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GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA
website content audit report

About Girl Scouts of the USA

The Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) is a non-profit youth organization that encourages young girls to develop a strong sense of self while creating a better community. With an array of activities offered from archery to glamping, the Girl Scouts hopes to inspire girls to learn through life experiences.

The Girl Scouts have two primary audiences: young girls and parents. The Girl Scouts organization is composed of students aged from Kindergarten to Twelfth grade. As a result, when the kids are younger it is primarily the parents and troop leaders who are utilizing the website resources. However the organization encourages leadership and self-advocating, therefore, they also are reaching out to the girls directly especially as they grow older.

Project Goal

I conducted an audit of the GSUSA's website. For this audit, I analyzed a representative sample of pages to gain an adequate impression of the overall site. This method was the best match for this project since the site has many web pages with similar content styles. This audit allowed me to gain an understanding of the existing content as well as analyze their current practice to gain a sense of how it is performing.

The main elements of their website and brand that were being analyzed were the SEO (search engine optimization), accessibility, content, writing, and architecture. To gain a sense of the Girl Scouts of the USA's SEO, I utilized Screaming Frog's SEO Spider Program. This computer application allows users to crawl a website and gain a sense of their backend information. For the other elements, I used my understanding and research to properly capture and analyze their current offerings.

SEO: Page Title

An important element of SEO is page titles. These are short pieces of HTML code found on every webpage. They provide a brief idea of what the webpage is about before the user clicks to open the link. Although the page titles don't directly impact your google ranking, effective titles can increase your visitor amount.

Using SEO Spider, I found that www.girlscouts.org has 1229 page titles on the site. They have no missing page titles on their URLs which is very good because it demonstrates that all of their web pages could be found on Google with the right keyword search. A majority of the links have different page titles, as there are only 100 duplicates. Although there are some duplicates, the varied page titles help give visitors an accurate impression of the page content; a satisfied user can lead to a repeat visitor and fewer page jumps.

Overall, the titles are fairly descriptive as they tend to give a sense of what the page is about. Some titles are very detailed while others only use one word to describe the content. Most of the single-word titles are very easily understood such as "Leadership" and "Invest" however some like "Faith" don't give a real sense of what they are about. They tend to match the one-word titles with the organization title "Girl Scouts' ' to ensure that appropriate context is available.

Since many of the page titles differ, the length of characters varies as well. The shortest title is "Member" with 7 characters. In comparison, the largest title has 171 characters, "Girl Scouts of the USA and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America Team Up to Provide Girls Greater Access to Mentorship Opportunities and Leadership Experiences | Girl Scouts."

The ideal page title length is between 55-70 characters. It is important to accurately describe the page content without being too wordy. When understanding the ideal character length it is important to understand how the titles are displayed for your target search query. A majority of the page titles on the Girl Scouts website are over 60 characters. A good example from their site is: What Girl Scouts Do | About Girl Scouts. This title clearly shows that this site is going to explain what the girl scouts do to help visitors understand the purpose of the organization. Meanwhile, a bad example is EiE | Girl Scouts. This title uses an abbreviation that isn't understandable to the average viewer which will likely limit its conversion rate.
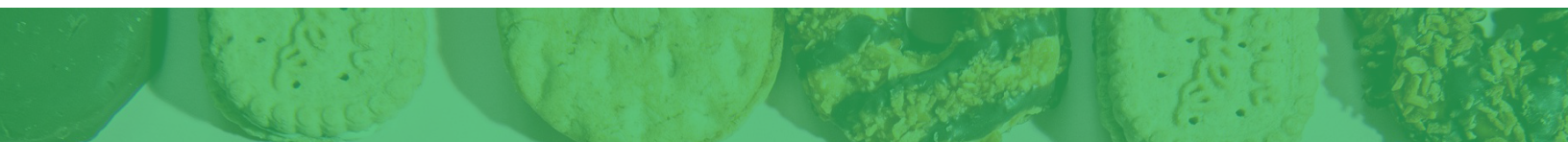
SEO: Meta Descriptions

Meta descriptions are pieces of HTML code that describe what a web page is about. The meta description is only seen on the search engine results page or when the page is shared on social media. The meta description will appear under the page title and offer more detail in hopes of getting clicks. Like page titles, meta descriptions don't directly impact search rank, but optimized descriptions can lead to more views. It is very important to add your meta description tag because otherwise google may just use text found from the page leading to an inaccurate summary.

