



Build strong SEO into your website

A Guide for SMEs

2022 EDITION

A photograph of a person wearing a yellow shirt, holding a black smartphone. The image is partially obscured by a large white and pink geometric shape on the left side of the page.

SEARCH

What is SEO?

You've painstakingly put together your content and gone through the process of building a website for your business. Now, the challenge is how do you ensure your website is seen and reaches your desired audience?

This is where SEO comes into play.

SEO is short for search engine optimisation. SEO can be defined as a set of practices that help your web page reach a higher or more prominent position in organic search results.

Why should SEO be important to you?

In short, the higher your site ranks in search results pages, the more visible your business is. The higher your visibility, the more visitor traffic (and transactions) you have the potential to generate.

Before we jump into further detail about what SEO is and how it works, we should first look at a few high-level facts around search engines – Google, specifically – and typical user search behaviour.

- ▶ Google dominates all other search engines, **with 92% market share as of August 2022**.
- ▶ According to Internet Live Stats, **Google processes over 8.5 billion searches per day** – that's about 99,000 searches *every second*.
- ▶ SEO software provider **SISTRIX conducted a 2022 study** analysing over 80 million keywords and billions of search results. They found 28.5% of users click on the first organic search result...while a paltry 2.5% click on the 10th. Beyond that, users rarely click through to the second page of results. This is what makes high search rankings so crucial to the success of your website.



Defining key SEO terms

Organic search/organic search results

This refers to the standard, unpaid listings on a search engine results page (SERP) that Google, Bing etc. have decided are the most relevant to the searcher's query.

- ▶ **Keep in mind:** your content needs to be relevant and responsive to search queries. For example, if someone is searching for 'garden hoses' and your hardware store website doesn't contain the word(s) 'garden hoses' anywhere...you won't be prioritised.
- ▶ Unlike paid search ads, organic results or listings appear and are positioned based on the search engine's rankings. In other words, you can't pay your webpage's way to the top in organic search results.

Onsite/on-page SEO

This involves optimising the content on your own site so you can improve search rankings and generate more traffic.

Examples of onsite SEO can include keyword-rich relevant content, adding appropriate headings and providing alt-text for images on your webpage. For the most part, onsite SEO is all about the elements within your control.

Offsite SEO

As the name implies, offsite SEO refers to actions outside of your own website aimed at improving your search engine results rankings. A generally agreed-upon core practice of offsite SEO involves building links (backlinks) from reputable third-party websites or social media accounts back to your content.

Crawling

The process used by search engines to discover and inspect your website. Google rates each page according to what it considers to be useful/credible to the end user.

Google's web crawlers employ an algorithm made up of 210 known factors to determine how to rank websites.

These factors include:

Content

- ▶ Specifically, how unique your content is – are you providing new and original information, or copying and pasting from an already-established source?
- ▶ Google will also look at how in-depth and helpful your content is by examining how long users spend on your site and whether they click through and explore your other pages.
- ▶ Another key element is whether you have a properly optimised title tag and/or relevant meta description – both of which we will cover in more detail.

Website authority

- ▶ Google will analyse how authoritative your page or website is. Specifically, how many websites link to you and are those websites legitimate or authoritative sources? As well, are these links relevant to your chosen topic and industry, or simply spam?
- ▶ How authoritative and trustworthy are your competitors' websites compared with yours?

Webpage performance

- ▶ Are visitors leaving your website quickly and returning to the Google search results because they can't find what they need, or because your content is not relevant?
- ▶ Is your webpage exceptionally slow or sluggish when loading on desktop or mobile platforms?

So, why is SEO important?

SEO is what ultimately helps make your site more visible to visitors. As we said in our introduction, increased visibility means more traffic and – ideally – more opportunities to make transactions.

Additionally, SEO can be a valuable tool for building awareness of your brand or business, and to establish you and your website as a credible, trustworthy source. Having more people click through to your site helps increase your organic page ranking on search engine results pages.

In the next sections, we outline what makes for good SEO and the practices you can follow.

Onsite SEO tips

Optimise your on-page content

First and foremost, it's your content that plays a big role in Google deciding whether your page merits a top position in the search results. That's why it is so important that your content does two things: services a demand and is linkable.

