# SEO Overview

## Introduction

This guide addresses a number of separate issues which are involved in Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) - the art of ensuring that your pages rank well in the "organic listings" [Wikipedia] of search engines such as Google.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive guide to all aspects of SEO - it only addresses the most common issues that arise. Make sure you ask your Relationship Manager to help you interpret the SEO report since this should always be the starting point for any discussion about whether additional SEO activity is needed. We use tools from both "WebPosition" and "Authority Labs" to prepare these reports. You may find that you are already ranking very well for the search phrases you care about (see 1).

# SEO-Friendly Section Names

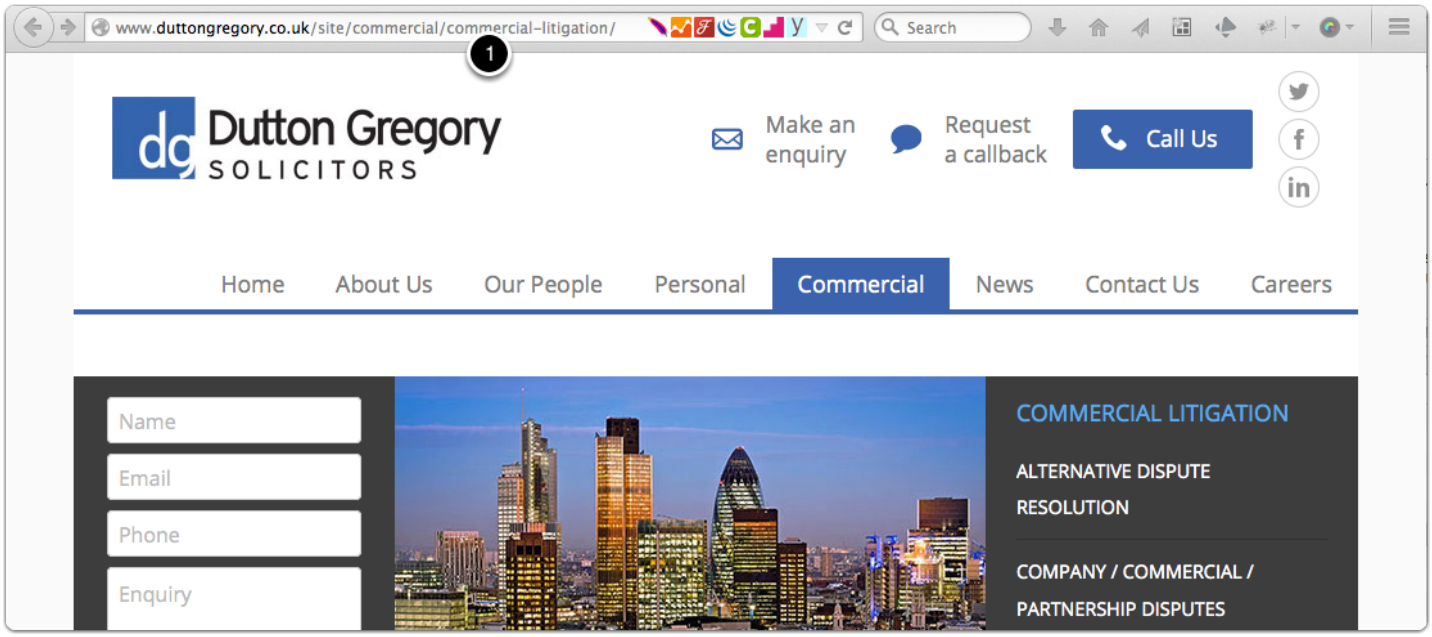
Most sites are organised into a simple hierarchical structure. The CMS is used to define sections and sub-sections and this information is then used to create the menu and sitemap automatically.

To help search engines understand the nature of each section it's important to ensure that the section-name contains keywords since this is one of many factors that combine to determine the ranking of the page.

For example, if you have a section called "Employment" and are creating a new sub-section with information about "Unfair Dismissal" then make sure that the new section is called "unfair-dismissal" since this is the most popular search term associated with that topic. So the full URL of such a page might be something like: www.lawfirm.com/site/employment/unfair-dismissal".

Once a section has been named and other pages linked to it, it can't be renamed automatically (it has to be rebuilt manually) - so, to avoid unnecessary expense, picking suitable names for each section is something that needs to be considered carefully when the site is first built.

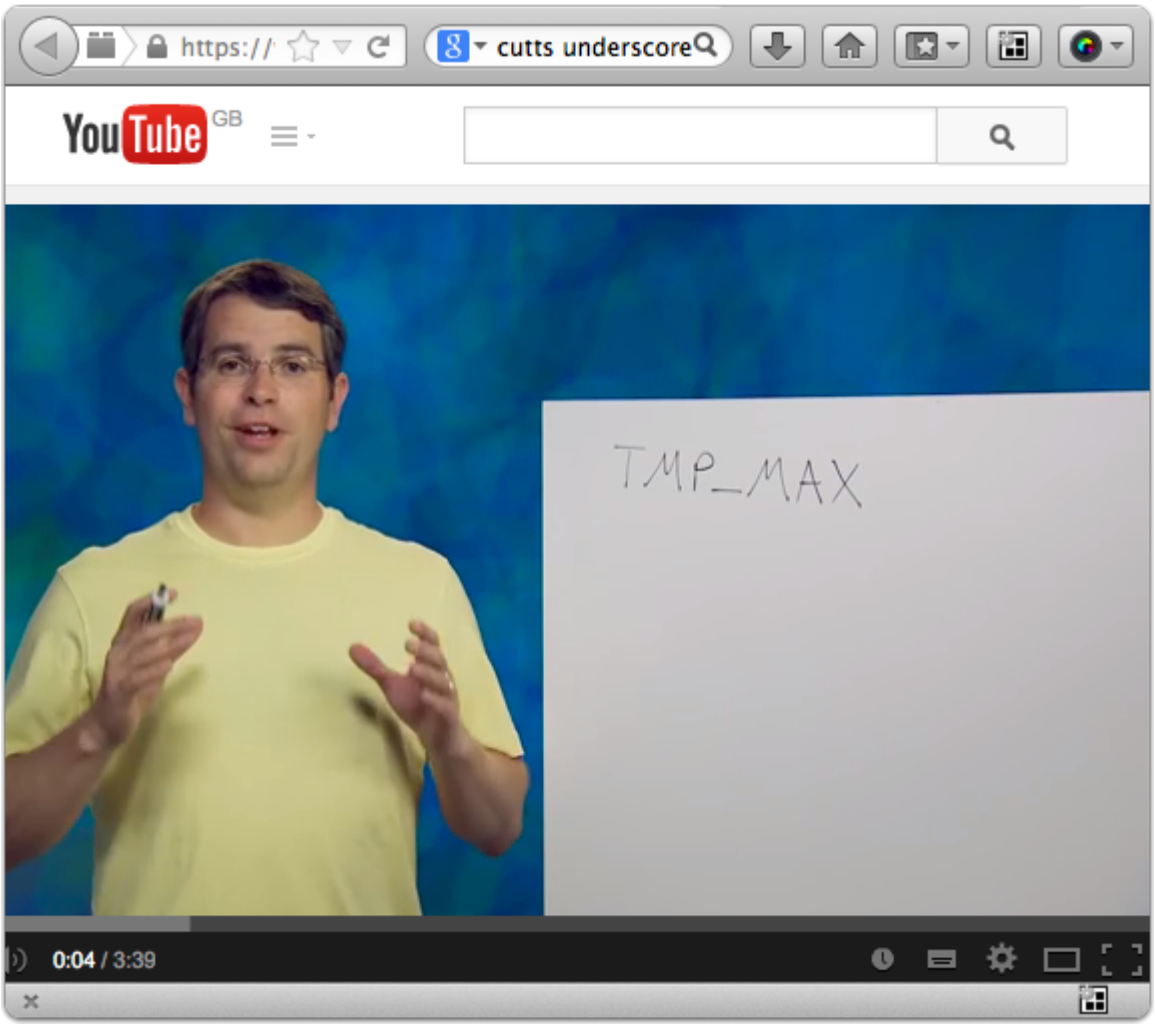
A typical example of a SEO-friendly section name containing the keywords "commercial" and "litigation" is shown below (see 1).