Using SEO Spider, I learned more about the girl scouts' meta descriptions. There are a large number of URLs that don't have any meta description. According to the program, there are around 950 pages that have one missing. The links that do have descriptions vary in length and specificity.

The shortest description is: "Share sisterhood on a global level," with 35 characters. The longest meta description length is 389 characters and reads, "Arconic Foundation is committed to supporting Girl Scouts who will serve as an inspiration and future leaders. In September 2018, Arconic Foundation enhanced their partnership with Girl Scouts of the USA by providing National Gold Award Girls Scouts with scholarships to kickstart their future, and help them achieve their goals that lead to making their communities and world a better place." Neither of these lengths is the most ideal because the best range is between 120-130 characters. The first is too short to gain a quick understanding of the content, while the second is so long that it will likely be cut off in the search results.

The URLs that contain meta descriptions are very well written. They tend to feel like taglines for the webpage that draws the users in. One good example is, "Build a time capsule about your experience with Girl Scouting with anything in your home." This one stood out as strong because it clearly describes that the page will be explaining how to do the activity and it adds the information that the activity can be done at home.

https://www.girlscouts.org ⋮

Girl Scouts of the USA

Visit the official site of **Girl Scouts of the USA**—where Girl Scouts bring their dreams to life and work together to build a better world.

SEO: Heading Tags (H1, H2)

Another element of SEO that was analyzed was the use of heading tags. These are tags that are used to separate topics on a webpage. They tend to rank in order of importance from H1 to H6, with H1 usually being the title at the top. Headings used to directly impact your search ranking, however, that is no longer a major factor. Despite this change, adding detailed and effective headings is still very beneficial because it creates a hierarchy within your webpage. Having strong web organization makes the content more digestible to visitors and therefore more effective.

The GSUSA's website does make use of HTML heading elements. The H1 headlines provide a strong description of the content on the page. One example is, "Kids Are Nervous About Going Back to School. You Can Help." This H1 header demonstrates the topic and the call to action the article will provide. Many of the H1 headings are over 70 characters. While there are not a lot of duplicate headings, about 50% of the page titles are the same as the H1 titles. Additionally, 50 URLS have a missing H1 element.

The H2 headers are also descriptive but they feel slightly vaguer than the H1 titles. Plus, around 1,000 URLs are missing an H2 header. An example of an H2 header on the site is, "Take Action and Service Projects." While this does provide some information, it isn't very clear what the heading is referencing without context.

Source: https://www.searchenginejournal.com/heading-tags-for-seo/341817/

Accessibility

Web accessibility refers to designing and developing web tools and technologies so that people with disabilities can use them. More specifically, disabled individuals should be able to easily understand, navigate, and contribute to the web. Many disabilities could affect access to the web including auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech, and visual.

To gain a sense of the site's overall accessibility, I use the online resource, WAVE: web accessibility evaluation tool. This site provides an overall summary of a webpage and identifies places where the accessibility is strong and weak. The Girl Scouts of the USA site was fairly accessible. WAVE did identify that there was low contrast between text and background colors on the main heading on the landing page. However, the rest of the text was not flagged. Additionally, a few pages have errors and places where the alt text could have been stronger. On the other side, the homepage had 47 features that were accessible including alternative text, linked image with alt text, 3 types of form labels, and a language that is identified.

Alt Tags

One HTML tag tool that can be used to improve web accessibility is image alt text (alternative text). This is HTML text that is used to describe an image. This helps the blind or visually impaired, but also can be displayed if for some reason the image cannot. Strong alt text should provide relevant and descriptive text about the image and the purpose of the graphic content.