Let's look at both elements in more detail:

► Services a demand

At the most basic level, does your content successfully address the user's original search query? For instance, if the search is for 'bodhrán repair Limerick', does your website provide useful information, pricing and appointment booking for your traditional Irish instrument repair service? Always keep search intent in mind when creating content for your website.

► Linkable

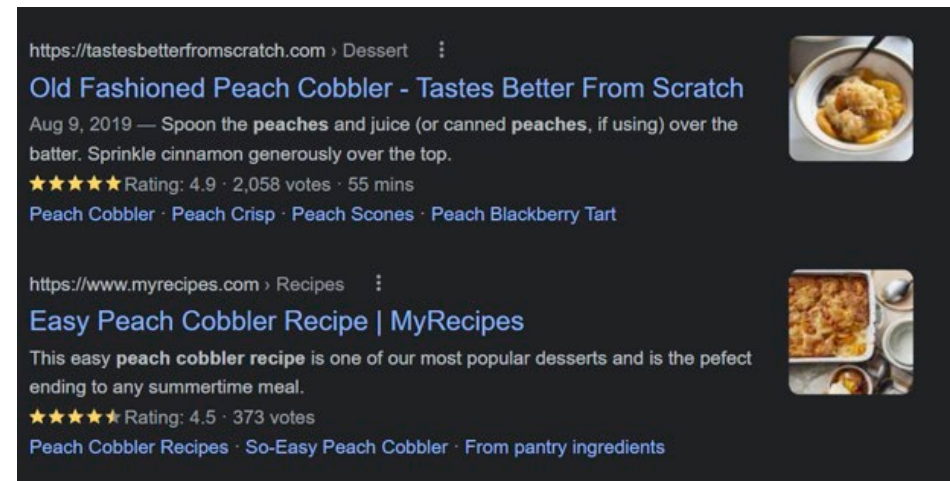
Google tends to favour content that can be easily discovered and linked to. Good linkable content tends to be more 'evergreen' in nature. This type of content includes material such as tutorials, infographics, white papers, e-books etc. However, if you do decide to place premium or subscriber-only content behind a password-protected paywall, be aware that it can negatively impact your organic SEO.

Build clear HTML title tags and effective meta descriptions

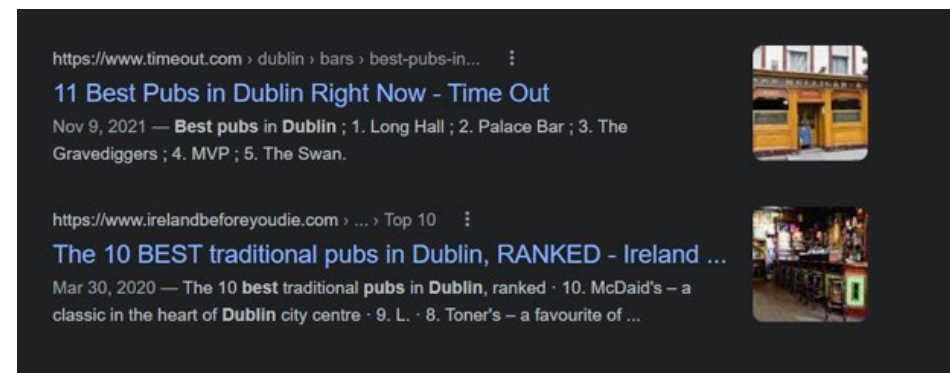
Title tags

After your on-page content, title tags are one of the single most important SEO elements. They are – as the name suggests – HTML elements that display your web page's title in the search engine results page. Generally, these title tags appear as clickable headlines as in the two examples below:

The first example shows the first two results for a 'peach cobbler recipes' Google search.



The second example shows top results for 'best pubs Dublin'.



Your title tags should be concise, accurate descriptions of your page content and contain relevant keywords. Keep in mind, though, most mobile and desktop web browsers are only able to display the first 50 to 60 characters of a title tag, so ensure you're not too verbose. Below are a couple of examples of effective title tags:

- ▶ **Dell Ireland:**
Laptops, Monitors, Computers & Storage Solutions | Dell Ireland

This tag provides a tidy, direct summary of Dell Ireland's offerings and hits on several potential keywords, as users may commonly search phrases such as 'Laptops Ireland', or 'New Laptops' in connection with Dell Ireland.

