

# A Comprehensive Guide to Search Engine Optimization



A Digital Marketing Agency

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# Table of Contents

# SEO

<b>A Comprehensive Guide to Search Engine Optimization (SEO)</b> .....	1
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	2
<b>Welcome to the Single Grain SEO Guide</b> .....	6
<b>SEO Terminology Index</b> .....	7
<b>Setting Up Your Site for Success</b> .....	13
<b>Keyword Research</b> .....	13
<b>Creating Content for Your Website</b> .....	21
<b>Scalable Content Creation That Works</b> .....	23
Write Content Based on Interesting Data .....	23
Focus on Evergreen Content .....	23
Write Content for Google's Freshness Update .....	24
<b>SEO Friendly Navigation and Usability</b> .....	
<b>On Page SEO</b> .....	30
<b>URL Structure</b> .....	30
<b>Page Titles</b> .....	31
<b>H1 Tags</b> .....	31
<b>Image Optimization</b> .....	32
<b>Find the Right Images</b> .....	32
<b>Use Keyword(s) in the File Names</b> .....	33
<b>Create Descriptive Alt Text</b> .....	33
<b>Make Your Images Match Your Content</b> .....	33
<b>Internal Links</b> .....	34
In-Text Links .....	34
Breadcrumbs Links .....	34

# Table of Contents

# SEO

<b>Off Page SEO</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Beginning Link Building</b>	<b>36</b>
Directory Listings	
Social Bookmarking	
Web 2.0 Site Marketing	
Social Networking	<b>39</b>
<b>Intermediate Link Building</b>	<b>41</b>
Link Baiting	<b>42</b>
Guest Blogging	<b>45</b>
Press Releases and PR	<b>46</b>
HARO (Help a Reporter Out)	<b>46</b>
Sponsorship Link Building	<b>47</b>
<b>Advanced Link Building</b>	<b>48</b>
Competitor Analysis	<b>48</b>
Link Sculpting	<b>51</b>
Link Reclamation	<b>57</b>
Link Building with Widgets	<b>57</b>
<b>Important Link Considerations</b>	<b>60</b>
Choose the Right Anchor Text	<b>60</b>
Watch Your Link Quality	<b>61</b>
Link Type	<b>61</b>
Link Velocity	<b>62</b>
Link Variance	<b>63</b>
Link Relevance	<b>64</b>



# Table of Contents

# SEO

<b>Follow Up / Ongoing Site Tweaks</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>Code Validation</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>Site Speed</b> .....	<b>67</b>
Minimize HTTP Requests .....	
Optimize and Correctly Display Images .....	
Minify HTML, CSS and Javascript .....	
<b>Advanced SEO</b> .....	<b>69</b>
Canonicalization of Links .....	
301 Redirects .....	
Pagination .....	
Duplicate Content .....	
Schema.org Microdata .....	
<b>Branding</b> .....	<b>80</b>
<b>Analytical Tools and Tracking</b> .....	<b>82</b>
<b>Getting Started with Local SEO</b> .....	<b>83</b>
<b>Google Places Optimization</b> .....	<b>85</b>
<b>Local Citations</b> .....	<b>89</b>
<b>Traditional SEO for Local Pages</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>Customer Reviews</b> .....	<b>93</b>
<b>Geo-Social Media</b> .....	<b>95</b>



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WARBY PARKER  
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The 4-Hour  
Workweek



ESCAPE 9-5. LIVE ANYWHERE.  
AND JOIN THE NEW RICH.  
TIMOTHY FERRISS

# Welcome to the Single Grain SEO Guide

## *So you've got an online business... now what?!*

The truth is, succeeding online is about so much more than putting a bunch of pretty pictures up on your website. Not only are the quality of your content and the amount of effort you put into promoting your site important, but there's a whole other set of requirements you need to familiarize yourself with – search engine optimization (SEO).

Essentially, SEO deals with the way the search engines store your site's content and how they value it when it comes to displaying search results pages for their users.

A good SEO plan will help your site to appear in the natural search results pages for dozens or hundreds of different keywords (aka – the words and phrases people enter into the search engines). The result of a good SEO plan will be tons of free traffic streaming to your site from the search engines, as well as the perceived authority and brand recognition that goes along with securing high search rankings for your website.

On the other hand, a website that isn't well-optimized for the search engines will struggle to gain traction. Acquiring traffic without the support of the search engines is a difficult prospect – one that will require you to invest either extra time or money to bring in visitors from other sources.

While putting together and implementing a good SEO plan can be challenging, it is doable – and it's something that every webmaster needs to be aware of.

Throughout this guide, we'll take you through the process of setting up your website correctly so that it can be indexed by the search engines, the on-page and off-page SEO tasks that should be part of your promotion plan, and the ongoing maintenance required to keep your site performing well in the natural search results. We'll also cover the specific actions small business owners must take to maximize their local SEO results.

Our hope is that, by following the steps in this guide, you'll be able to develop and launch an SEO plan that will help you to rank highly in the search results pages and drive tons of traffic back to your website.

**However, if you have questions throughout the process or encounter anything you believe is beyond your technical capabilities; please don't hesitate to contact us at (800) 701-0793 to find out what Single Grain can do for you!**

Sincerely,  
The Single Grain Team

# SEO Terminology Index

Before we dive into the techniques needed to improve your site's search engine optimization, it's important that we define a few key terms you may encounter in this report.