## Underscores vs. Dashes

You are not allowed to have a space in the URL of a page, so in order to make the URL readable people very often replace all spaces with either a dash "-" or an underscore "_". Google makes a subtle distinction between dashes and underscores which is explained in this official Google video from Matt Cutts. He stresses that the effects are tiny and suggests that there are almost always better things to be doing with your SEO time than worry about the difference between these two characters. The important conclusion from this video is:

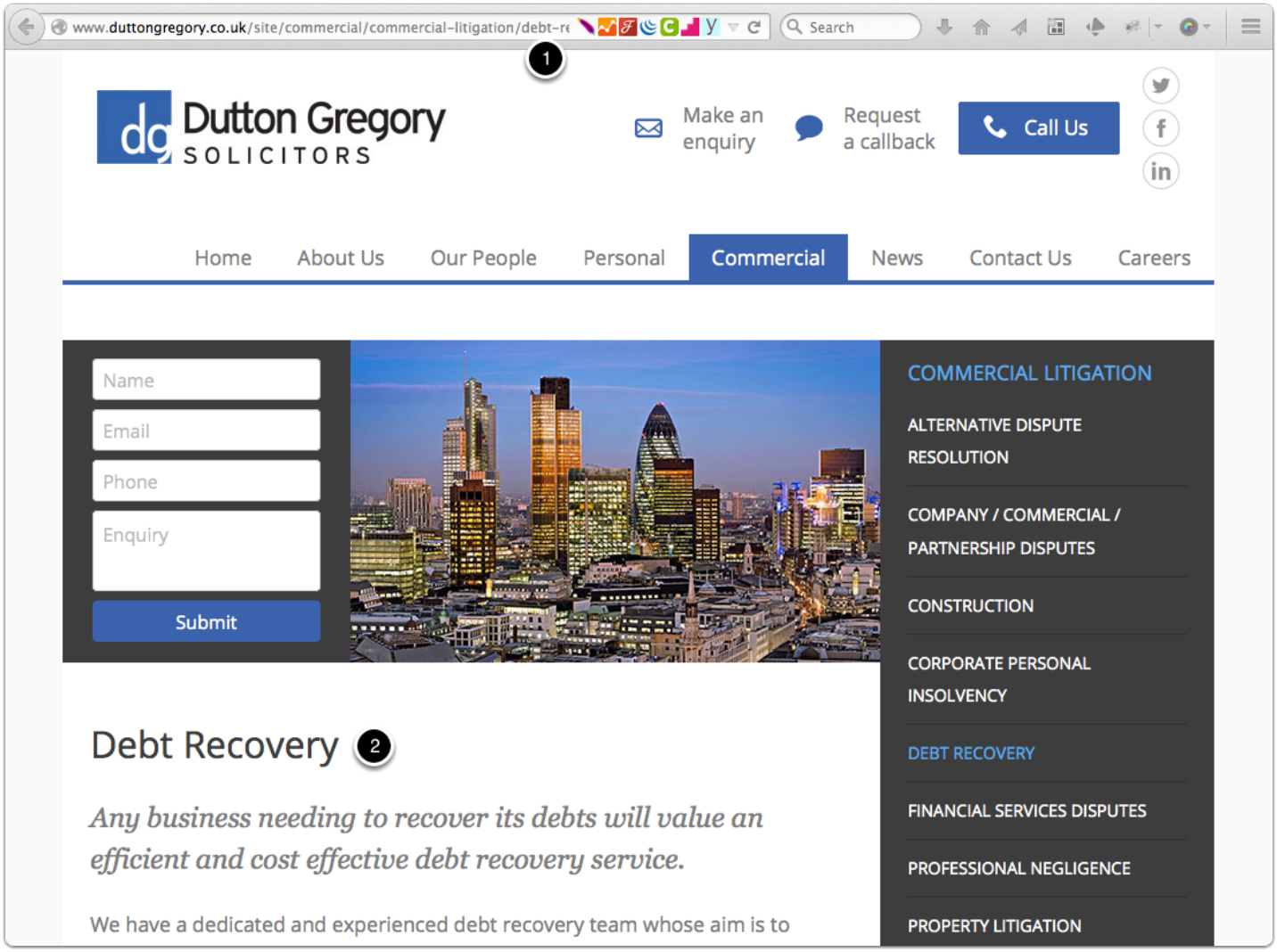
- For new pages, it is advisable to use dashes rather than underscores
- For existing pages that use underscores, it's advisable **not to change** these to dashes



# SEO-Friendly Headings

For good SEO performance you should ensure that each page has one (and only one) heading of type <H1> and that the name is reflective of what the User might be searching for. The <H1> tag is inserted automatically for you as part of the logic used by the CMS to build each page, but you certainly need to pay attention to the text used for headings. For example on this site the author has ensured that the heading uses non-legal terms more likely to appear in searches (see 1).

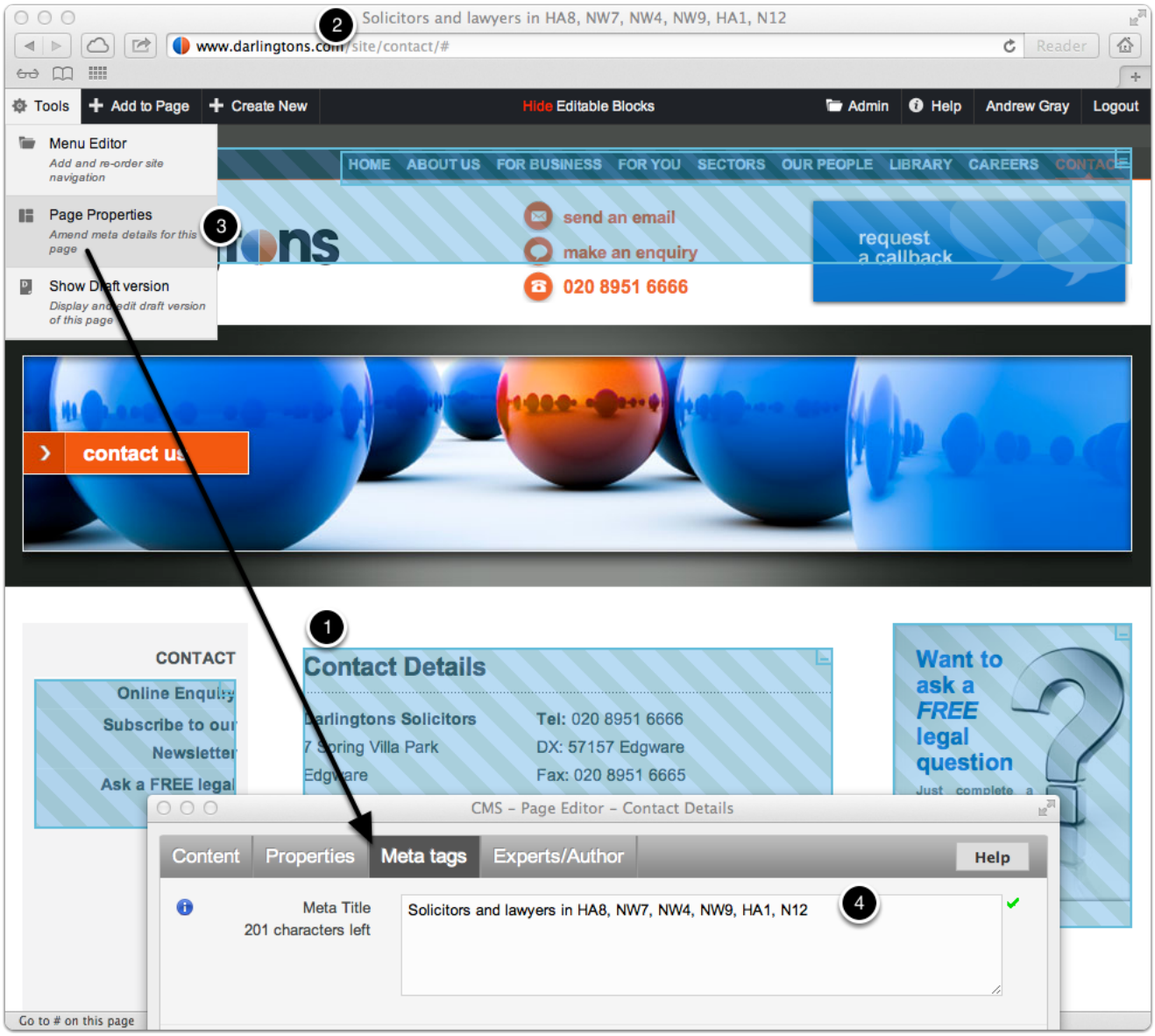
It's always a good idea to ensure that your main keyword also appears in the H1 tag on the page (i.e. the main visible-titlte of the page).