- ▶ **Tesco Ireland:**
Tesco.ie - online shopping; bringing the supermarket to you

Like the Dell Ireland title tag, Tesco has focused their keywords on some combination of 'online shopping groceries' or 'online supermarket' as a way to summarise their offerings.

Don't forget about meta descriptions

While meta descriptions don't generally influence whether Google ranks your page highly (or not), a well-written description *can* have a major impact on a user's decision to click through if they're served up your site on the results page.

Effective meta descriptions should be around 160 characters in total and provide users with an engaging but accurate and relevant summary of what your page is about. Think of it as an ultra-short elevator pitch designed to entice and intrigue. Below are three good meta description examples:

- ▶ **Powell's Music Shop:**
'Quaint musical instrument & art shop in the heart of Galway. Also CDs, sheet music, pipes and more - pop in'
- ▶ **Boots Ireland:**
'Shop our extensive range of health and beauty products from leading brands, fragrances for her and him, gift sets and much more on Boots.ie'
- ▶ **The Kitchen Whisk:**
'The Kitchen Whisk is the heart of your home. We supply kitchenware, cookware and tableware for every dedicated culinary specialist and home cook'.

If you have the time and resources, aim to create unique meta descriptions for every individual page on your site.

Optimise and tag your website's images

Though it's cliché to say, a picture is worth a thousand words to your SEO efforts. Taking the time to select good quality (and relevant) imagery for your site can contribute to your site's overall SEO effectiveness and help boost traffic.

Keep in mind that large, ultra-high-resolution images that take longer to load can hurt your SEO score in Google's eyes. Fortunately, there are several easy-to-use, free tools like [TinyPNG](#), that can reduce file sizes while keeping image quality intact.

Another important part of optimising your images is adding alt text. What is it? Alt text is a short, written description that appears in place of an image on your webpage. This is important for users with visual impairment or in circumstances where the image doesn't load.

Why is alt text important for SEO? Alt text helps search engines crawl and better understand/rank your website. Good alt text should contain an accurate, informative description of the image that's rich in keywords.

Below are examples of a good and a bad alt text tag for this beach photo.



BAD ALT TEXT TAG

'Sandy beach'

Yes, this is indeed a sandy beach, but it doesn't provide the user with much detail or context.

GOOD ALT TEXT TAG

'Sunny Mexican beach with mountains on the horizon'

This alt text tag provides a far more accurate and detailed description of the image and even adds in a bit of context around the beach being a 'Mexican beach'.

Don't underestimate the value of URLs

Good URL structure clearly identifies what information will be contained on a given webpage to search engines.

Here's a quick example of good structure:

<https://goldendiscs.ie/collections/vinyl-boxset>

Because of the way this URL is laid out, the search engine can tell straight away – and without any further digging – that this page is about browsing Golden Discs' collection of vinyl record boxsets.

Here's an example of bad URL structure:

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0468569>

This URL doesn't contain any information that a user would search for and reveals nothing about what the page contains.

Do your keyword research and be smart about what you target

Rather than looking to rank highly on a single, preferred keyword, think of using keyword themes, that group together many related keywords that convey the same idea.

For example, if your keyword theme is 'bakery' then some related keywords might be: 'fresh pastries', 'local bakeries', 'bakeries near me', 'cake shop', 'fresh bread' and 'traditional bakery.'

Conduct research to build your keyword lists by using Google, along with (free and paid) keyword tools, like [Moz Keyword Explorer](#), [Google Keyword Planner](#) and [Semrush Keyword Magic Tool](#).