If you're a new online business owner, don't feel overwhelmed! Use the following list of SEO lingo to get up to speed or as reference material whenever you encounter a word you don't understand:

- **URL:** A “URL” (or uniform resource locator) refers to the specific string of characters that lead to an internet resource. In most cases, the word URL is used to describe the letter-based web address entered into a browser in order to access a web page.
- **TLD:** “TLD” stands for top-level domain and refers to the extension of a given web address. The most popular TLDs from an SEO perspective include .com, .org and .net, although dozens of other industry/country-specific options are available as well.
- **SEO / SEM / PPC:** Search engine optimization (SEO) refers to the on-page and off-page activities designed to help a website appear more prominently in the natural search results, while pay-per-click advertising (PPC) involves bidding for high placements within the sponsored search results provided by the search engines. Search engine marketing (SEM) incorporates both of these techniques to refer to a website's overall promotional plan.
- **Links:** A link (or backlink) is a connection between two websites that is built using HTML code and enables visitors to move between different web pages.
  - **Outbound Links** - Outbound links refer to those specific backlinks which point away from a site and direct visitors to a page on a different website.
  - **Internal Links** - Internal links are those backlinks that point between pages on a single website. Internal links can be used contextually within articles, as well as in the navigation structure of a site.
  - **Anchor Text** - Anchor text refers to the “clickable” link of an HTML backlink not the code that enables the link action to occur. Anchor text is often used by the search engines to measure link and content relevance.
  - **Link Building** - Because the quality and quantity of backlinks plays an important role in SEO, link building or, the process of acquiring more outbound links from other sites is a big priority for most webmasters.
  - **Link Profile** - A site's link profile refers to the collection of outbound links from other sites that are pointing in to the site in question. The quality of a site's link profile can vary widely, according to a number of different parameters.

- **Link Juice** - “Link juice” refers to the authority that is transmitted from one site to another through a backlink, in accordance with Google's PageRank measurement system and algorithms.
- **No-Follow / Do-Follow** - No-follow and do-follow are specific tags webmasters can add to their links to control which links transmit link juice to their link partners and which links reserve this authority for themselves.
- **Footer Links** - Footer links are the links that appear in the bottom section (or “footer”) of a website.
- **Link Bait** - Link bait is intentionally provocative content that's disseminated to encourage viral sharing and result in more backlinks than usual pointing at a site.
- **Guest Posting** - Guest posting is a popular link building tactic that involves developing content for other websites in exchange for a backlink pointing at your own pages.
- **Social Signals:** Social signals are any factors that demonstrate authority and influence on popular social networking websites. A few examples include a person's number of Facebook followers, how frequently his Twitter updates are re-tweeted and the number of times articles on his site are shared across the most popular social media sites.
- **Optimization:** “Optimization” refers to the process of intentionally manipulating website content in order to secure higher rankings within the natural search results pages.
- **White Hat / Grey Hat / Black Hat:** These three terms refer to the acceptability of various optimization techniques. “White hat” techniques are wholesome, search engine approved tactics, “black hat” techniques are those that intentionally mislead or subvert the search engines' indexation processes (and that could lead to future penalties if discovered), and “grey hat” techniques are those that fall into the grey area between acceptable and unacceptable.
- **Organic Search Results / SERP:** A search engine results page (SERP) is the specific set of website listings that appear whenever a user enters a search query into Google, Bing, Yahoo or any of the other lower-tier search engines. To secure maximum traffic and exposure, most webmasters use SEO in order to have their websites appear in the Top 10 results on any given SERP.
  - **Blended / Universal SERPs** - Though past search results pages were composed entirely of links to text-based web pages, the current Google SERPs now contain links to video results, image results, shopping results and more leading to what is now known as the “blended” or “universal” SERPs.
  - **Personalized SERPs** - Personalized SERPs refer to search results pages that incorporate a user's personal preferences and relationships (typically pulled from his Google profile) to create a custom results listing page.

- **Algorithm / Algo:** Each of the search engines maintain their own algorithms, which are the sets of calculations that weigh different factors in order to automatically determine which websites should be displayed in the SERPs. Algorithms (frequently abbreviated in the SEO world as “algos”) are constantly being updated, which makes it important for webmasters to stay on top of SEO industry news.
- **Search Engine Spider / Crawling / Robots:** In order to display your website in the SERPs, the search engines must first capture the content that's stored on your site in order to determine what it's related to and how it should be ranked a process that's referred to as “indexing” or “crawling.” To accomplish this task, the search engines use automated programs known as “spiders” or “robots” to assess and index the text-based content on your website.
- **Indexability:** Many commonly-used website enhancements (including images, Flash animations and Javascript codes) can prevent the search engine spiders from indexing a website properly. Indexability refers to how well these programs can understand your website, as well as the presence of any website elements that might prevent proper indexation.
- **Keyword / Keyword Phrase:** Keywords and keyword phrases are the specific combinations of words that users enter into the search engines. Because having your site appear for specific keyword SERPs results in a number of different website advantages, webmasters must invest time into keyword research to find the exact keyword combinations to target with their sites, based on the overall search volume each keyword receives and how competitive its SERP is.
- **Keyword Stuffing:** Keyword stuffing refers to the process of incorporating target keywords into website content or code sections in order to increase rankings. Many specific keyword stuffing methods (for example, stuffing the meta keywords tag or CSS pages) have been detected and accounted for in the search algorithms. For this reason, it's best to focus on providing quality content to readers, instead of optimizing website text to a specific keyword density.
- **PageRank (PR):** PageRank is a value assigned to every web page in the Google index, based on the page's relative merit. A number of different factors contribute to a page's PR, including site age, number of inbound links, inbound link quality and more. Though actual PageRank is constantly being updated by Google's algorithm, these calculations are not made public. Instead, the PageRank scores pushed out to PR measurement tools are known as “Toolbar PageRank” and represent only a general approximation of a page's actual PR.
- **Navigation / Site Architecture:** A website's navigation structure or site architecture refers to the specific way its pages are set up. For best results, it's important to use a “wide” navigation structure (in which every page on your site can be reached within three clicks) instead of a “deep” architecture.
- **Analytics:** Website analytics refers to the process of tracking website usage data and analyzing relevant metrics to determine how well a website is performing. Google Analytics is the program used most frequently for this pursuit, though there are several other options for obtaining website data. The following are a few specific metrics that can be tracked through website analytics programs:



- **Bounce Rate:** A “bounce” is recorded whenever a visitor lands on your website and leaves without clicking on a link to view another page. In general, a bounce rate under 50% is considered ideal (and may play a role in how well your site ranks in the SERPs).
- **Page Views / Impressions:** Page views or impressions indicates the number of times each of your website pages is viewed, as well as the number of pages each of your visitors takes in while on your site. “Average views per visit” is a commonly-tracked website metric, with higher average views demonstrating a more engaged audience.
- **Conversions:** A conversion occurs whenever a visitor on your website takes the specific action you desire, which could be purchasing a product, opting-in to your email newsletter or viewing an embedded video on your site. Having a conversion rate optimization plan in place to increase your total number of conversions is an important part of maximizing your website's success.
- **Usability:** Compared to site indexability, usability refers to how easy it is for people to engage with your website. Site design, browser compatibility, disability enhancements and other features all play a role in improving usability and making your site accessible for as many people as possible.
- **HTML Tags:** HTML tags represent specific website code elements that can be manipulated in order to improve a site's SEO.
  - **Meta Keywords** - The meta keywords tag is a specific tag that can be added to the “head” section of an HTML document. Although this tag was originally intended to inform the search engine spiders on a website's topic, its past abuse through keyword stuffing means that it is no longer weighted in most search engine algorithms and can therefore be disregarded.
  - **Meta Description** - Meta description tags allow users to provide a description of each page's content in the “head” section. This content is not used in the SEO algorithms, but is often displayed as part of the “snippet” that appears in the search results. To encourage clickthroughs from the SERPs, make this description engaging and include a call to action.
  - **Page Title** - A web page's title appears at the top of the browser window whenever the page is opened and does play a role in a page's SEO score. Incorporate your target keyword here and for best results keep your total title between 60-70 characters.
  - **Image ALT** - Image ALT tags are used to provide a description of each image on your site that can be interpreted by visually impaired visitors using adapted technology. Incorporating your target keyword here may convey a small SEO benefit, but it's important to avoid keyword stuffing and include your chosen keywords only if you can do so in a natural, valuable way.

- **Headline** - Headline tags (including h1, h2, h3, h4, h5 and h6 tags) allow you to separate your website text into sections. Headline tags should be used naturally and should incorporate your target keywords where relevant, as doing so may provide a small SEO benefit.
- **Google Panda:** Google Panda is a major Google algorithm update which was initially rolled out in February 2011 (though several subsequent updates have occurred since then). The stated goal of Google Panda was to rid the SERPs of the low-value content provided by sites deemed to be “content farms.”
- **Google Penguin:** Google Penguin was a more recent algorithm update (initially launched in April 2012) that was designed to penalized over-optimized sites. Specific factors that may have implicated over-optimized sites include low-quality backlinks, keyword stuffing and consistent evidence of on-page optimization schemes.
- **CTR:** “CTR” stands for clickthrough rate and indicates the percentage of visitors that click on a given link out of the total impressions the link receives. This metric is used in a number of different circumstances, including the total clicks a PPC ad receives compared to its total views and the number of times an in-article link on a website is clicked compared to the site's total number of visitors.
- **Penalties:** Search engine penalties may be assessed to discourage webmasters from acting in ways that violate the search engines' terms of service. Penalties may be manually assessed on a site-by-site basis, or they may occur automatically as a result of algorithm changes. Penalties can be temporary or permanent in nature, and they can be assessed in various degrees of severity, from a loss in SERPs rankings to total removal from an engine's index.
- **Webmaster Tools:** Google's Webmaster Tools page offers website owners a number of helpful features, including the ability to monitor sites for indexing errors and site speed. These pages are also used to communicate penalty notifications to webmasters, when appropriate.
- **Google Dance:** The “Google Dance” refers to the variability in SERPs rankings that occur whenever a new web page is added to the Google index or whenever new link building campaigns are carried out. The specific rankings of these new pages may vary by as many as 300-800 positions in the SERPs as Google determines where exactly the page should fall, with the process typically leveling off within a few weeks.
- **Google Sandbox:** The “Google Sandbox” is an often-hypothesized, never-confirmed phenomenon that prevents new websites from seeing the full benefit of their optimization efforts within the first few months of their lives. Typically, this effect is witnessed most often with young sites targeting competitive keywords and can only be overcome when the site surpasses Google's trust barrier.
- **Landing Page:** A landing page refers to the first page a new visitor sees when he arrives on your website. Any page on your site can be a landing page for traffic from various sources, although the specific term “landing page” is often used to refer to specially-designed pages that are constructed to encourage new visitors to take a specific action right away.

- **Opt-in Form / Email Marketing:** Email marketing is the process of capturing visitor email addresses for future solicitations, which is carried out through the use of opt-in forms. These forms enable specific pieces of information (for example, visitor name and email address) to be automatically added to list management software for future follow-up and can be optimized to increase sign-ups in a number of different ways.
- **Microdata / Rich Snippets:** Microdata is a method approved by Google, Bing and Yahoo for adding extra information to the HTML of a website for use in indexing by the search engine spiders. The information captured by microdata (as described on the [Schema.org](http://Schema.org) website) may be displayed in the SERPs, resulting in an enhanced listing known as a “rich snippet.”
- **Split Testing:** Split testing refers to the process of producing multiple variations of a web page and displaying them randomly to website visitors in order to determine which specific combination of elements is most effective at increasing conversions. Split testing can be carried out using the A/B format (in which only two versions testing a single element are displayed) or conducted as multivariate tests, in which several variables are tested at once).