# SEO-Friendly Page Titles (Meta Tag)

The "title" of the page is what appears in the bar at the top of your browser window which is derived from the <TITLE> tag within the HTML of the page. Most pages will have a visible heading which is often taken as the title but the two things are separate. There are times when you might want the heading and the title to be different. For example - on contact pages you might want the visible heading to read "Contact Details" (see 1) but the Title of the page to read "Solicitors and Lawyers in ...." (see 2). This is achieved by selecting **Tools** (see 3) then **Page Properties** which reveals the Meta Title field (see 4).

<TITLE> tags are the most important on-page ranking factor (see 4).

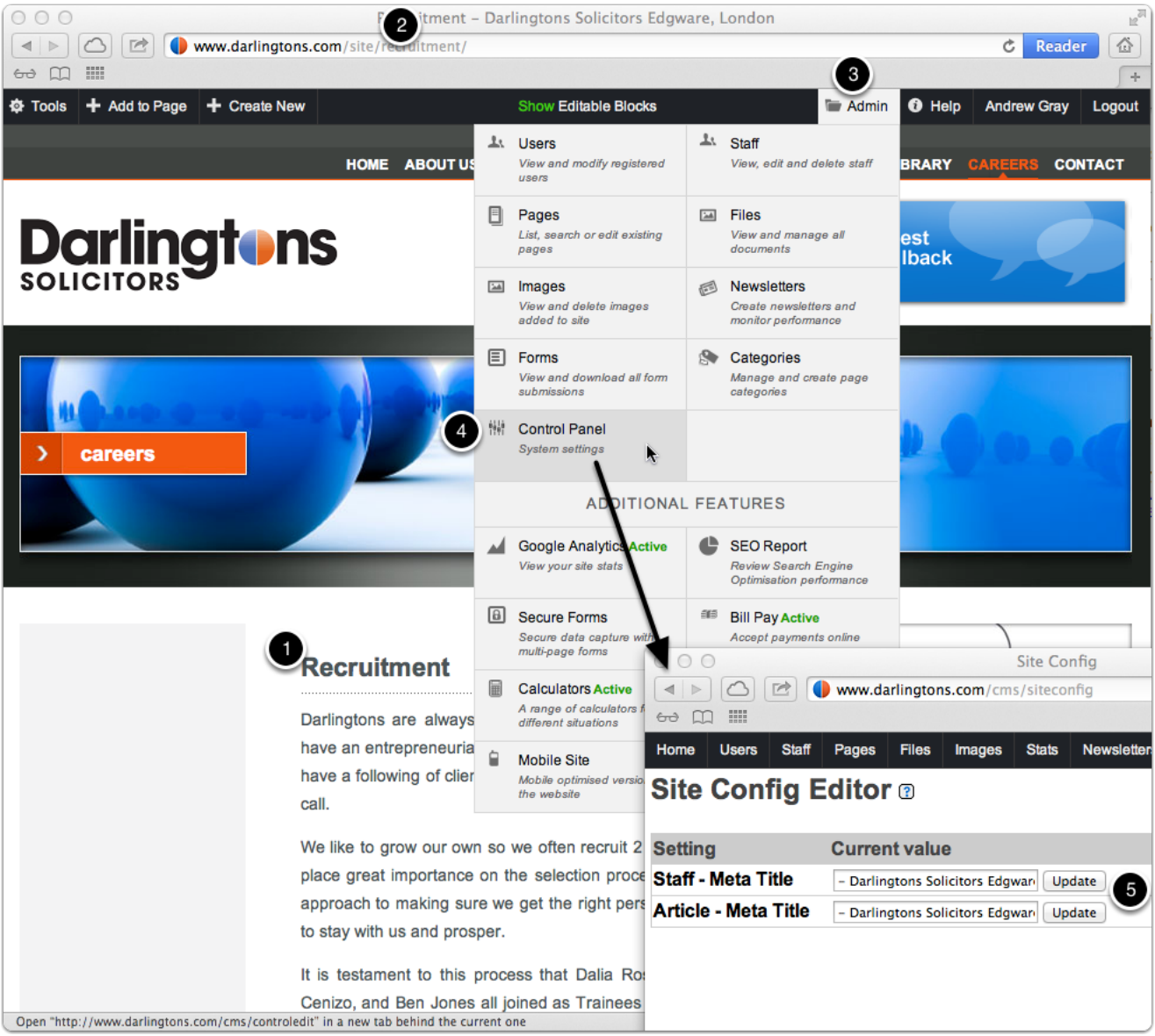


# Automatic Page Titles (Meta Tag)

Most sites contain many hundreds of pages and it's impractical to create a unique "TITLE" meta tag for each and every page. Yet the tag is very important, so for this reason the CMS applies some logic in order to create a "TITLE" tag for pages which have not had one set explicitly. The logic is fairly simple and works like this:

- If a meta title has been set manually then use that (and do not adjust it in any way)
- If there is no meta title set explicitly then manufacture one by taking the HEADING of the page and adding an SEO-title-fragment to it. The SEO-title-fragment is a single field that can be used as a default for the entire site.

For example, this page does not have a meta title defined explicitly so the CMS has created one by taking the visible heading of "Recruitment" (see 1) and adding some fixed text to achieve "Recruitment - Solicitors Edgware, London" (see 2). To adjust the fixed text select **Admin** (see 3) then **Control Panel** (see 4) which will reveal the fields used for staff pages and the field used for all other pages of the site (see 5)