Your goal should be for keywords to be specific and relevant to your business or service. Your chosen keywords should also be common enough and have enough search volume for you to bother targeting them. If your keyword was 'leather sandals', then you might also consider these related keywords:

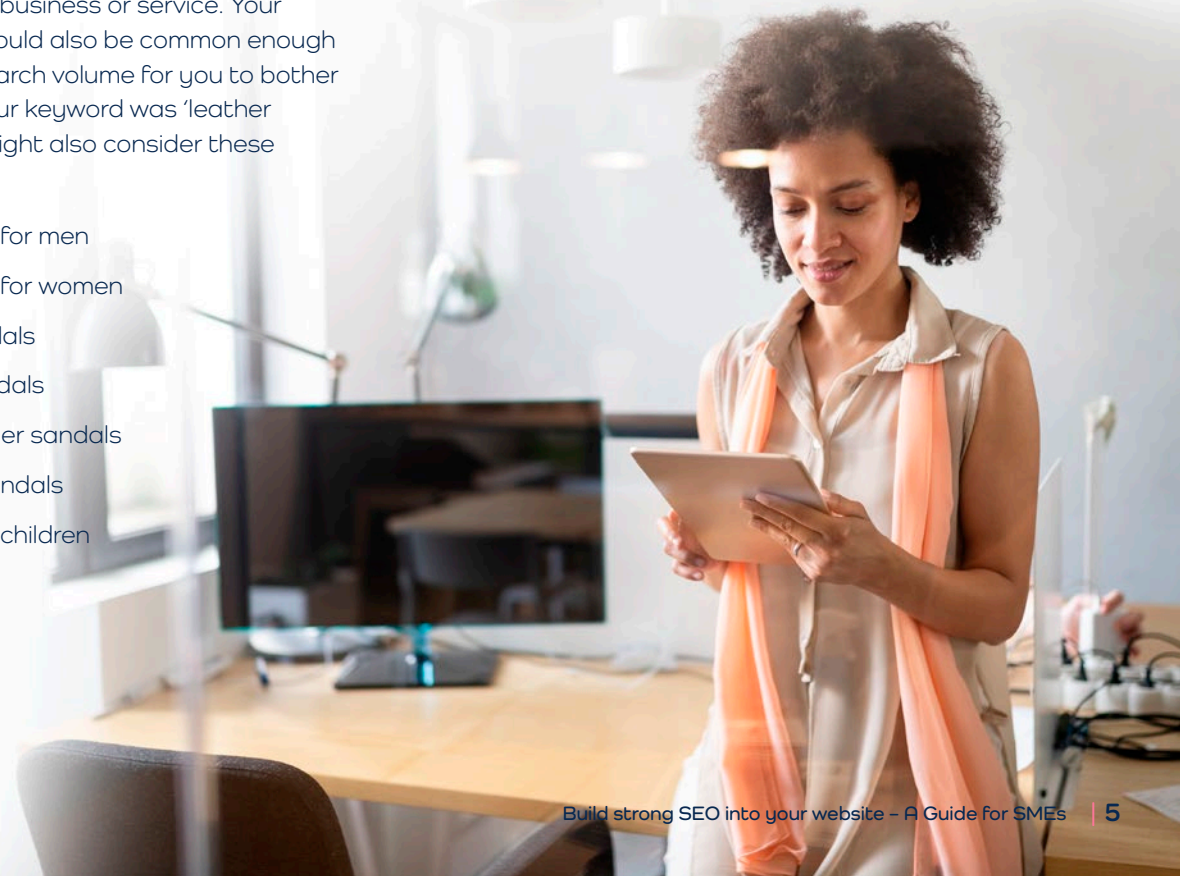
- ▶ Leather sandals for men
- ▶ Leather sandals for women
- ▶ Irish leather sandals
- ▶ Best leather sandals
- ▶ Handmade leather sandals
- ▶ Brown leather sandals
- ▶ Leather sandals children

Optimise your website's performance

Page speed, or how fast your webpage loads, is another key SEO ranking factor. Slow page speed ultimately means that search engine crawlers can't index as many of your pages in a short timeframe.

Slow-loading pages also affect bounce rates (people leaving your site) and can result in fewer conversions/transactions. Optimising your website's code (including removing unused bits of code, cleaning up unnecessary characters and spaces), as well as compressing image/file sizes can boost your page loading speed.

A tool like [PageSpeed Insights from Google](#) can help you analyse and diagnose potential web page performance issues on mobile or desktop.



