Client.com

This is a heavily redacted example of a Portent SEO audit. **Do not implement these recommendations.** They were created for a specific site. Bad things could happen.

If you'd like to learn how you can get an audit like this for your site, contact us at https://www.portent.com



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Introduction

We've reviewed client.com for SEO opportunities and next steps. This report contains:

Tactics. Large areas of improvement

Recommendations. Specific changes for each tactic

Keywords and topics. Words, phrases and ideas that can help you meet KPI goals

Opportunities. Pages and areas of your site that can most benefit from SEO changes

If you want to see the keywords we found that guided these recommendations, keep reading. If you want to jump straight to the recommendations, go to page 12.

There's always more. As we fix issues and dig deeper, we'll have more recommendations.

Important Note: Search Console

Change Google Search Console to the "https" version of your site as soon as possible. Right now, GSC is tracking traffic to the "http" version.

Google Search Console treats https://www.client.com and http://www.client.com as separate properties. So Search Console isn't reporting helpful data. Right now it shows seven clicks for the last three months:



Figure 1. This nearly gave me a heart attack

The easiest way to fix this is to set up a separate Google Search Console property for https://www.client.com. Once that's working, please share it with portentint@gmail.com.

KPIs & Metrics

We didn't talk about KPIs, so I'm making some up based on the data and what I think's possible. These are stretch goals. I think you have a 50/50 chance of achieving them:

Increase year over year organic traffic 2x starting 2 months after you complete the changes outline in this report. Why? The phrase "peg board" gets 40,000 searches/month. You are currently high on page 2 for "peg board." Moving to the bottom of page one should give you an additional two to three thousand organic clicks.

Maintain conversion rate from organic search. This is another challenge. I'm not as concerned about the number as I am about keeping this front-of-mind. Sending organic search traffic to new heights is meaningless if we don't sell more stuff.

Again, I'm setting these targets to get us started. You may want to change them as changes affect SEO.

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Topics

SEO isn't just about keywords any more. This review looks at questions, entities and yes, keywords.

Normally I'd do an elaborate keyword analysis. But your keyword set is simple: Any phrases including "product" or "peg board."

Exclude "product nerds" and similar phrases. "Product Nerds" is a Scandanavian electronica band. I can't make this stuff up.

I've attached a keyword report – keyword-report1.xlsx – that provides the details. Here's a quick key to the report:

The report pulls keyword performance data for phrases where you already rank.

The Existing Opportunities tab is the most important. For each phrase, the report has:

- The phrase
- Current ranking
- Previous ranking
- Search volume (estimated Google doesn't provide this data): Monthly searches for this phrase
- Ranking page
- Page value: The dollars per pageview on that page from all channels (not just organic)
- Unique pageviews from all channels



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- % Exit: The percentage of views after which the visitor leaves your site. From all channels
- Time on page. From all channels
- Bounce rate: **Do not focus on this statistic!** It's there as a reference. But it's a lousy performance metric. For example: Portent site has an 86% bounce rate, and we're fine with that. People read blog posts and leave. We're OK with that. From all channels

Rows highlighted in yellow are tagged as opportunities. Opportunities are phrases where a little movement could lead to a lot of growth. They're tagged based on ranking, volume, and page value. So, phrases:

- For which you already rank
- That have high search volume
- And have a page value > 0

Are the most likely to get tagged as opportunities.

I won't ignore phrases that aren't marked as opportunities. They may have a lot of potential. But moving one or two positions won't have a major impact on traffic or revenue.



Specific Keywords And Topics

Here are the specifics:

- Findings "Peg board" is the winning phrase:
 - You already rank #11. Improve by a single position and you'll be on page one
 - It has a solid page value
 - Your home page isn't the ranking page, so we can optimize for it without jeopardizing other rankings. It's possible that your home page will become the ranking page for this phrase. If so, that's OK, because it means you'll have improved rankings for your best opportunity. But we can start without risking other rankings.

"Product accessories" is the next-best opportunity.

