

# Lilo's guide on how to Optimise using Structured Data

*Lilo explains how to make use of Google Structured Data and how to optimise Structured Data for search engines.*

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, July 10, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The term "structured data" has been used a lot in the SEO community in recent years, but there are still many misconceptions around what the concept actually means for search. Structured data can play a critical role in the way search engines understand the content on a website – yet not many marketers are using this to their advantage.



This guide will explore what structured data means, what it can be used for, and how to use it for SEO purposes.

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*Elodie Berland*

We’ve also included a glossary of terms at the end of the guide, to give you an easy point of reference for common phrases around the topic of structured data. What is Structured Data?

In a general context, the term structured data refers to any data or information that is organised in some way. This definition includes data contained in relational databases and spreadsheets.

## Unstructured vs Structured Data:

Here is a very basic, relatable everyday example of unstructured data. Let’s say you have written three notes to yourself throughout a busy work day. You now have a handful of Post-It notes or paper scraps, with the following three pieces of information written on them:

Note 1: “Michael called, 3pm meet on Wed at Main Rd Coffee Shop confirmed.”

Note 2: “Don’t forget 9 o’ clock meeting at Jim’s office on Friday morning.”

Note 3: “Pam – dinner plans – Sat 7pm – Alfredo’s.”

If you wanted to turn that into structured data for a diary, daily planner, calendar or spreadsheet, you would organise it (i.e. structure it) in the following way:

Meeting with DateTimePlace

Michael Wednesday 3pm Main Rd Coffee Shop

Jim Friday 9am Jim’s office

Pam Saturday 7pm Alfredo’s restaurant

Organising your information makes it much clearer and easier to understand when you read through it. The same goes for search engines “reading” the information on a web page.

In an SEO context, structured data typically refers to using some type of markup on a web page that will provide additional detail around the content on that page. When the markup is added to your website's HTML, it helps to point the search engines to elements that contain valuable information around the web page's content.

Google describes structured data in the following way:

"Google Search works hard to understand the content of a page. You can help us by providing explicit clues about the meaning of a page to Google, by including structured data on the page. Structured data is a standardised format for providing information about a page and classifying the page content; for example, on a recipe page, what are the ingredients, the cooking time and temperature, the calories, and so on."

Structured data markup is designed to improve the way a search engine understands a page's content. This can make the page more relevant to the search engine, and enhance SERP (Search Engine Results Page) displays. The search engine is able to pull through rich snippets and rich data for the page – such as images, reviews and business hours – to be displayed on the SERP. This can make your site appear more attractive to users, and improve click-through rates.

Structured data is useful for companies that have offices in several locations. The company's SEO team can create separate web pages for each location, and use structured data that is unique to each location. Companies selling a variety of products online can also benefit, by using structured data to determine what makes each product unique – such as colour, size, manufacturer, etc.

Search engines are not able to understand language as effectively as humans do. Structured data can be used to help SEO professionals in improving search engines' understanding of language.

Essentially, search engines can gain new knowledge from data that is highly organised or meaningful.

### Structured Data and Semantic Search

When looking at ways to optimise using structured data, marketers often talk about "semantic search" or "the semantic web". What does this mean exactly?

Semantics is the study of meaning in languages – specifically the relationship between words, phrases and symbols (known as signifiers) and what they mean. The semantic web, or "meaningful web", is focused on these relationships, rather than elements like keywords and backlinks. Instead of looking at strings of words and phrases, the semantic web looks at the concepts behind the words and phrases.

Just like human language has its grammar and vocabulary rules, so does the semantic web. In order to successfully convey information, you need the following two things:

Vocabulary: A set of words that represents sign-meaning pairs.

Grammar: A set of rules on how to use the vocabulary to convey the correct meaning.

The same principles apply to search, which is why consistent sets of rules are needed.

### Standardising Structured Data

Of course, because structured data markup needs to be consistently understood by search engines and human web users, it's essential for it to be standardised.

In 2011, the world's most prolific search engines – namely Google, Microsoft, Yandex and Yahoo – collaborated and agreed upon the creation of a standardised list of structured data markup attributes and entities. This initiative became known as Schema.org, which has become the most widely used approach to structured data markup for SEO.