# Setting Up Your Site for Success

Building a website isn't a process that should be undertaken lightly. There are a number of important variables that will be set when you first launch your website – including your navigation structure, permalinks and so on – which is why it's so important to plan ahead in order to set up your site for success. So before you even think of launching your website, it's important to walk through the following items in order to get started on the right foot.

**(Note – If you already have a site, jump to page [30] for more advanced SEO advice.)**

## Keyword Research

Doing keyword research is the vital first step of any SEO campaign, as you'll need to know which keywords to target so that the SEO campaign will achieve its maximum return.

Keep in mind, SEO is built on keywords, not on niches. You can't get your website ranked #1 in Google (and benefit from all of the free traffic that comes as a result of this placement) for a niche. Instead, you need to choose specific keyword phrases to build your site around.

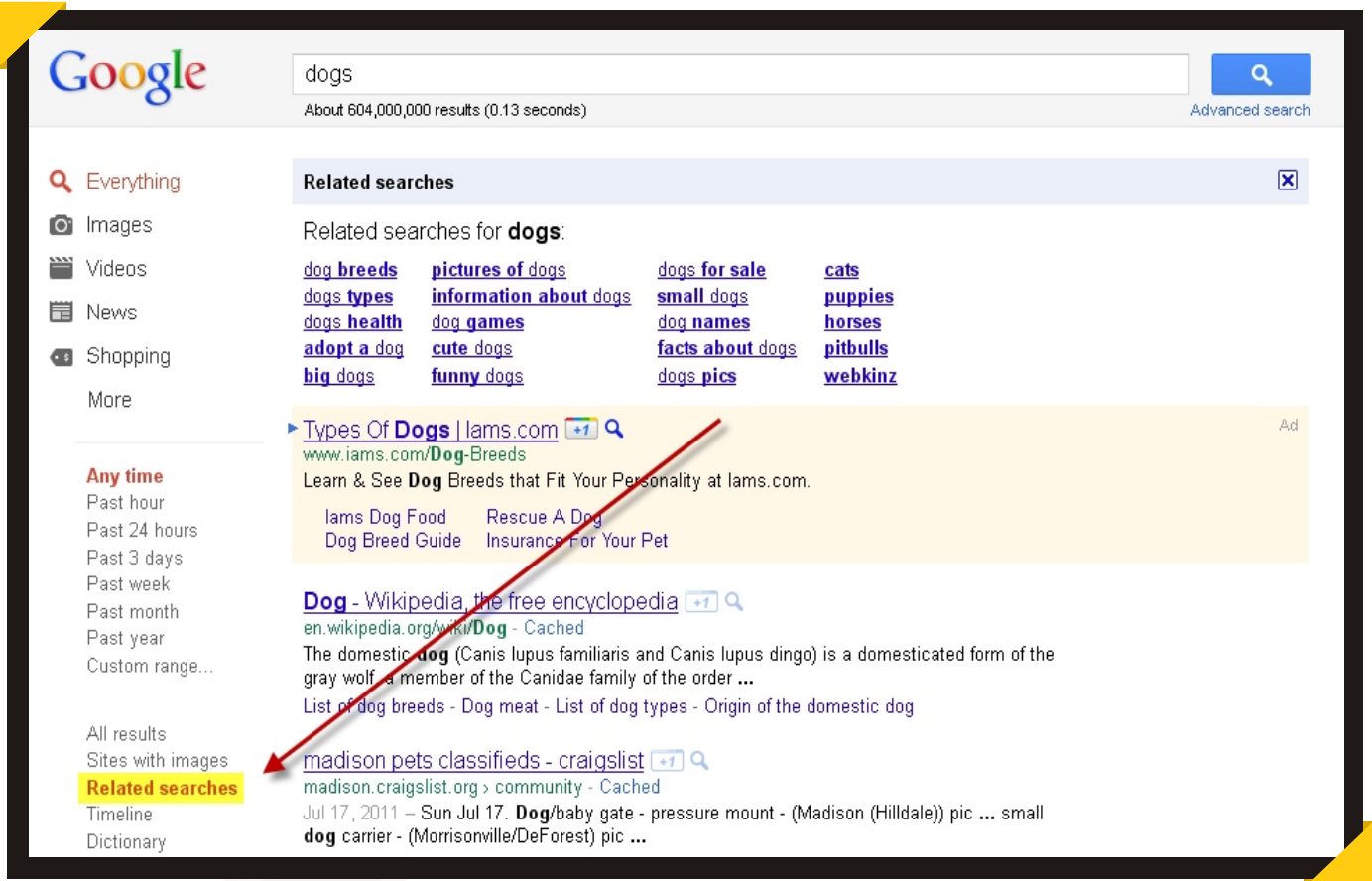
Let's look at a few different ways to research keywords in greater depth:

### Go Straight to the Source with Google's Related Searches

Identifying niches without significant competition is one of the biggest challenges that website owners face. Trying to compete in the natural search rankings for a general term like "dogs" is going to be an uphill battle, requiring substantial investment of time and/or money in order to see results.