- You rank top 10
- Each pageview is worth \$5.99
- However, your home page ranks for this phrase. That makes me nervous. You have an accessories page. More about this later



Then "product hooks." This isn't flagged as an opportunity, but it gets at least 10,000 searches/month, and it has a very high page value.

After that, there are dozens of specialty applications, like "office wall organizer." These are all good targets. But they're relatively-low volume, so I'm not focusing on those for now. If we hit diminishing returns on head terms that include "product" or "peg board," we can concentrate on long tail specialty applications. For now, optimizing for head terms should help you rank for the long tail as well.

Peg board vs. product Google says their algorithm understands similarities between terms like "peg board" and "product." You rank top 20 for "peg board." That **should** mean you rank at least in the top 30-40 for "product." But you don't.



That's a valuable lesson: **Don't trust what Google says**. At least, don't take what they say at face value. I wish I had a brilliant answer. I don't. For whatever reason, Google can't figure out the relationship between your site, "product" and "peg board."

Don't take what Google says at face value. Ever.

What we **can** do is figure out ways to optimize for both phrases.

What we shouldn't do is jeopardize your rankings for "peg board."

Here's a bit of theory as to why your results are so different for the compound word and phrase. This is conjecture backed up by Google patents. If you feel your eyes rolling back in your head, move along. Nothing to see here:

- 1. Google performs word splitting. So they split "product" into "peg board."
- 2. They also do *lemmatization* my fee went up 20% just for knowing that word. They strip out plurals, possessives, etc.
- 3. And they do word stemming they look for the shortest version of a word, removing "ed" and such.
- 4. They look at their query logs for frequency of appearance. If the number of searches for "product" is far different than "peg board," they're more likely to see them as separate phrases with separate meanings.
- 5. And, they look at co-occurance. "peg" and "board" appear together, but not as often as some other phrases. So Google may match queries very differently than for "product."
- 6. They look at context and HTML elements. For example, how many pages that have links with the link text "peg board" are about your kind of peg board, versus climbing walls or Scandanavian electronica bands?





Topical Strategy

This is how I'd approach SEO for your site. But I don't work in your business, so make sure it makes sense:

- 1. Get the home page ranking for "product."
- 2. Improve the ranking of the product page for "peg board."
- 3. Optimize individual product and application pages (such as "product hooks").
- 4. Risk ranking for "peg board" only if targeting "product."

Most important: Any changes you make carry some risk that you will hurt your rankings for "peg board." There's no avoiding that. But the risk to your rankings is only slightly higher than if you do nothing.

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Infrastructure

The "guts" of your site limit or support SEO: If client.com has a strong technical foundation, it's easier to optimize. If portent.com has core technical problems, they reduce the effectiveness of other optimization. This section looks at your servers and site code and how they respond to requests.

Some of these recommendations are very difficult to complete. Don't let them block other work. Put them in the development queue and make sure they are eventually completed.

We didn't find any major infrastructure issues. However, there are a lot of little things that are affecting rankings. Fixing them will help every SEO effort you make.

The next few pages explain some SEO infrastructure concepts. Skip to page 14 if you want to get right to the recommendations.



Concept: Canonicalization

Every file on the internet should have a single *canonical* address. That means, with a few exceptions, there should be one way to reach each file.

Search engines rarely want to see the same information at multiple addresses.

But search engines aren't terribly smart. So, if they see:

www.yoursite.com

and

www.yoursite.com/index.html

and

yoursite.com

They treat those as two separate addresses. You and I know those are all your home page. Search engines don't.

You can use rel="canonical" to tell search engines, "Hey, ignore this page. The real one is over there." But the search engines still have to take the time to find, crawl and interpret all versions of the page. That wastes crawl budget. Search engines don't like to waste anything.

This seems like a minor thing, but consider: If you and a competitor are otherwise equal, SEO-wise, Google will rank the site that does **not** have to use rel=canonical higher than the one that does.

So a big part of SEO is to make sure that all your pages "live" at a single address.