Schema.org provides a collection of shared vocabularies, which are under active development by the community. SEOs can use these vocabularies to mark up their website pages in ways that can be more easily understood by the major search engines.

Reports have shown surprisingly slow adoption of Schema.org, with an uptake of just 17%. However, despite this, it must be noted that more than 10 million sites today use Schema.org to markup their website pages.

Schema.org vocabulary can be used together with a variety of different encodings, including the three popular formats: RDFa, Microdata and JSON-LD. Google supports structured data in all three of these formats.

**RDFa (Resource Description Framework in Attributes):** An HTML5 extension designed to help with marking up things like People, Places, Events, Recipes and Reviews. RDFa supports linked data by introducing HTML tag attributes that correspond to the onsite content you want to describe to search engines.

**Microdata:** An HTML specification used to nest meta data within existing HTML content on a web page. Similar to RDFa, Microdata uses simple attributes in HTML tags to name the properties you want to be recognised as structured data.

**JSON-LD (JavaScript Object Notation for Linked Data):** A lightweight Linked Data format that's easy for human users to read and write. Linked Data gives webmasters a way to create a network of standardised data across their websites, which is easy for search engines to read.

JSON-LD is Google's recommended format. Nested data items are easy to express with JSON-LD, and Google can also read the data when it is added dynamically to the contents of a page (e.g. via JavaScript code).

#### Key Benefits of Using Structured Data

Think back to the early days of Google, when you would search for something and would be answered with a list of plain blue links. Over the years, Google Search has improved and evolved to the point where SERPs display really informative results. Instead of a page of plain links, search results come complete with images and relevant news stories, as well as contact details and operating hours for businesses being searched. These are called "rich" results.

Web pages with rich results take up more space in SERPs, and are also more attractive to searchers, which means they have a higher click-through rate than plain links. If your website isn't leveraging search features like this, you could be losing out on plenty of valuable clicks.

Search engines offer advantages to SEO professionals who implement structured data correctly. Google in particular uses structured data to enable special search result enhancements, like:

Rich data results.

Rich cards (i.e. rich search results designed for mobile users).

Knowledge Graph information.

Breadcrumbs in search results.

Multiple rich results appearing in a carousel style.

Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) appearing in carousels and with rich results.

Enhanced click-through rate (CTR).

Improved traffic to the website or web page.

Improved CTR is a user behaviour signal that can indirectly lead to better rankings.

Let's look at some of these structured data benefits in a bit more detail:

**Rich Data Snippets and Rich Cards:**

Structured data markup allows SEOs to provide additional context for ratings and reviews, video content, articles, products and recipes. With structured data, a site will show up in the SERPs as a rich snippet or a rich card, accompanied by images, videos and star ratings.

**Knowledge Graph:**

If you have a personal brand or a business, you can edit the Knowledge Graph box – the information that appears on the right-hand side of the SERP for branded searches. Google uses structured data to populate this box.

**Carousel Results:**

These are the results that run horizontally across the top of a Google SERP when a user searches for something with local intent (like “art galleries in London”). If a website has several items that would fit the query, the SERP can display multiple rich results in a carousel style.

**Accelerated Mobile Pages:**

If a site uses AMPs, it's important to include structured data markup, which will allow the AMP pages to appear in rich results.

**Do's and Don'ts for Structured Data**

Keep in mind that the structured data must be representative of the main content of the page – it should not mislead search engines or searchers in any way. The marked up content should also be visible to your users – don't try to hide it. If you don't follow the correct guidelines, Google will flag your structured data as being “manipulative” or see it as an attempt to “trick” the search engine.

If Google decides that your implementation violates their Rich Snippet Quality guidelines, you could be penalised for improper use of structured data.

Here are Google's do's and don'ts for those looking to add structured data to a site:

Do follow the Google Webmaster Quality Guidelines.

Do provide up-to-date, relevant information – Google won't display a rich result for time-sensitive content that has become outdated.

Do provide original content, generated by you and/or your users.

Don't mark up content that is hidden from your readers.

Don't mark up irrelevant or misleading content.