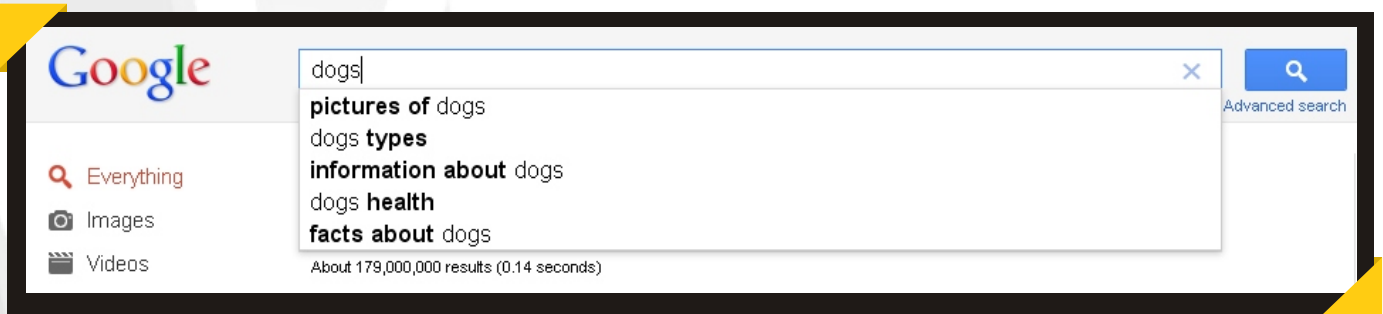
So instead, Internet marketers are wise to look for the low-hanging fruit of micro niches – that is, smaller, narrower sub-topics within your chosen niche. But how do you know which of these topics offer the most potential? The answer lies in Google's Related Searches feature...

To access this feature, simply navigate to Google and type a general keyword or evergreen niche keyword phrase into the search bar. Then, click on "More Search Tools" on the lower left column and finally, choose "Related Searches". This will bring up a list of several keyword phrases that Google considers to be related to your main keyword, as shown in the example below:



Simply copy the related search terms onto a spreadsheet and enter them into Google's external keyword tool or any other keyword research software program to find more information on their search volumes and overall competitiveness rankings.

Similarly, you can use the auto-complete results that pop up below your search bar to generate related SEO keywords to analyze:



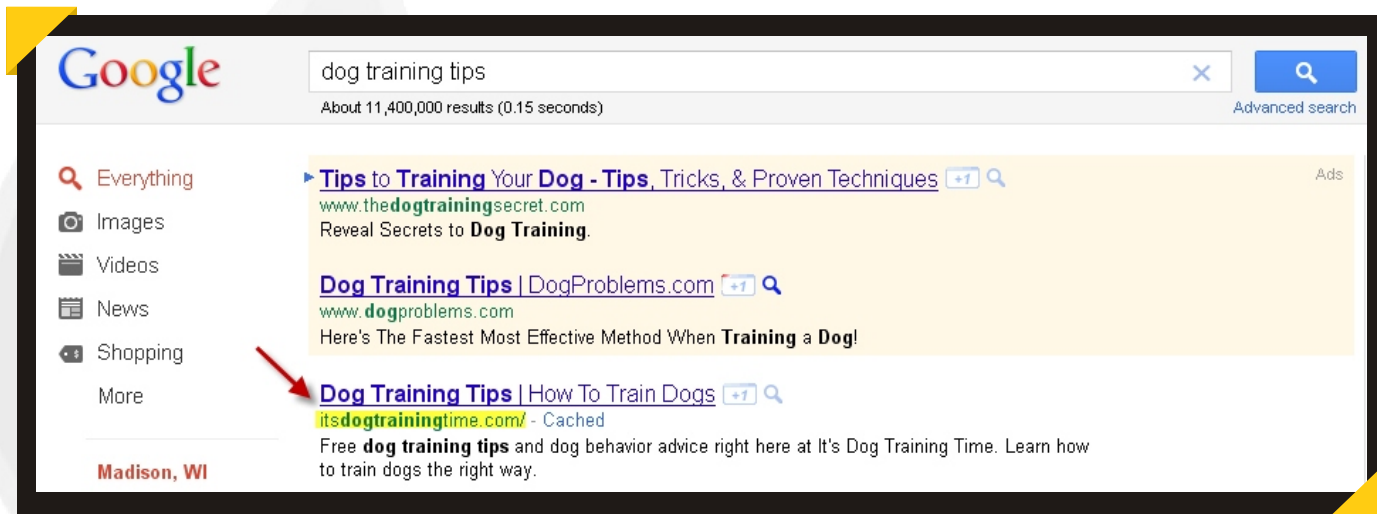
## New Ways to Use Google's External Keyword Tool

If you've been involved in SEO research for any amount of time, you've probably used Google's free external keyword research tool before. If not, check it out, as it contains a wealth of free data on keyword metrics, straight from the horse's mouth.

However, once you navigate to the tool, don't just enter in your target keyword and have the tool generate results that's Google External Keyword Tool 101! Instead, use the tool to reverse engineer your competition's websites to find the most profitable keywords to pursue.

Suppose we decided to target the keyword phrase, "Dog training tips" using the process described above. Now, we know that we want to build a website around this keyword, but we want to find other keywords that Google thinks are relevant from a latent semantic indexing standpoint, as well as keywords that we know will be valuable to target.

To find these specific related keywords, enter the main search phrase into Google, then copy the address of the first natural search result:



Now, return to the Google External Keyword Research Tool and enter this URL into the "Website" box, ignoring the "Word or Phrase" entry area.

## Find keywords

Based on one or more of the following:

Word or phrase (one per line)

Website

itsdogtrainingtime.com

☐ Only show ideas closely related to my search terms ?

☒ Advanced Options and Filters

Locations: United States x

Languages: English x

Devices: Desktop

Search

Sign in with your AdWords login information to see the full set of ideas for this search.