Concept: Crawl "Budget" and Prioritization

Based on relative site importance and authority, Google and Bing set a crawl "budget:" The amount of time they'll spend on your site/the number of pages they'll crawl.

We don't know how they set this budget. We **do** know that duplicate content, slow response times, incorrect server responses, and thin or low-value content all waste crawl budget.

A lot of our infrastructure SEO recommendations focus on optimizing use of crawl budget. We'll mention it as we go.

Change Redirect from "Wallstuff.com"

Right now, wallstuff.com redirects to http://www.client.com.

That then redirects to <u>https://www.client.com</u>.

That extra "hop" is costing you authority. Instead, redirect all <u>www.wallstuff.com</u> pages directly to the corresponding <u>https://www.client.com</u> page.



Remove Brand and Category Pages

BigCommerce automatically generates "brand" and "categories" pages. You're not using either one on your site. These are duplicate/thin pages that waste crawl budget and may also affect site quality.

Findings Google is finding and indexing 90-100 "brand" and "categories" URLs on your site.



Figure 2. Categories pages in the Google SERP

You only have one brand. And you already have shorter URLs for categories. All these other pages do is create confusion.

Recommendation Difficulty: Low Priority: Medium

In robots.txt, add this:

Use robots.txt to block these pages:

Disallow: /categories* Disallow: /brands*

That should prevent indexing of these pages.

I believe BigCommerce provides a setting to turn off brand and category pages, as well. If so, turn them off.

Finally, make sure your XML sitemap doesn't include these URLs.

(I'm not certain you have an XML sitemap - more about that below)



Block Shopping Cart and Wishlist URLs

Shopping cart software creates links for every sorted and filtered versions. These waste crawl budget. The filtered pages can also create "thin content" – pages with identical or near-identical content.

Findings About 10% of pages on your site are sort or filter links. You use rel=canonical, which is a good start, but Google is still indexing these pages:

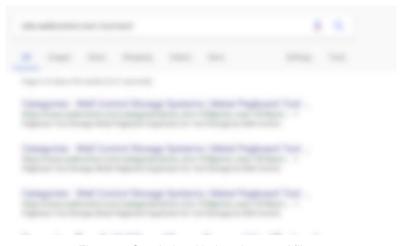


Figure 3. Crawled and indexed sort and filter pages

Recommendation Difficulty: Low Priority: Low Use robots.txt to block these pages:

In robots.txt, add this:

Disallow: *?sort=*
Disallow: *?price_min?
Disallow: *?price_max?

That should prevent indexing of these pages.

I'm not suggesting that you noindex or nofollow these pages. That's personal preference on my part: We want to keep Google from crawling these pages. Noindex won't do that.

Keep rel=canonical in place.



Shopping cart software creates "add to cart" links for every product page. These waste crawl budget.

About 10% of pages on your site are add to cart links. Those links are redirected but Findings not blocked. The pages don't get traffic, and don't have any links pointing at them.

Google is indexing a few wishlist.php pages as well.

Block all add to cart pages and cart.php with robots.txt and using a meta robots tag. Recommendation

Difficulty: Low On cart.php, add this meta tag: Priority: Medium

<meta name="robots" content = "noindex" />

In robots.txt, add this:

Disallow: /cart.php*

Priority: Medium

And change the wishlist.php exclusion to this:

Disallow: /wishlist.php*

Meta robots is the most important change. It prevents search engines from crawling the pages. The robots meta tag will stop them from indexing, but not from crawling, so those pages will still waste crawl budget.

Recommendation	If possible, add an X-Robots-Tag http header to all cart.php pages.
Difficulty: High	
Priority: Medium	Be very careful! Doing this wrong might exclude all pages from the Google index.
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Difficulty: High	
Priority: Medium	Be very careful! Doing this wrong might exclude all pages from the Google index.

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Correct Pagination

Pagination can eat up crawl budget and create canonical issues. Here's what I found:

Findings Wherever you have pagination – for example, on <u>https://www.client.com/product-value-kits/?sort=featured&page=2</u> – your link back to page 1 includes the query attribute "page=1."