Don't use structured data to deceive your users.

Don't impersonate another person or business, create fake reviews, or misrepresent your ownership or affiliation.

Don't use content that promotes illegal acts, violent or cruel acts, targeted hatred or dangerous activities.

Don't mark up content that promotes products, services or information that could cause serious and immediate harm to others. (It is allowable to mark up this content to provide necessary educational information.)

**Implementing Structured Data Markup**

Here's a method of setting up your structured data markup using Schema.org with JSON-LD, in three simple steps.

## Step 1: Choose the Schemas

Look through the commonly used schemas available at Schema.org. These might include Person, Place, Product, Review, Event, etc. depending on the content of your site.

In a spreadsheet, create a “map” of schemas for your website. In one column, list the URLs of each individual page or category on the site, and in the next column, list the relevant schemas that match those pages or categories. For example:

### URLs Schemas

-http:// the-vegan-cooking-academy.com/about : Local Business  
-http:// the-vegan-cooking-academy.com/meet-the-chef : Person  
-http:// the-vegan-cooking-academy/upcoming-classes : Event  
-http:// the-vegan-cooking-academy/testimonials : Review  
-http:// the-vegan-cooking-academy/the-cookbook : Product

(Note that multiple schemas can be combined to describe one object if needed.)

## Step 2: Create your Structured Data Markup

Google makes it easy to mark up the structured data on a site, with the Structured Data Markup Helper tool. This is a user-friendly tool that’s especially handy for SEOs who aren’t professional web developers.

Open the Structured Data Markup Helper.

Select the relevant schema.

Enter the URL from your spreadsheet.

Click “Start Tagging”.

Highlight page elements and assign the relevant schema tags to them.

When you’re done, click “Create HTML”.

Select JSON-LD from the dropdown menu.

Copy and paste the code into the <head> or <body> tags in the HTML code of your web page.

## Step 3: Test your Work

Use the Structured Data Testing Tool to check your work. Enter the URL of the page you want to test. The tool will display all the marked up data for that page, and give you any information you need about errors and warnings.

Once your code is tested and you are satisfied that there are no errors, it’s time to “hurry up and wait”. The rich snippets will only start to display in the search results pages once Google has recrawled your website.

Afterwards, it’s a good idea to make a habit of using the Structured Data Tool to identify issues. Start incorporating regular structured data checks into your SEO routine. It’s easy:

Log into Google’s Search Console.

Click “Search Appearance > Structured Data”.

These checks will give you details about any errors, as well as information about the types of structured data detected on your site.

### Final Notes on Structured Data

It’s important to note that Google doesn’t offer any guarantee that your structured data will show up in search results. If you’ve set everything up correctly and tested it all meticulously, but still aren’t seeing those enhanced features – don’t panic. It doesn’t necessarily mean you’ve done something wrong. Google guidelines say:

“The Google algorithm tailors search results to create what it thinks is the best search experience for a user, depending on many variables, including search history, location, and device type. In some cases it may determine that one feature is more appropriate than another, or even that a plain blue link is best.”

Adding structured data to your site in an intelligent way requires thought and care, and the potential benefits are well worth the effort. Get support online with Google’s Structured Data Markup Helper, and be sure to review their official guidelines beforehand as well.  
Your Complete Structured Data Glossary

In case you’re finding all the jargon around structured data a little overwhelming, you can use this glossary for easy reference.

Breadcrumbs—links that allow users to track their path from the page they are currently viewing back to the homepage of a website.

Grammar—A set of rules on how to use vocabulary to convey the correct meaning.

JSON-LD—JSON (JavaScript Object Notation) is a lightweight format for storing and transporting data. JSON-LD is JSON for Linking Data, i.e. a JSON-based format to serialise linked data.

Knowledge Graph—A Google knowledge base used to enhance Google search engine results with information gathered from various sources.

Linked Data—A method of publishing structured data so that it can be interlinked and become more useful through semantic queries. A way to expose and connect data on the web from a variety of different sources.

Markup—Text-based organisation of data included in a file and served from the web.

Original article found @ <https://www.lilo.co.uk/blog/complete-guide-how-to-optimise-structured-data/>

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