Download ▾

View as text ▾

More like these ▾

### ☒ Keyword ideas (100)

<input type="checkbox"/> Keyword	Competition
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ puppy training	<div><div></div></div>
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ how to train a puppy	<div><div></div></div>
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ dog obedience training	<div><div></div></div>
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ training a puppy	<div><div></div></div>
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ dog training tips	<div><div></div></div>
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ dog training	<div><div></div></div>
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ training puppies	<div><div></div></div>
<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ house training a puppy	<div><div></div></div>

Repeat this process for every site listed in the natural SERPs for your target keyword phrase and make a special note of any keyword ideas that overlap between URLs.

Searching in this manner will return SEO keyword phrases that your competition is targeting and that Google believes to be relevant to each other. Assuming that our competitors are well-established and have done their own SEO keyword search homework, we can be reasonably certain that the common keywords they're targeting are worthwhile to pursue as well.

## Checking Keyword Competitiveness

At this point in the keyword research process, you should have a list of potential keywords to target on your website, based on recommendations from both Google's related search feature and the External Keyword Tool.

However, before we get down to actually implementing the results of this keyword research into our websites, there's one final measure we'll want to check the competitiveness of our chosen keywords.

To understand what makes a keyword “competitive,” think about the two following keyword phrases:

- “Lose weight”
- “Build ab muscles through core pilates exercises”

Although both of these keyword phrases relate to the same subject, they're strikingly different when it comes to SEO. The first keyword phrase - “lose weight” - is a highly competitive keyword prospect. Because thousands upon thousands of people enter this specific query into the search engines every day, positioning your site in the Google Top 10 results for this keyword would be incredibly lucrative.

Unfortunately, you aren't the only one to see the potential there! Because getting a website ranked highly for this keyword or similar phrases could translate into significant income, the competition to secure these top spots is quite high. Webmasters can devote years to performing the necessary SEO to achieve top rankings not to mention the effort needed to maintain them once they've reached the top spots!

The second sample keyword phrase represents a less-commonly searched for query (also known as a “long tail” keyword). Because fewer people are searching for this specific phrase, the income potential for ranking highly in the SERPs for this keyword is much lower than in the initial example. This diminished potential return makes the keyword less competitive, as fewer marketers invest the time needed to optimize for this exact keyword phrase.

As a website owner, it's important to understand which of the keywords on your list represent “competitive” keywords that will require time (and possibly money) to rank for and which ones will be easier to achieve high SERPs rankings quickly for.



There are a number of different factors that make one keyword more or less competitive than another:

- **Keyword search volume** – In general, you'll find that the more searches a given keyword receives in a month, the more difficult it will be to get ranked.
- **Competing pages** – The number of competing pages in the search engines' indices is another important metric when it comes to determining how difficult it will be to get your website ranked well.
- **Ranking site authority** – Beyond considering the overall number of competing pages for your chosen keyword phrases, it's also important to determine how strong these pages are – and how easy they'll be to beat!

To find keyword search volume, return to the Google External Keyword Research Tools and enter your list of keyword phrases into the search tool:

The screenshot shows the Google Keyword Planner interface. On the left, the 'Tools' sidebar has 'Keyword Tool' selected. Under 'Match Types', the 'Exact' option is selected and highlighted with a red arrow. The main area is titled 'Find keywords' and shows search results for the keyword 'dog training tips'. The results are displayed in a table with columns for 'Keyword', 'Competition', 'Global Monthly Searches', and 'Local Monthly Searches'. The 'Local Monthly Searches' column is highlighted in yellow. The table shows results for 'dog training tips' and several related keyword ideas.

Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches	Local Monthly Searches
[dog training tips]	High	8,100	4,400
[dog training tips]	High	8,100	4,400
[dog potty training tips]	High	480	390
[free dog training tips]	High	320	210
[dog training]	High	60,500	33,100

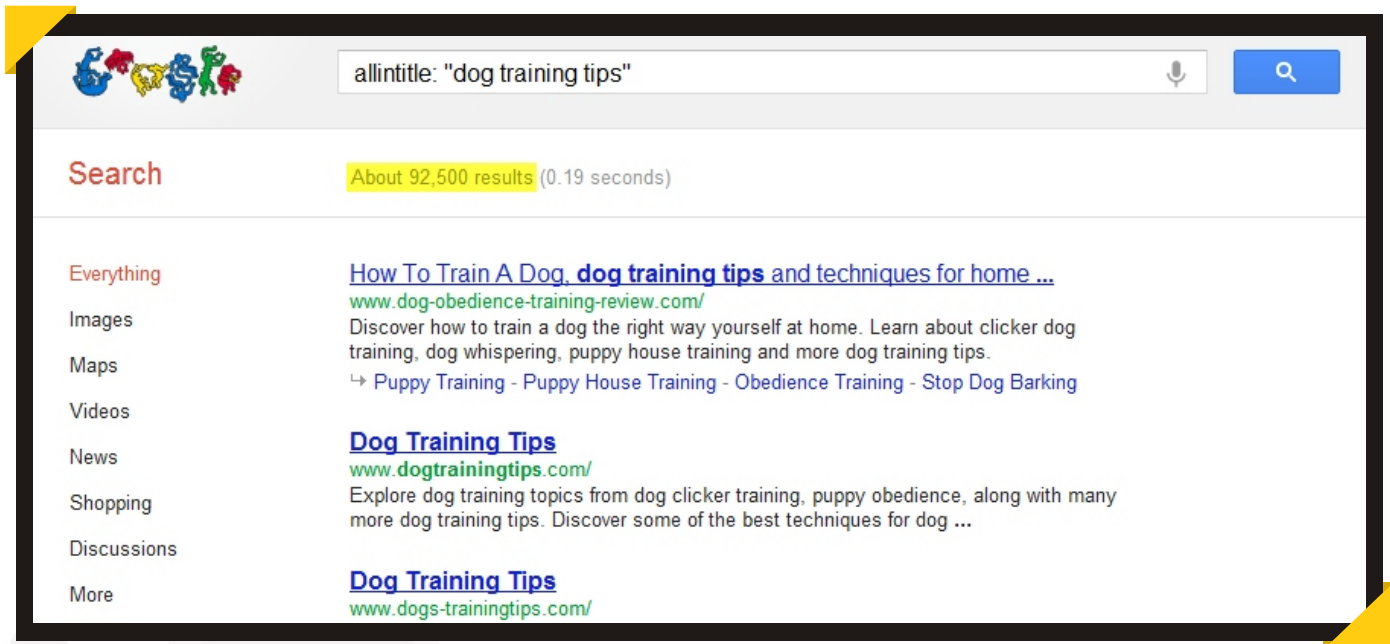
Making sure that the “Match Type” is set to “Exact” (to ensure that only searches that contain your specific keyword phrases are considered), refer to the far right column labeled “Local Monthly Searches” to determine exactly how many people are searching for your keyword each month.