To Google, that's a duplicate of https://www.client.com/product-value-kits/?sort=featured.

RecommendationHave the link back to page one in any pagination tunnel link to the "home" URL of thatDifficulty: Mediumtunnel.

Priority: Medium

So, for https://www.client.com/product-value-kits/?sort=featured

The link to page one should be:

https://www.client.com/product-value-kits/?sort=featured

Not

https://www.client.com/product-value-kits/?sort=featured&page=1

Do this for all pagination tunnels.



Block Tag Pages

Tag pages can be helpful, but only if you have multiple posts per tag. If you have many tags with one or two associated posts or products, your site generates short, near-duplicate "thin" content pages.

Findings Your photo contest generates tag pages. Those pages have the same or nearlyidentical content to the individual photo pages.

You also have tags for terms like "Client" and "product." These are duplicates or near duplicates of the main photo content page.

Recommendation Block all tag pages with robots.txt.

Difficulty: Low Priority: Low In robots.txt, add this:

Disallow: /tag/*

You can add a meta robots tag, too, but it's not essential.



Fix Structured Data

Structured data can help Google and Bing extract information from your pages, such as prices, inventory and product types.

All of these can lead to enhanced listings that draw attention and higher clickthru on search results:



Figure 4. Enhanced search rankings - you don't have reviews, but you do have prices

	You're getting some enhanced features, like prices, but not consistently.
Findings	You have structured markup for breadcrumbs and products, but both are throwing errors. You can also add other structured markup.
Recommendation	Fix and add the following:
Difficulty: Medium Priority: Low	 Make sure all breadcrumb markup specifies name, item.name or item. Use item for the final list element in the list
	 If you're going to specify product ratings, be sure the rating field is populated, and that you provide a ratingCount or reviewCount. Otherwise, remove the aggregateRating
	 For the product markup, add the sku field
	 For the product markup, add the isRelatedTo. If the product is a an accessory, set isRelatedTo to the products
	 For the product markup, add isSimilarTo for the various boards
	Some of this may be restricted by BigCommerce. Do what you can.



Site Performance

At first glance, your site is screaming fast. On a fast connection, most pages load in under 2 seconds. However, on mobile and slower desktop connections your site performs poorly, and there are some easy upgrades.

Improving speed will help you as Google migrates to mobile-first indexing. I won't bother reciting the litany of statistics about how every .5s shaved off load time improves conversion rates by 5%. Oh wait. I just did.



Minify Javascript

Spaces, tabs and line breaks are characters, and they increase the size of javascript and CSS files. "Minification" can lead to big savings.

Findings theme-bundle.main.js is currently 251kb. Minify it and the file will be only 100kb. On a 4G connection that could save 1s. For a mobile user, that's an eternity.

RecommendationUse a minified version of theme-bundle.main.js. You may have to talk toDifficulty: LowBigCommerce about this, but I doubt it. If BigCommerce can't provide a minifiedPriority: Mediumversion, you can minify the file by going to https://javascript-minifier.com/, pasting in the javascript and clicking "minify."

Fix Render-Blocking Resources

When a browser loads a page and encounters CSS or javascript, it may stop "drawing" the page while it waits to load the resource. So a page that measures well (has a short load time, for example) may actually *appear* to load slowly.

You have four resources you should defer, inline, or load asynchronously.

Findings Your font files:

/css?family=Oswald:300|Karla:400|Montserrat:400 /css/theme-e7845810-5093-0136-7cc7-0242ac110019.css /css/font-awesome-e7845810-5093-0136-7cc7-0242ac110019.css /css/dm-custom-e7845810-5093-0136-7cc7-0242ac110019.css

All block page loads. Deferring load could save another 1s of load time.