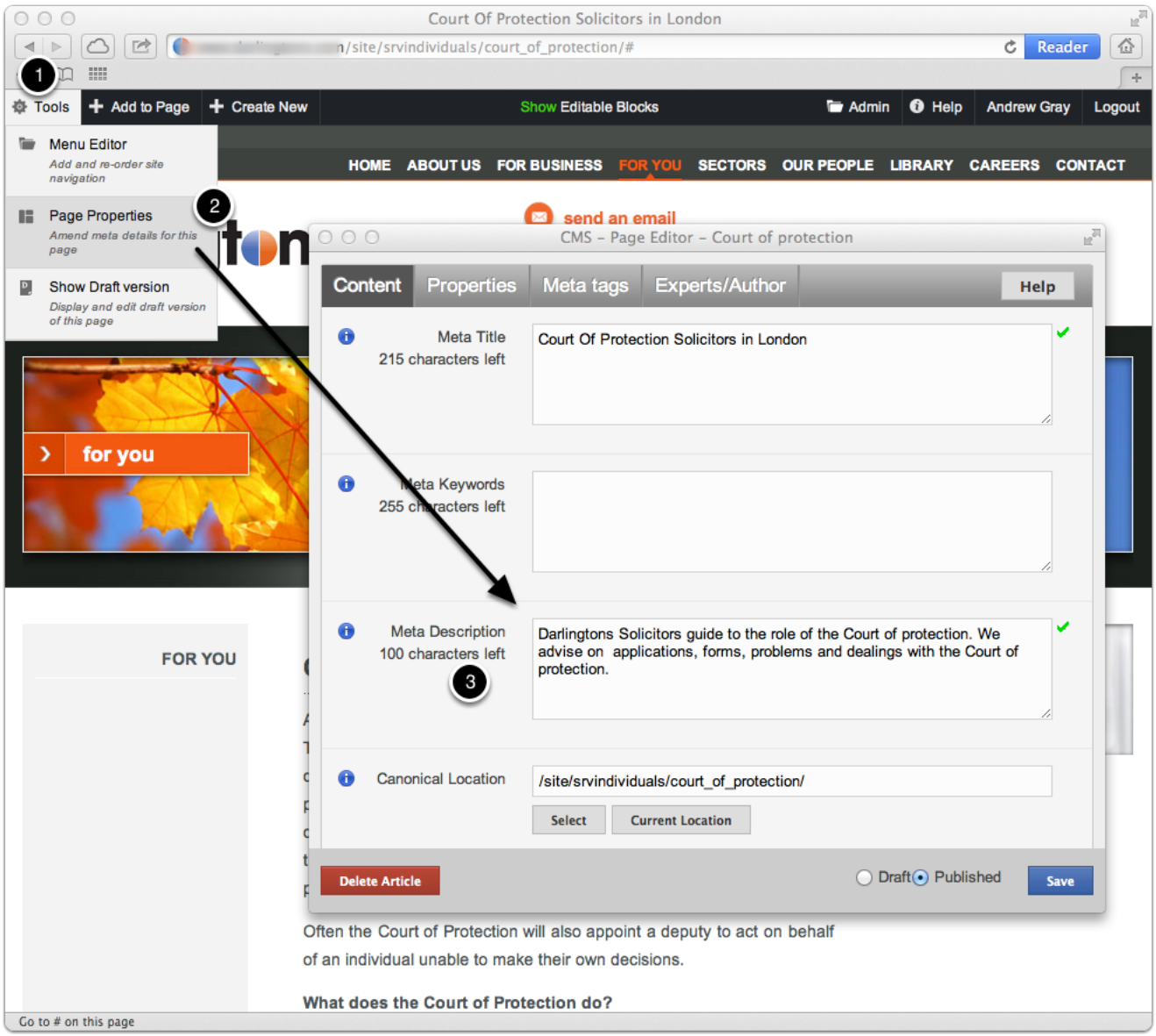


# SEO-Friendly Description (Meta Tag)

A page's description meta tag gives Google and other search engines a summary of what the page is about. Whereas a page's title may be a few words or a phrase, a page's description meta tag might be a sentence or a short paragraph.

Description meta tags are important because Google will use them as snippets for your pages if it does find a relevant section of the page's visible text. Adding description meta tags to each of your pages is always a good practice in case Google cannot find a good selection of text to use in the snippet.

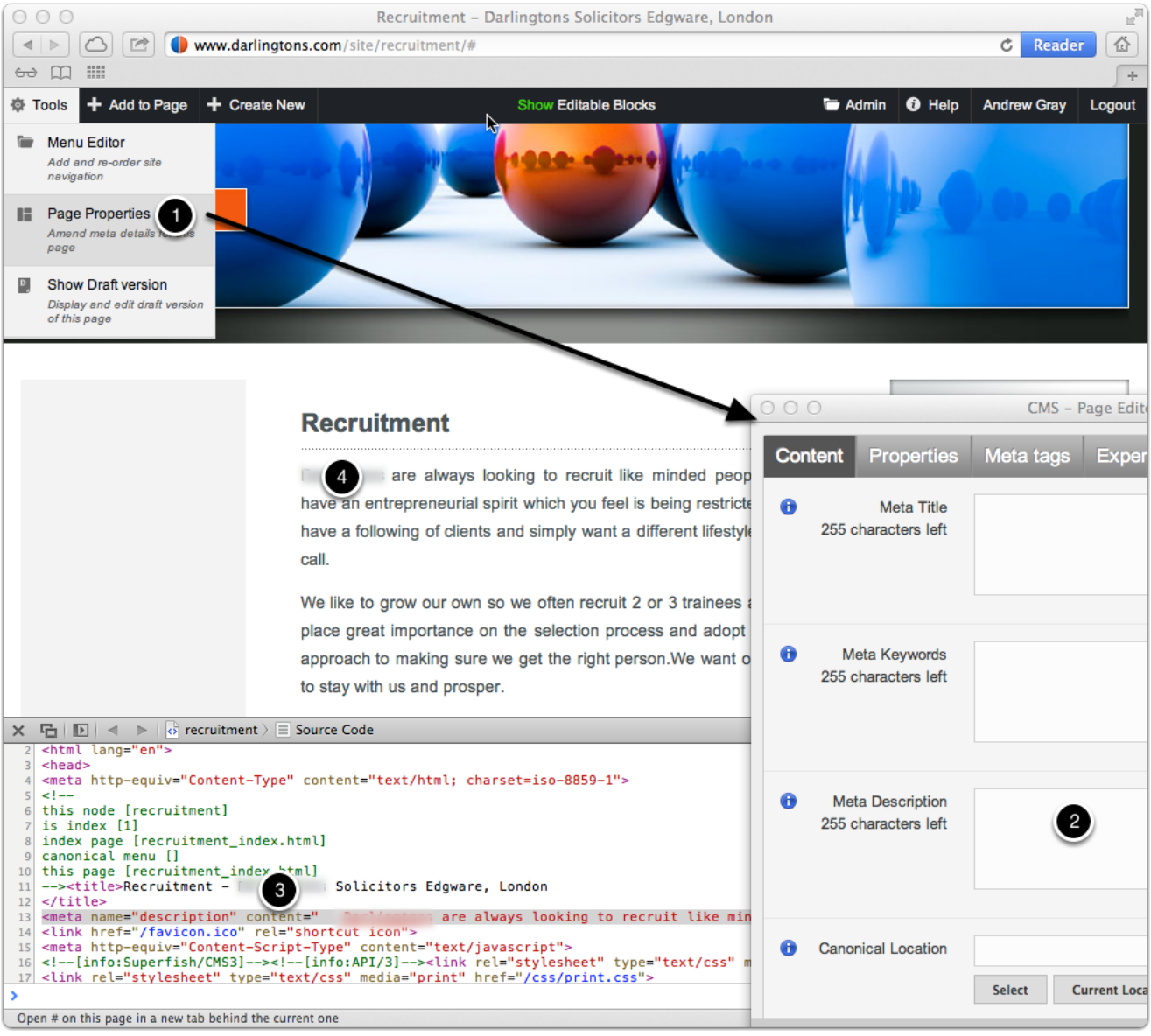
To set a Meta Description, navigate to the page on your site, then select **Tools** (see 1) and **Page Properties** (see 2) which will reveal all the Meta Tags for the page (see 3)



# Automatic Meta Description (Meta Tag)

If you do not provide a Meta Description the CMS will create one automatically by using the first 200 characters of the main content on the page.

For example, on this site Page Properties (see 1) shows that no Meta Description has been created for this particular page (see 2) yet when viewing the HTML source of the page you see that the CMS has created on automatically (see 3) based on the text from the page (see 4).




# SEO Friendly Keywords (Meta Tag)

Google does not use the "Keywords" meta tag - [read the official explanation]