In general, when it comes to keyword search volume, bigger is always better. But since bigger usually also means more competitive, it may not be in your best interest to target keyword phrases with the highest total search volume. Aim for keywords with a monthly search volume of at least 500-1,000 (and potentially much more) to avoid wasting your time optimizing your site for keywords that won't send significant traffic to your pages.

Next up, take a look at the number of competing pages that exist for your target keyword phrases. To do this quickly, enter your keyword phrase into the Google search bar in the following format:

allintitle: "keyword phrase"

This specific search will return only the pages that have your keyword phrase in the title tag - indicating that they represent the optimized pages you'll be competing against to get ranked.



Once we've identified the pages we'll be competing against, should we decide to try and get a page ranked for this search results page, we'll also want to take a look at how competitive each of the individual Top 10 results pages listed here are.

As you might expect, a SERP with a number of poorly-optimized, low-value results will be much easier to break into than one that's full of high PageRank, aged sites!

For this reason, you'll want to analyze all of the following factors for each of the Top 10 results that appear in the keyword SERPs you're thinking about targeting:

- **Site-wide PageRank** – Although site - wide PageRank has some weaknesses as a metric, it can be used as a general guide to determine which sites are better regarded by the search engines.
- **Site age** – Older sites tend to be given more credence by the search engines, making them harder to displace from the SERPs.

- **Site authority** – When a site is widely-regarded as an authority destination in its niche, the search engine spiders tend to give its pages more weight in the SERPs. Although it may be helpful to have some background knowledge of your chosen industry to determine which sites are considered to be authority figures, you can also identify these sites through their repeated presence on high search volume keyword SERPs.
- **On-site optimization** – If a result in your target SERP has your chosen keyword phrase in its title tag, h1 tag, meta description tag and body content, assume that the webmaster you'll be competing against is one who's actively optimizing his pages for high search rankings. On the other hand, if you see SERPs listings that aren't well-optimized, you could be looking at a good opportunity to sneak into a poorly-targeted results page.

SEO Expert Tom Schmitz, writing for [Search Engine Land](#), recommends asking the following questions of each listing that appears in your target SERP to determine whether you're dealing with a competitive keyword or one that can be easily conquered:

- Is the keyword in the title tag? At the beginning? How long is the title tag?
- Is the keyword in the H1? How well is it written?
- How much content is on the page? Is it quality text? Is the keyword well used in the copy? Do you see other words one would expect in a discussion about the keyword?
- Is the keyword in image alt text?
- Is the keyword in the domain or URL?
- Would you say the page is over optimized?
- Can you find questionable SEO practices or obvious spam?
- How deeply does the page sit within the website's internal linking architecture?
- Is the keyword well represented in the anchor text of internal and external links?

All of these factors can be analyzed for free, by hand, using tools like the free SEO Book "[SEO Toolbar](#)." Alternatively, if you plan to conduct a significant amount of keyword and competitiveness research, you may find it worthwhile to invest in a paid tool that will automate the processing of this data.



# Creating Content for Your Website

Once we've determined which keywords to focus on, we can begin creating the content that will form the base of our new site. The following are a few things to keep in mind as you begin writing your web content:

- Your content must be in HTML text format – images, Flash files, Java applets, and other non-text content items are invisible to search engine spiders and won't help your site get ranked for your chosen keywords.
- The first sentence in the body text and the first few words of each sentence are the most important for advanced SEO necessities. Consider using your target keywords here for maximum benefit.
- Heading 1 (H1) and Heading 2 (H2) texts show the search engines the main subjects for content to be indexed. Make H1 and H2 texts keyword friendly and reflective of your page title.
- Meta descriptions are also important. The meta description is the short description of a page's content that appears directly under the page title in a search engine query.

Or, to break on-page optimization down even further, use your target keywords in your web content in the following manner:

- Use the keyword in the page title at least once. Keep the keyword as close to the beginning of the page title as possible.
- Once in a H1 header tag.
- At least 3 times in the body copy.
- At least once in the URL.

To see how this will all look on your site, consider the following example:



# Scalable Content Creation That Works

Now you know what keywords you're going to write your content around and how to set them up for maximum SEO success, but how the heck are you going to actually sit down and create all of this content? Consider any of the following strategies to get your creative content-writing juices flowing!

## Write Content Based on Interesting Data

If you hang out around geeks who can't get dates, you've probably seen a series of posts by OKCupid on topics such as [how your race affects responses](#) in online dating. This is brilliantly done linkbait it takes a huge amount of proprietary data (OKCupid response analytics) and exposes it in such a way that it is:

- **Interesting** (“Whoa, the very hottest women really do get hit on less than you would expect”)
- **Easily consumable** (“Whoa, this pretty picture demonstrates that black guys have it hard when dating.”), And
- **Easily shareable** (“Guys, I found scientific proof of why we need to take our shirts off!”)