Recommendation Two options:

Difficulty: Medium

Priority: Medium

- Move font css to the bottom of the page. This is easiest, but will cause the page to first load without the correct fonts, then add the formatting later. That can lead to a sort of page "twitch" as the fonts change
- 2. Inline the font CSS. Instead of loading it as a separate file, take the CSS that loads the fonts and paste it straight into the HTML template



Other Issues

We found other improvements, but you can't make them on BigCommerce. Examples include:

- Code coverage
- Javascript optimization are good examples
- Lazy loading
- Far-future caching
- Reduce DOM nodes/clean up HTML and CSS

If you ever rebuild your site, set the following requirements for your developer. These are on a 4G/simulated fast 3G connection:

- Lighthouse Audit score >80
- Time to Interactive <3s
- First meaningful paint <2s



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Mobile Readiness

Google is changing to a mobile-first index. That means many rankings on both desktop and mobile will look at the mobile experience first. Your site tests well. If you someday rebuild it, I'd like to see a better responsive experience. This is a design/UX issue, though, not an SEO one. It's not my strong suit.

But there's one requirement for a new site. Use **AMP**, or **Accelerated Mobile Pages**. I despise the AMP standard but AMP pages sometimes get preferred placement and a listing enhancement:





Content

These are the more "typical" SEO recommendations. They're very important. They're even more effective if you make the changes in the previous sections. Regardless, make these changes. If the changes in previous sections have to wait, that's OK. You'll still see some improvement with the recommendations in this section.

We've also included some user experience recommendations. UX is not SEO. SEO is not UX. But there are a few places where the two overlap. We've made recommendations in those areas.

We prioritize content recommendations as follows:

- 1. Sitewide recommendations
- 2. Changes for pages that are present opportunities
- 3. Other pages

All changes are based on our research. See on <u>Topics</u> page 7 for more information.

Note: I've recommended a few changes to your home page. Some of these recommendations will move links to products, etc. down the page. If possible, install a tool like CrazyEgg on your site for a few weeks. See where folks click. Make sure my suggestions won't bury links that generate revenue.



Concept: The Blank Sheet Of Paper Test

We talk about the Blank Sheet Of Paper Test a lot. It's a test to ensure a piece of information is fully descriptive:

If you show a stranger a specific "chunk" of text on a blank sheet of paper, they should know what it describes.

For links, that means the link text written on a blank sheet of paper should tell a stranger what they'll see if they click.

For headlines and title tags, that means the text written on a blank sheet of paper should tell a stranger what they're going to learn.

Concept: Link Authority

In the link-building world, every page on your site is a "bucket." Each bucket is filled with authority (the water). Every link is a hole in the bucket, drawing authority away to another page.

The easiest way to improve the authority of specific pages is to consolidate links. We'll talk about that in this section.

Concept: Hub Pages

"Hub" pages are central pages provided onsite authority using links from other pages on the site. These links can be inline, navigation, or sub-navigation. Hub pages can be carefully planned or organically created by links added to new content.

Linking to hub pages strengthens relevant authority for those pages, helping them rank.

For a full walkthrough of hub pages, see our hub page explainer.



Remove Or Change The Home Page Carousel

A carousel is a great way to show multiple chunks of content above the fold. But it's a bad user experience and, in SEO terms, bad for rankings.¹ Google weights visible content first, hidden content second.

You're trying to rank for terms like "product" and "product accessories." Those words don't show up in the first slide of the current carousel.

Findings Right now, carousel content doesn't appear until javascript fires. And, your key terms don't appear in the first slide of the carousel. That's hurting your ability to rank for your most important phrases.

Recommendation Difficulty: Medium Priority: High **Option 1 - easiest**: Remove the carousel. Have a single image at the top of the page. I suggest using this one:



Figure 5. Use this as your home page "poster"





¹ Movement distracts. Hidden content is, well, hidden. Carousels combine the worst of both worlds. See ConversionXL's piece about this: <u>https://conversionxl.com/blog/dont-use-automatic-image-sliders-or-carousels/</u>. If you must use a carousel, see Jakob Nielsen's suggestions: <u>https://www.nngroup.com/articles/designing-effective-carousels/</u> - but note that even he isn't a fan

Then change the image text to read: "Easy To Install Metal Product | Made In USA | Versatile | Attractive | Strong"

This is the value you provide: Versatile, attractive metal product. Lead with that.