Offsite SEO tips

Build quality backlinks to your content

Think of backlinks as a positive affirmation or endorsement of your content. Backlinks tell search engines that your content is credible, trustworthy and useful to others.

Keep in mind that generating backlinks should be about quality, not quantity. Having your brand mentioned on a reputable blog or social media account is a great way to generate strong backlinks to your site.

Other ways to gain backlinks can include publishing 'how-to' or educational content that can be shared and referenced elsewhere. For example, the 'ultimate guide to leather repair', 'guitar maintenance made easy' or 'beginner urban gardening tips.'

SEO analytics tools, like [Google Search Console](#), can help track whether you've made any new backlinks.

Get positive business reviews to build trust

Soliciting feedback or reviews from happy customers is a way to build a sense of trust and legitimacy for your brand.

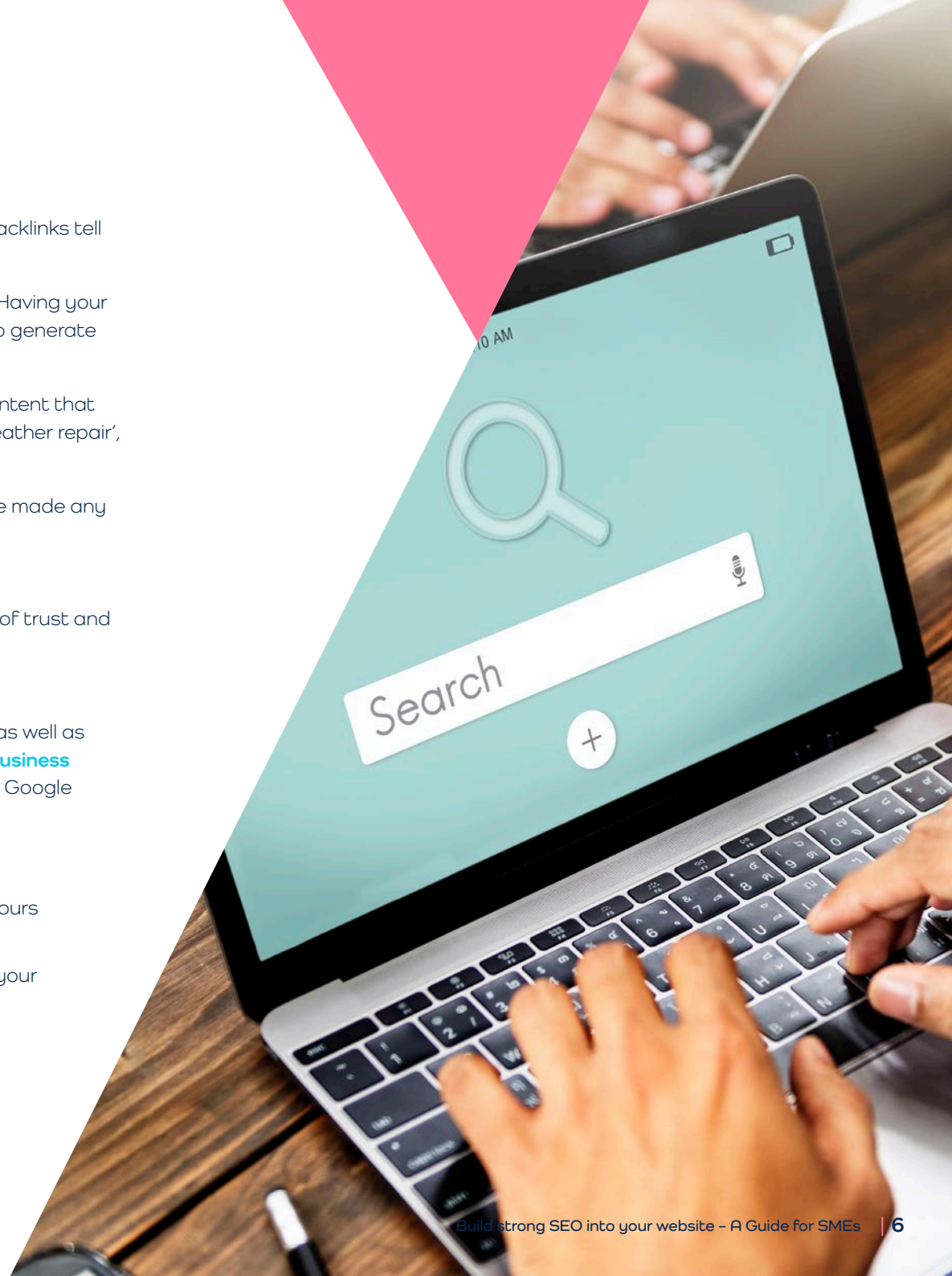
Claim business directory listings

This is a useful way to make it easier for your potential customers to find you, as well as providing search engines with more information about your business. [Google Business Profiles](#), in particular, offer the built-in advantage of being fully integrated with Google Search and Google Maps.

Other possible business directory listings you can claim include:

- ▶ [Goldenpages.ie](#) - features business listings with contact details, opening hours and product/service information.
- ▶ [ie.trustpilot.com](#) - features business profile pages with information about your services as well as any reviews that users have contributed.
- ▶ [Whatswhat.ie](#) - features over 100,000 Irish business listings and can be leveraged for backlinks to your site.

A key point about business directory listings is to make the time to periodically update/refresh your business information.



How long will it take to see the benefits/effects of SEO?

SEO almost never works instantaneously. Most businesses can expect to start seeing positive results from an improved SEO strategy within six to 12 months.

How do you evaluate whether you're *actually* getting positive results?

Set measurable targets, such as:

- ▶ **Engagement metrics** – What are people doing once they reach your site? How are they interacting with your content?
- ▶ **Conversion rate** – Divide the number of conversions (e.g. making a purchase, subscribing to an email list, enquiring for more information, requesting an appointment) by the number of unique visits to your website.
- ▶ **Time on site** – How long did visitors spend on your page? For instance, if you have a five-minute video and only 20 seconds of it is being watched, that content isn't capturing a visitor's interest.