# SEO-Friendly Short-URLs (Root Level Pages)

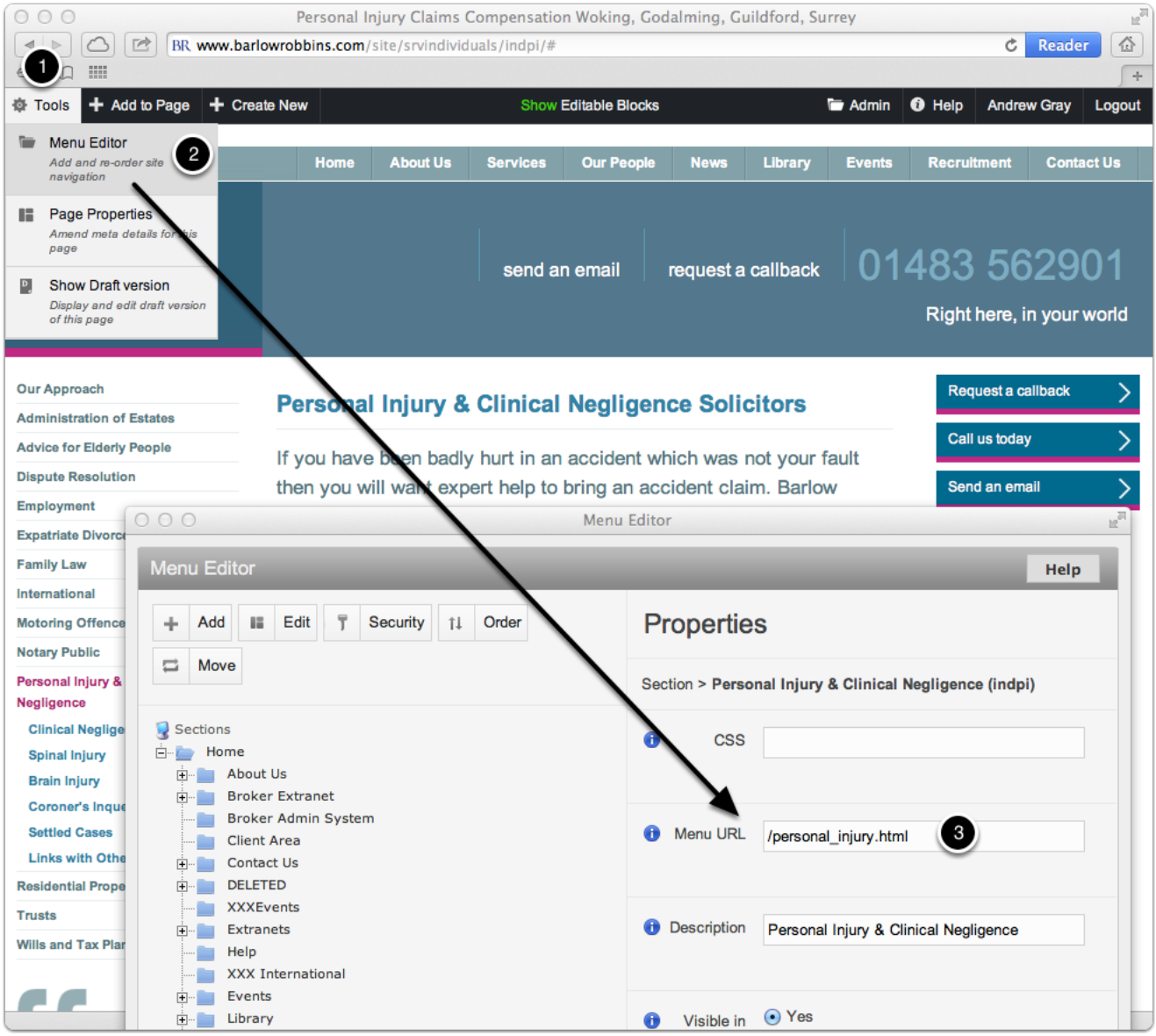
Some people suggest that root-level pages perform better than pages which appear to be deeper within the site. For example, it is suggested that www.lawfirm.com/head_injury.html would perform better than www.lawfirm.com/site/personal_injury/head_injury/

To make a section appear to be a root-level page select Tools (see 1) then Menu Editor (see 2) and enter a Menu URL - this must be in the form /name.html (see 3)

- it must begin with with a forward-slash e.g. "/"
- it must be a valid name e.g. "personal_injury"
- it must end ".html"

The technical configuration needed to make a page appear to be at the root-level takes place automatically each evening so you need to wait until the following morning before the root-level page will start to function. From then on, the section will appear to be a root-level page.

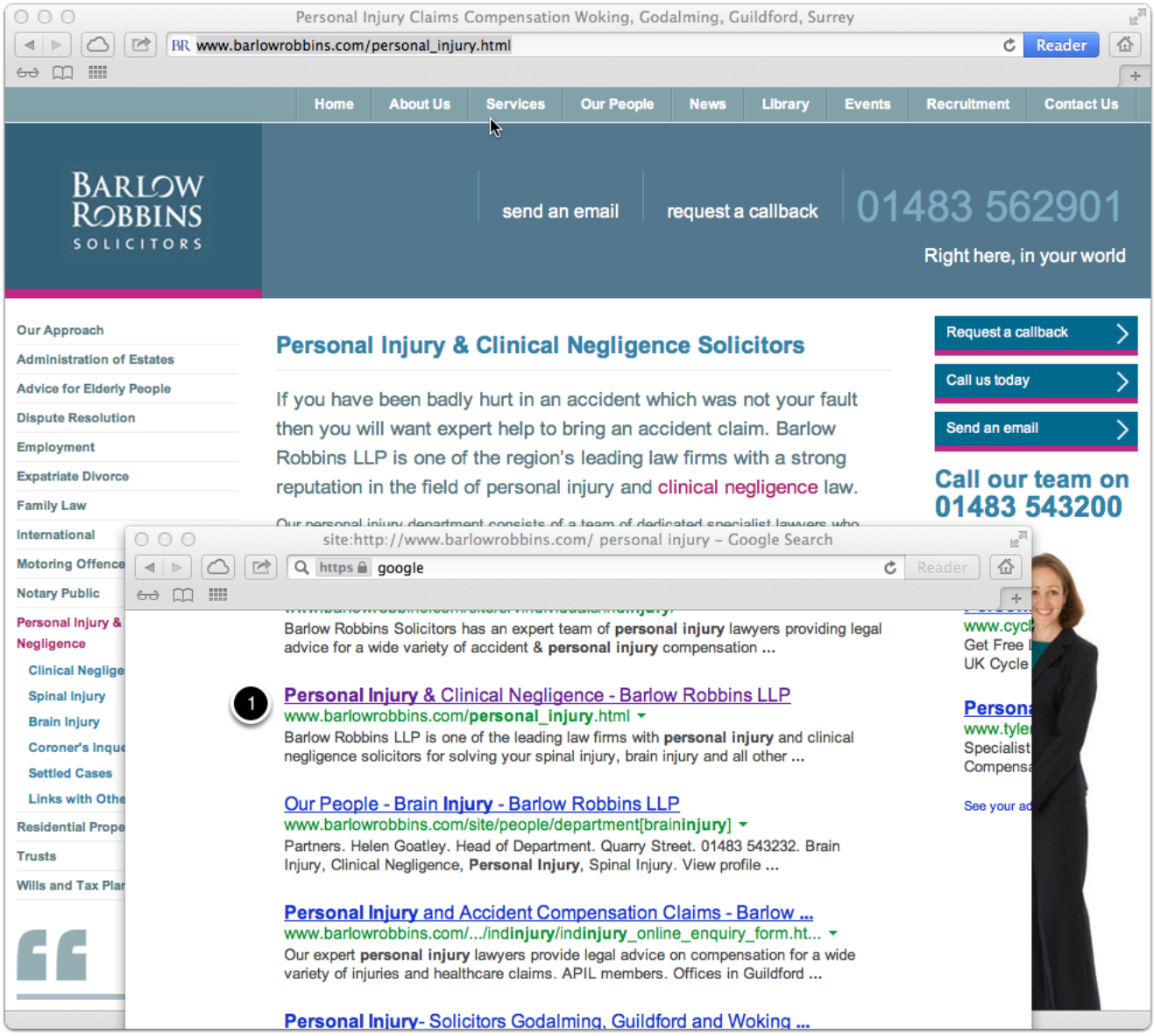
***Important note:*** *If you are logged in as an Editor you will not see the root-level-page because the CMS will link you to the page using the full URL (reflecting it's real position within the site structure). The CMS requires this format in order to activate "edit" options correctly. You need to logout if you want to see the site exactly as your Users will (if you logout then the menu will link you through to the root-level URL).*


Personal Injury Claims Compensation Woking, Godalming, Guildford, Surrey
www.barlowrobbins.com/site/srvindividuals/indpi/#
Reader
1
Tools
Add to Page
Create New
Show Editable Blocks
Admin
Help
Andrew Gray
Logout
Menu Editor
Add and re-order site navigation
2
Page Properties
Amend meta details for this page
Show Draft version
Display and edit draft version of this page
Home
About Us
Services
Our People
News
Library
Events
Recruitment
Contact Us
send an email
request a callback
01483 562901
Right here, in your world
Our Approach
Administration of Estates
Advice for Elderly People
Dispute Resolution
Employment
Expatriate Divorce
Family Law
International
Motoring Offence
Notary Public
Personal Injury & Negligence
Clinical Negligence
Spinal Injury
Brain Injury
Coroner's Inquest
Settled Cases
Links with Other
Residential Property
Trusts
Wills and Tax Planning
Personal Injury & Clinical Negligence Solicitors
If you have been badly hurt in an accident which was not your fault then you will want expert help to bring an accident claim. Barlow
Request a callback
Call us today
Send an email
Menu Editor
Menu Editor
Help
Add
Edit
Security
Order
Move
Sections
Home
About Us
Broker Extranet
Broker Admin System
Client Area
Contact Us
DELETED
XXXEvents
Extranets
Help
XXX International
Events
Library
Properties
Section > Personal Injury & Clinical Negligence (indpi)
CSS
Menu URL
/personal_injury.html
3
Description
Personal Injury & Clinical Negligence
Visible in
Yes

# SEO-Friendly Short-URLs - Example

Here's how it will look once you have created a root-level page. The page in Google will appear to be "/personal_injury.html" (see 1).