Option 2 - hardest: Change the carousel so the first image loads **without** javascript. Use the image and text from Option 1. Have the carousel load after the "static" image and text load, and have it start when the user clicks the next image arrow.

Option 3: Remove the carousel. Show 3-4 images and messages in a "stripe" format, like this:

Text	
Text	
Text	
Text	

Figure 6. It's not pretty, but it would work

Option 3 would let you get most of your messages on the page. I don't like it though, because it adds a lot of clutter. If you do go this route, compromise and place two images and messages.

Eventually, you need to redesign your home page. When you do, revisit the top-ofpage layout. It could use an update and you could probably improve clickthru at the same time.

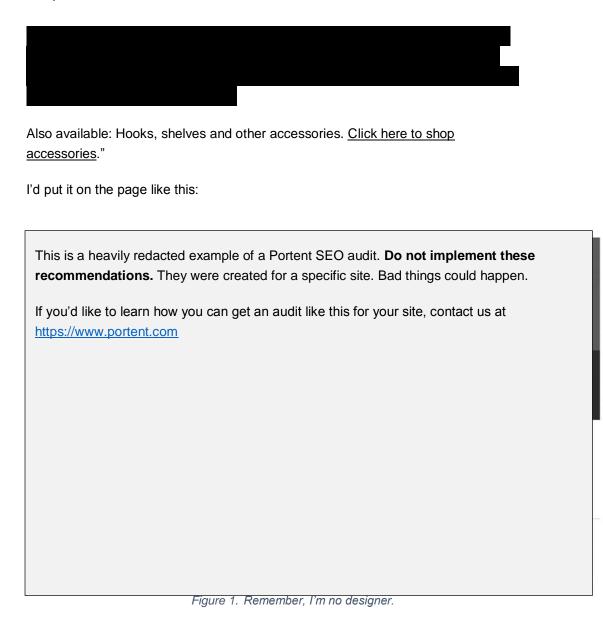


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Edit Home Page Copy

If you change/delete the carousel, you can introduce some copy onto the home page to replace that content. I recommend this:



This will add a little search "food" and some room for marketing copy.



Remove Keyword Tags

This is an easy one: Search engines no longer use keyword tags. Remove the keywords META tag from all pages on your site. Best case, they don't do anything. Worst case, you're showing your competitors your SEO strategy.

Write Unique META Descriptions

Every page on your site should have a unique meta description. While the meta description tag doesn't directly impact rankings, it **can** impact clickthru, since it's most often the summary used in a Google search results page:

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You don't have to rewrite every description.

Findings You duplicate meta descriptions across many pages, and few have a good call to action.

RecommendationRewriting every meta description on your site would be mind-numbing. Instead, startDifficulty: Lowwith the highest-converting, highest-priority pages:

Priority: Medium

- Your home page
- The product category pages (product, product hooks, etc)
- **Example** Write descriptions like you'd write marketing copy. You could steal a bit from your Amazon listings. Your home page description might be something like:



Revise Title Tags

Finally! The SEO stuff! Or, at least, what most folks think is the "SEO stuff."

Title tags should follow the Blank Sheet of Paper Rule (see Concept: The Blank Sheet Of Paper Test). Since space is at a premium (you only have 60 characters), you need to be really efficient.

Title tags can only be 60 characters long, so space is at a premium.

Findings Most of your title tags repeat words, wasting valuable characters. Some aren't fully descriptive.

Also, the marketing blog title is repeated across 256 pages.

Recommendation Difficulty: Low Priority: High We've provided a spreadsheet of suggested edits for high-potential pages, but there are a few basic principles, too.