- ▶ **Bounce rate** – How many visitors came to your page and then left without doing anything further. A high bounce rate could speak to poor user experience or content that's uninteresting or not useful/relevant. **A bounce rate of 26 – 40% is considered excellent**, 41 – 55% is average, while 70% or higher could signal serious problems.
- ▶ **Scroll depth** – How far down is an average user scrolling on your webpages? More importantly – are users able to reach the content you want them to see?
- ▶ **Pages per visit** – How many pages on average are users visiting before leaving your site?

Lastly – Google Analytics is an excellent tool for monitoring traffic to your site – both paid and organic. You can keep track of traffic to your site over time and determine what effect your SEO improvements have had.

Help with SEO is available

Building in strong, sustainable SEO practices on your website takes time – especially if you're starting from scratch. That's why you may also consider enlisting a digital agency or digital marketing expert to help you build a long-term SEO plan, suggest ways to optimise your existing content, generate backlinks – and more.



Unlock the power of the internet with a trusted Irish .ie online identity

It's trusted

Every **.ie** applicant's identity is checked and validated at the point of registration. Consumers will have confidence in your business as **.ie** is a well-established and trusted domain. 77% of Irish consumers prefer a **.ie** website when buying online, instead of a **.com**.¹

It's uniquely Irish

The official Internet country code for Ireland is **.ie** and is the only online address that is Irish. A **.ie** tells the global community that you are Irish and tells the Irish community that you are local. You can even register an Irish language name if required, fadas and all.

It's more likely to be available

There is a wider choice of available **.ie** domain names compared to **.com**, as significantly more of those names are already registered.

It lets your customers find you online

.ie addresses rank higher than **.com** addresses on Irish based search engines like Google.ie. Irish consumers are more likely to click on local website addresses.

It's the preferred online address for business in Ireland

91% of Irish consumers associate **.ie** websites with Irish businesses over other websites like **.com**.¹ The **.ie** domain accounts for the majority of hosted domains in Ireland.²

It protects your brand

Securing your **.ie** online address strengthens your brand and protects your online identity. All **.ie** domains are registered on a first-come, first-served basis.

¹ .ie Consumer Trust 2020

² HosterStats

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