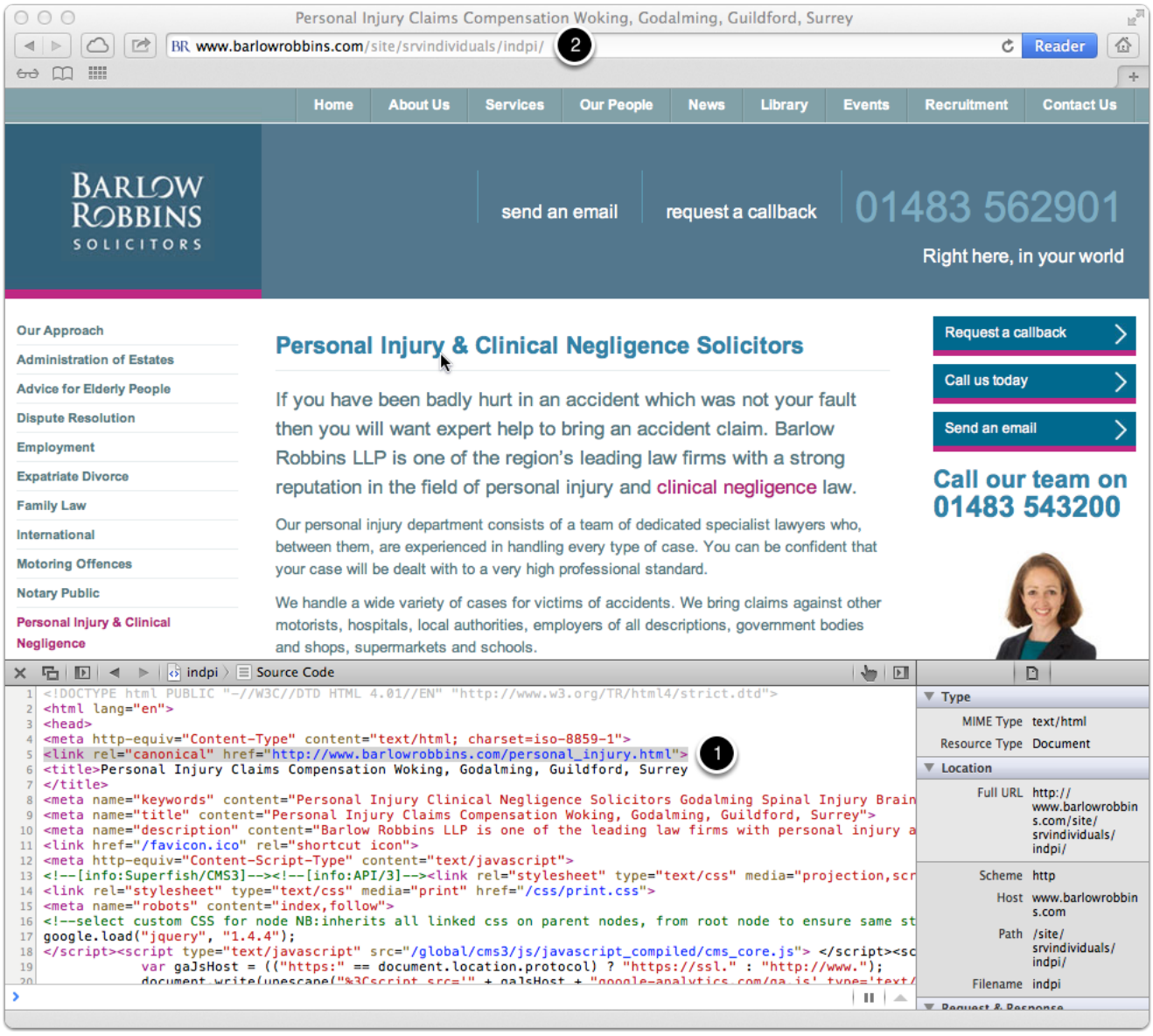
***Important note**: It is likely that the page will already be in the Google but indexed under it's previous location. To correct this, the CMS automatically inserts a canonical link into the HTML definition of the page so that Search Engines know the correct form of the page.*



# Canonical Links

A "canonical link" [Wikipedia] is a way of telling the Search Engines which is your preferred form of a page. There are sometimes reasons why you would have the same page appearing multiple times within the structure of a site but by using a canonical link you can ensure that only one page appears in the Google index. All the major Search Engines support the concept of "canonical links" - indeed the solution was pioneered by Google and is well supported by them.

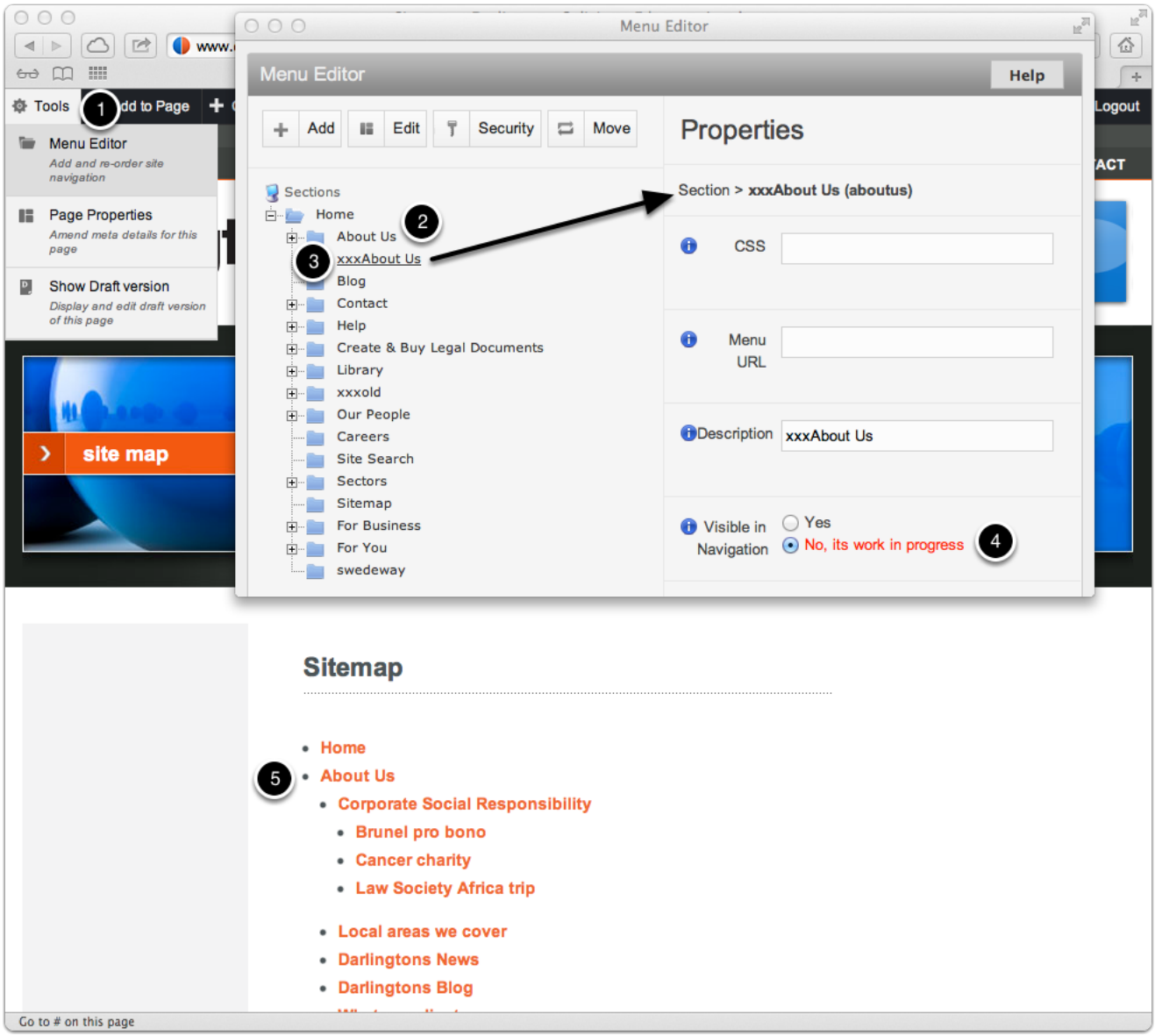
For example, if you establish a root-level URL a canonical link is automatically added to ensure that the new location of the page (see 1) is used in preference to the original location (see 2).