Most of the images on GSUSA's website do have alt tags. Only around 3% of the images are missing alt text. The quality of writing for these varies, as some are very detailed while others are simple. The simple ones give an idea of what the context of the image is, but don't provide much description to help paint a picture. A good example of the alt text is, "gold award pin on ambassador uniform vest." This is strong because a reader can picture the color of the pin and the type of vest it is adorning. A bad example of alt text from the site is "Partner Locally." This is bad text because the actual image is girls in graduation gowns all holding a diploma. Although the alt text may have something to do with the page the image is on, it does not provide a strong description of what the image is. The lack of description therefore may impair a disabled individual's understanding of the content.

Sources: https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/
https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/how-to-find-missing-image-alt-text/

Content

The content types found on the website were primarily photographs and varied images. There were not any gifs or videos on their site. The images are fairly well integrated into the site. It became apparent that each page was very good at creating rows of information and breaking down topics using design, specifically color blocks. Since color is the main element of their design, the number of bright colors can be overwhelming. They likely chose such an eye-catching design because one of their target audience is younger kids and teens. While this is a strong strategy it can make the content feel very over the top.

Most of the photography used features young girls having fun or doing activities. This is likely to show a sense of community and create a very inclusive and exciting brand identity. They also highlight their products, especially the Girl Scout cookies.

In addition to its website, GUSSA also has active social accounts where they share a variety of content. The posts tend to overlap on the networks however each one does have slightly different elements.

INSTAGRAM: 174K followers
- The Instagram content is very colorful and bright which is similar to the website. The content is consists of photos, graphics, and videos

FACEBOOK: 1.1 Followers
- All of the posts are connected to a graphic element. The type of content is photos, graphics, and links.

TWITTER: 97.4k followers
- Although twitter is primarily known for text based content, a lot of the Girl Scouts posts contain an accompanying graphic element. The content consists of photos, graphics, gifs, and article links.

Writing

The content is well written on the website. The author considered the medium when drafting the work. The body text is short and is accompanied by headings and bold text to help with skimming. The tone of the writing is both informative and positive. The website is hoping to help visitors understand the organization and get involved. Many of the pages include calls to action to encourage behavior beyond just reading.

The writing feels like it is aimed at parents. The author added some personality, through millennial-based humor and emphasis. Although some of the content is aimed directly at the scouts themselves, the voice still feels like it's being directed toward parents. This is likely due to an adult having authored the text rather than a girl scout writing to her peers. It is still effective, but it could be stronger if it took more of a youthful tone.

Architecture

The site is mobile-friendly. It alters the site from a three-column format to a single column when accessed on a mobile device. This helps because it keeps the content organized in a hierarchy but ensures that the text and buttons are still large enough to be accessible.

The navigation is fairly user-friendly, however, some glitches are attached to the drop-down menu. When I was navigating on my computer and the site was at half-width, the drop-down option would disappear before I would click on the option I had intended. In addition to having menu navigation, there are lots of contact points between the pages. If you were to click on discover rather than pick a drop-down option, you'd be taken to a page that gives links to all the discover pages.

There are no navigation waypoints. Instead, a visitor will have to keep track of where they are traveling to find past pages. There is a search function, which works fairly well. It leads you to a web page of search results. These results connect to all the URLs within the website that contain the keyword you entered. Using page titles and descriptions, you can find the information you were searching for. It is a highly text-based search function rather than employing visuals to assist the user.

Conclusion

The Girl Scouts of the USA has a very strong website. SEO is taken into consideration as many of the URLs have strong page titles and meta descriptions. The heading elements are decently written with the greatest weakness being found in their lack of H2 tags. In terms of accessibility, the site is very strong. Many of the images contain alt tags and there aren't many issues that WAVE found. The site does use a lot of bright colors, so there must be careful consideration about how text is integrated to ensure it isn't difficult to read. The content is integrated well though can be a bit overwhelming at times. The bright format fits better on social media than it does on the website. However, having the same content style on both platforms creates uniform branding. The writing is garnered towards adults despite the split audience, but it does provide an effective and informative text. Finally, the site has a strong architecture with easy navigation and mobile setups. The architecture could benefit from navigation waypoints and a slightly more visual search function.The site is in a very strong place, but as this audit demonstrates there is always room for improvement.