- Maximum 60 characters in length
- Unique
- Use hypens instead of pipes ("|")
- I prefer to end title tags with the brand, not start them with the brand. There's no data on this but search engines care a lot about structure, so I like to put the most important words first
- See the "new title" column of "title-tags.xlsx" for edits on the top opportunity pages



Write Fully Descriptive ALT Attributes

The ALT attribute describes an image to visiting browsers and assistive devices. It's required for accessibility guidelines. And, it's a ranking factor. In code, the ALT attribute looks like this:

ALT attributes should fully describe the image, whatever the image. If the image has the words "Learning Technology," then the ALT should be "Learning Technology." If the image is a photo of two people drinking beer, the ALT should be "Two people drinking beer."

Findings You have many images, particularly on the blog, that either lack ALT attributes or have empty ALT attributes.

See img-no-alt.csv for a list. It lists each page, then all images on each page that lack ALT attributes or have empty ALT attributes.

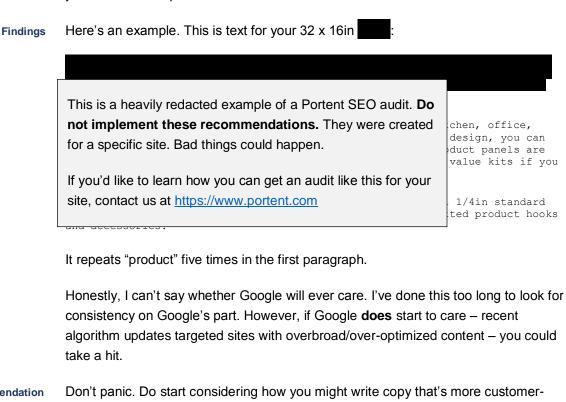
Recommendation Difficulty: Low Priority: High

If BigCommerce doesn't have that ability you should be able to at least set the default ALT attribute of product images to the product name.



Over-Optimization: Product Pages

A lot of your content is over-optimized. I'm concerned that could get you in trouble as your site moves up.



Recommendation

Difficulty: High Priority: Low

optimized and less search-optimized.

Or, change "Strategy" to "Marketing Strategy." That would create a sitewide link with the word "marketing" in it pointing to the strategy page.

Don't sacrifice the user experience! For example, don't change "Strategy" to "Digital Marketing Strategy." It's too long. Don't change "Tools" to "Marketing Tools" if it crowds the navigation. Only make these changes if they work for the user.



Over-Optimization: Photo Pages

These are the pages that most concern me.

Findings Honestly, the copy on these pages is fluff. I apologize if someone has a sense of ownership in it, but as a marketer, copywriter and SEO, this horrifies me:

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This shrieks "SEO copy here!" to Google.

While you may never get penalized, you won't gain any traction in the rankings with this writing, either.

I've written one example:

Recommendation

Edit paragraph one:

Difficulty: **Low** Priority: **Low**

"Congratulations to Francois for winning the 2018 2nd Quarter Photo Contest with the most adorable product setup we've seen so far!"

I'd stop there and delete all other copy. If you have to have more, get a few quotes from Francois and/or his parents as to how he uses the product.



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Optimize Brand Ambassador Pages

The Brand Ambassador pages are fantastic content, and I think they can do more for you.

Findings The ambassadors all use assortments of Client products, and they use them for different applications. If you added a little content to each page you might better leverage them for SEO **and** improve it for readers.

RecommendationGet a few images of their workspaces. Then list the Client products they use, withDifficulty: Lowlinks to those product pages.

Priority: Low

Even better, create product kits for each ambassador's space: "Want the Shanty2Chic storage system? Click here for the kit."

Customers love those kinds of one-click recipe options.



That's A Wrap

Well, no it's not. I stayed very tactical in this report.

There are more strategic issues you can tackle:

- Rewrite product copy for better relevance and conversion
- Reorganize product structure for hub pages
- Revamp site navigation
- Restructure and reorganize the photo contest to eliminate duplication
- Start an outreach program

But this could go on for another 50 pages. Start with the items in this report.

Then, when you're ready, we can have another look.

