

HTTPS – Should I Implement It on My Site?

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Google announced last Wednesday, August 6, that the search engine will use https as a ranking signal. HTTPS stands for **Hypertext Transport Protocol Secure**, which protects the data integrity and confidentiality of users visiting a site. For example, when a user enters data into a form on a site in order to subscribe to updates or purchase a product, a secure site protects that user's personal information and ensures that the user communicates with the authorized owner of the site. For the HTTPS connection to work properly, websites require an SSL certificate, which is what enables the site to make a secure connection.

Even though Google is making this change, it is not something that webmasters should jump into lightly. Webmasters should implement https only when they really need it and have sections in their site where they need to protect their visitors' information.

Before making any drastic changes to the site, it is important to take into consideration that Google stated that this change will affect less than one percent of queries, carrying less weight than other signals such as high-quality content.

Cons of using https

- Up until this recent announcement, it was recommended only using https on the sections of the site that needed to protect the confidentiality of user data, such as payment forms that collected credit card information, the site's login section or any page that would send/receive other private information (such as street address, phone number or health records), because using https in the whole site can overload web servers and make sites slower, which affects negatively on a site's ranking.
- Changing to https also means that all of the URLs in your site will change and it will be necessary to redirect all of the URLs on the site, so that they can be indexed by Google and avoid having duplicate content between https and http URLs. Redirects usually increase the load time of the site, which can be a negative ranking factor and reduce the link juice coming from external sites pointing to http URLs.
- SSL certificates cost money, and certificates signed by well-known authorities can be expensive.

I advise against making an immediate decision to change to https because it is a recent change and apparently the effort to switch exceeds the benefit obtained in rankings. Right now it is better to stand back and observe how the change affects those sites that alter their URLs to https.

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