# Sitemaps - Automatic (Human Readable)

Your site will have been built with a SiteMap which is often linked to from the footer of each page and provides an overview of how the entire site has been structured. The Sitemap is generated automatically based on the information created by the Menu Editor (which is also used to generate the navigation bar). You wont have to worry about the Sitemap since it is maintained automatically but remember to use the Menu Editor if you see something that isn't quite right.

For example, in this site the **Menu Editor** (see 1) reveals a section called "About Us" (see 2) and another called "XXXAbout Us" (see 3) which has been flagged as "Not visible in the navigation" (see 4) which is reflected in the automatically created Sitemap (see 5).



## Sitemap - Automatic (Machine Readable)

An XML Sitemap is created automatically by the same system that is responsible for creating the full-text search index on your site. In order to create the full-text search index a web-crawler pulls the homepage and then follows all the links on all the pages found until it has navigated the entire site. The primary function of this index is to enable a full-text search (similar to a Google search) but the index is also then used in order to generate an XML Sitemap. The XML Sitemap is always found at the root-level of the site and is named /sitemap.gz

To quote Google "Sitemaps are a way to tell Google about pages on your site we might not otherwise discover. " [ref] - the emphasis here is on the phrase "we might not otherwise discover". Most people like to provide Google with an XML Sitemap but in practice we have not found that it makes any difference (even without an XML Sitemap Google finds new pages effectively). Nevertheless, for peace of mind we continue to create an XML Sitemap for each site.

## Advanced: Speed

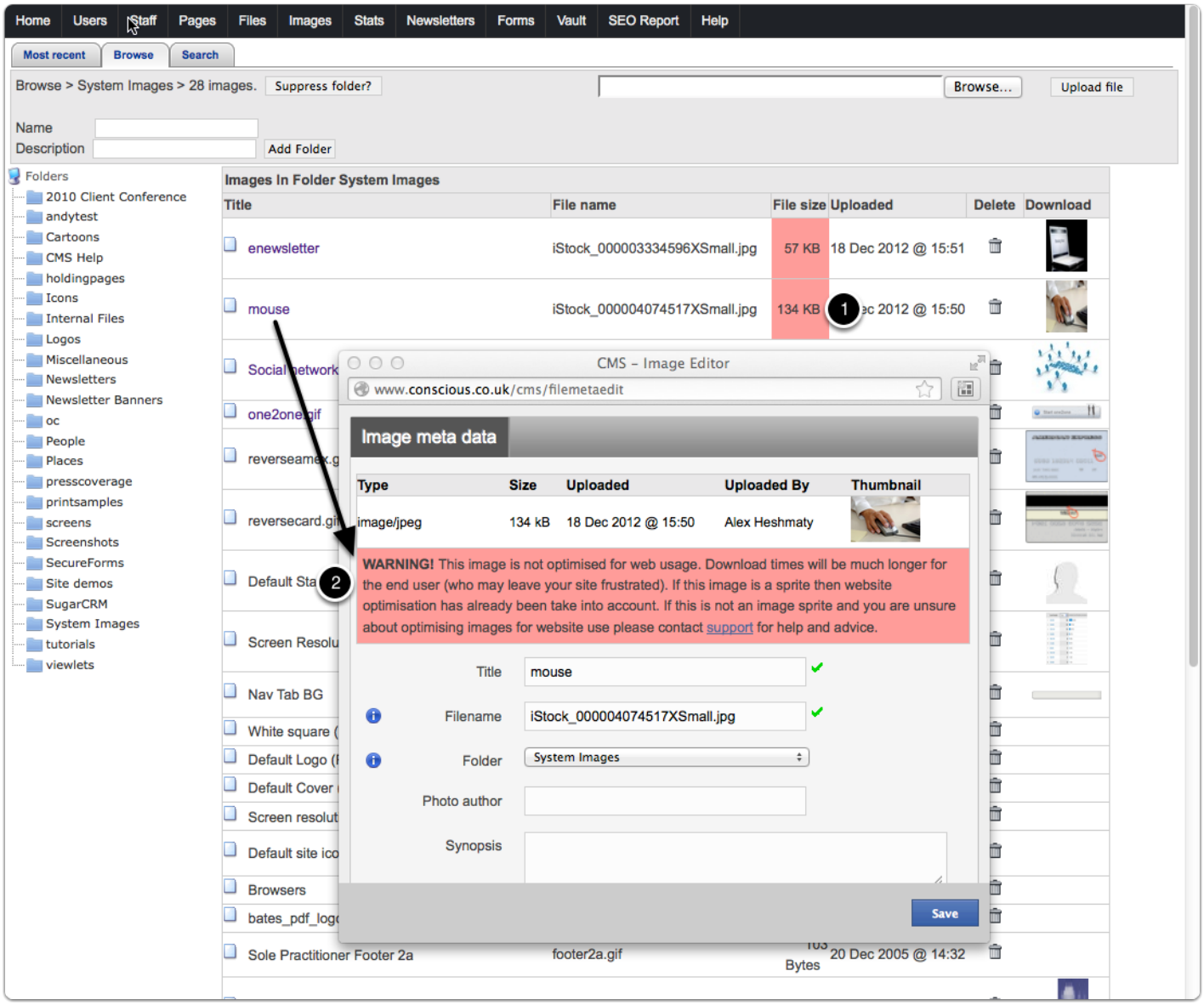
Site speed is one of the many factors taken into account by Google (and others) when determining the ranking of a page, so if you want to optimise pages for organic listings you need to be aware of the various factors that contribute to "speed".

Some speed factors are obvious:

- make sure any images are optimised (i.e. are as small as possible)
- reduce the number of HTTP requests that the browser has to make before being able to render the page
- reduce the amount of JavaScript that has to be run (Social Media icons are often expensive in this respect)

# Advanced: Image Size

Most of the factors that influence site speed can only be adjusted by technical engineers as they build a new site (or do a "makeover" of an existing site). However, once the site is live it's likely that you will continue to add images to pages and one of the easiest things to do is to make sure that these images are as small as they can be (for an acceptable quality). The CMS helps identify "problem" images by highlighting any image that is more than 50K (see 1) and a warning message appears (2).



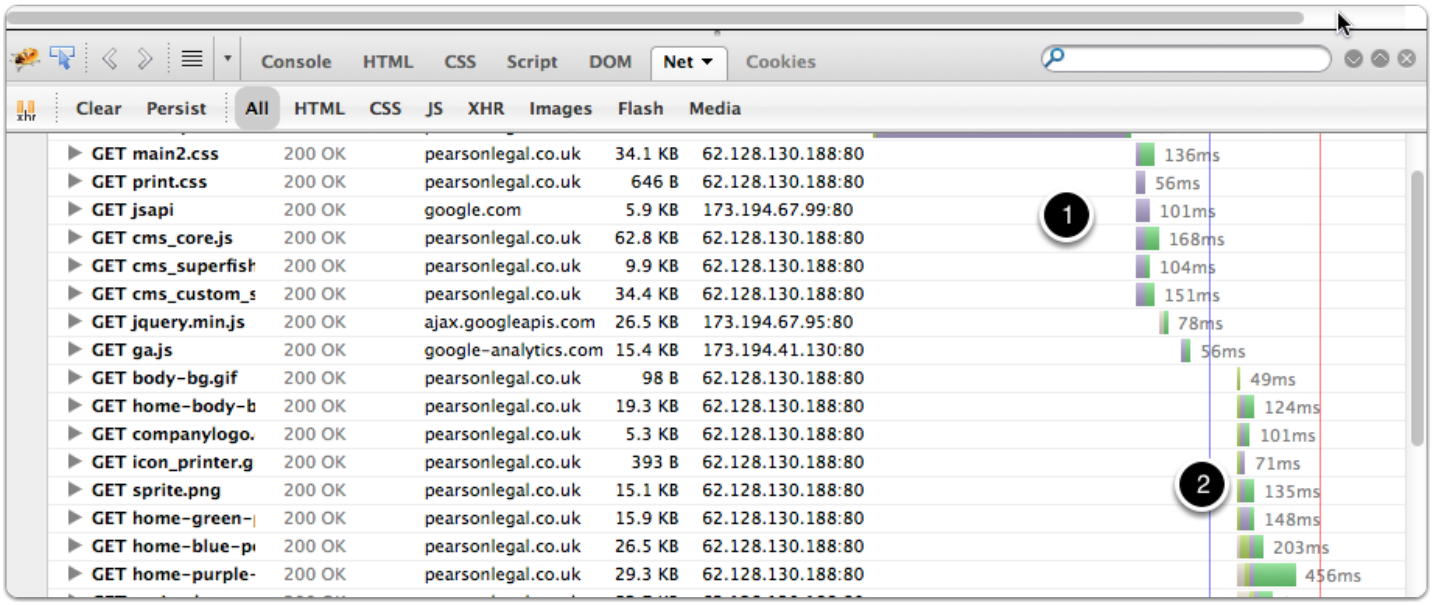
# Advanced: Reduce HTTP Requests

A page on the internet is not a single entity like a page in Word, it is actually built up of many components each obtained by the browser via a separate HTTP request to the web-server. The basic process as far as your browser is concerned is:

- Obtain the definition of the page (this is the HTML)
- Study the HTML to determine what else is needed in order to render the page
- Obtain other resources such as style sheets (CSS), images and JavaScript
- Interpret the JavaScript to determine what (if anything) needs to be done
- ....and finally, render the page

A page consisting of 20 HTTP requests will load faster than a page that requires 40 HTTP requests even if the total size of the page is the same. This is because browsers execute HTTP requests in batches, usually about 5 at a time, and they wait for one batch to be complete before processing the next batch. The fewer the total number of HTTP requests the fewer batches have to be processed and the less waiting will be done between batches (and the faster the page will load).

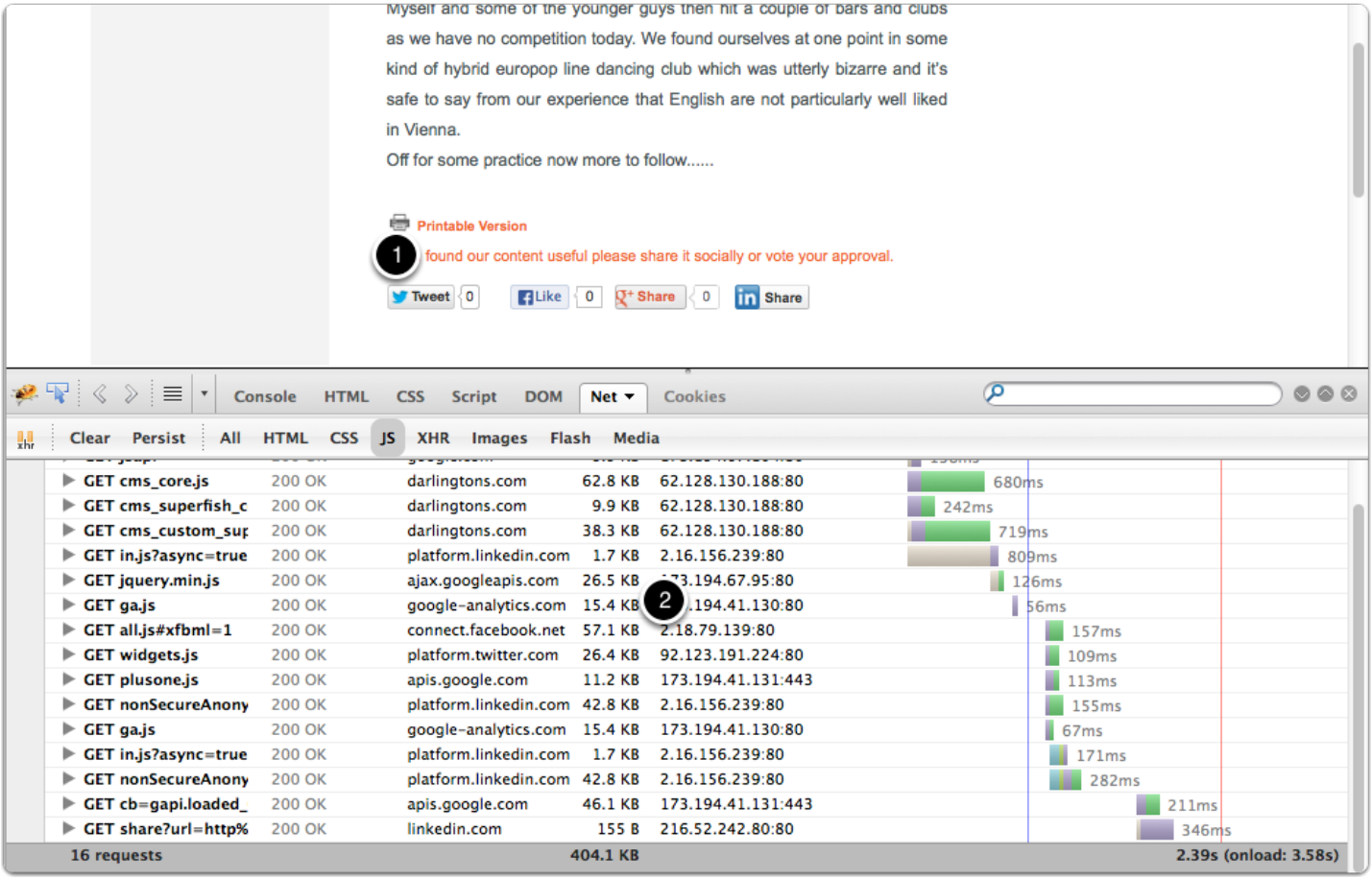
We use Firebug (an extension to Firefox) to see exactly how a page has been constructed and to test how well it performs. In this display you see quite clearly how the browser is waiting for the first batch of HTTP requests to finish (see 1) before processing the second batch (see 2).



# Advanced: Social Media Icons (take care)

There was a time when a "social media" icon was lightweight thing - a simple image with a hyperlink formatted in a particular way so that Users were linked through to your pages on the particular Social Media platform. In those days you could add a Social Media icon to any page or all pages with practically no impact on speed. The page could be loaded without any of the Social Media platforms being involved in the process (so there was no chance of the page load process being delayed).

However, once the Social Media giants added "like" features the method of implementing links became much more complicated. To get "5 people like this page" to work the page obviously has to ask the Social Media platform "how many people have liked this page?". All of this (and more) is now embedded in those innocent looking Social Media icons and the net result is that they slow the page down quite noticeably.

Obviously Social Media is a very important factor in SEO and we are not suggesting that you remove icons - but don't add icons you don't need and try to avoid adding links to the homepage since this is often the first page that is pulled (and resources for the first page will normally be download fresh rather than being taken from the browsers cache).

For example, on this site the Social Media Icons are displayed in the normal way (see 1) - when analysed with Firebug you see that there is a total of 404KB of JavaScript on the site (see 2) of which 300K is needed for Google Analytics and the Social Media services.