Of course, if you're any old random dating site affiliate, you can't possibly produce that same type of linkbait content. OKCupid can do it over and over and over again though, because they've written the analytics tools that generate this data and they've figured out how to do the research and visualizations. All they need to do is to come up with a new hook every so often and - bam - they're back at the top of the social news sites collecting links again.

If you don't have interesting data like this, you should start collecting interesting data using your analytics program (which we'll discuss later) or other survey tools. In the meanwhile, you can start visualizing or crunching existing data. Obviously, anybody can go out and grab a few random statistics to suit their points, but you can add a lot of value by summarizing and visualizing these existing stats in new and exciting ways.

## Focus on Evergreen Content

One of the first big mistakes people make when it comes to their web content is writing on current events topics that will be out of date within a few days. Not that it's entirely wrong to include news updates on your site (these certainly should have a place), but if you're only ever writing about the latest news, you're missing out on the big advantages of writing evergreen content.

Evergreen content is information that's going to be as relevant in a month or a year as it is on the date of publication. For example, consider our dog training niche from the keyword research section above. Your readers aren't going to care in a week or two that a new dog training facility opened up in a faraway state, but they're always going to want to know how to choose a dog training method.

By writing content that has a longer “shelf life” than brief news updates, you'll need to put less effort into your website's content over time.

## Write Content for Google's Freshness Update

The Google freshness update was launched at the end of 2011, with the stated goal of providing more current results for certain queries that demand real-time answers. This distinction is best explained with an example, so imagine that on a given day you enter both of the queries, “House M.D. episode recap” and “how to cook carrots” into Google's search box.

In the first example, it's clear that you want “fresh” results. You probably aren't looking for a recap of an episode that aired months ago, so Google would be wise to find the most recent results mentioning this keyword phrase even if these newer pages wouldn't otherwise be ranked highly based on the traditional SERPs ranking factors.

On the other hand, if you're looking for a recipe that will show you how to cook carrots, you don't need the results of your search query to be recent. Instead, you want the best possible carrot recipe found on the web, which will likely be pulled by the traditional ranking factors the search engines use to parse results found over the history of their indices.

With this in mind, Google launched its freshness update in order to a) identify search queries in which recent results should be prioritized over more historically authoritative pieces of content, and b) determine how to serve up the most timely, yet accurate results. The specific search queries impacted by the freshness update are, for these reasons, termed “QDF” or “query deserves freshness.”

Typically, most QDF search queries relate to celebrities, upcoming events and news items within specific industries. Understanding the specific queries in your industry that are affected by the freshness update is a vital part to determining how to leverage these changes for SEO.

## How Does Google Select QDF (Query Deserves Freshness) Results?

As a webmaster, these changes should uncover some obvious opportunities for your brand. If you can successfully identify the QDF keyword phrases within your industry and position your content to be chosen for inclusion in a freshness-affected results page, you stand to see a substantial SEO benefit if your result displaces a site that would have otherwise achieved high rankings from traditional SEO.

As usual, Google has offered no clear explanation as to how the content displayed for QDF results is chosen, although there's plenty of speculation amongst the SEO crowd about the sources that might be tapped. The Google+ network is an obvious option, which is why it's as important as ever to be sure you're sharing content on this site and prompting users to "+1" your articles from within your own site.

However, another alternative theory suggests that content shared via RSS specifically through Feedburner, which Google owns could be a natural way to capture data on which pieces of content are being read most in relation to a QDF query.

## Strategies for Promoting Your Own "Fresh" Content

So, with all these different elements of the freshness update in mind, what specific actions should you take in order to maximize your potential exposure through QDF queries?

The following are a few of the strategies we've developed in response to this algorithm change:

- **Stay on top of industry news.** This should go without saying, but if you want to capture the potential of the freshness update and leverage it for SEO, you need to be aware of the events and news items that are making the rounds in your industry. To do so, make watching Google News, Google Insights, Google Trends, Google Hot Trends and any relevant, industry-specific news sites a part of your daily routine.
- **Watch for QDF results.** As you browse through SERPs in your industry, take note of the specific search queries that are showing QDF results (as demonstrated by a cluster of date-stamped posts at the top of the natural results). In some of these cases, "freshness" may be evaluated on an ongoing basis, meaning that it might make sense to continue to target these keyword phrases in the future.
- **Write short, yet informative blog posts.** Not every piece you publish on your blog needs to be Pulitzer Prize worthy. In fact, when it comes to freshness, faster is often better – even if you've only published a quick reaction to a breaking news event. Certainly, keep up your set schedule of publishing good evergreen content for your readers to reference, but balance these efforts with shorter, newsworthy articles as well to leverage the freshness update for SEO.
- **Publicize your posts through a variety of sources.** Since it isn't entirely clear how Google is processing results for QDF queries, it's best to publicize your posts through a variety of sources. Obviously, both Google+ and the Feedburner RSS service should play a role in your promotional efforts, but don't neglect the potential impact of other popular social media and social bookmarking sites as well.

- **Piggyback on current events.** Suppose you run a website in an industry that doesn't have as many opportunities for QDF results. Instead of getting upset about it, trying piggybacking onto other current events outside your niche. For example, if you run a sales strategy blog, running an article titled, "Sales and Marketing Lessons from This Year's Best Super Bowl Commercials," could help you to pick up interest and traffic from the fresh results generated from this popular sports contest.
- **Use link blending.** Another way to increase the likelihood of being picked up for inclusion in the QDF SERPs is "link blending." Throughout your QDF-targeted article, add a few links out to other news articles on the topic you're writing about, preferably to .edu or .gov sites. As the search engine spiders index your page, they'll see these links and naturally associate your pages with these current events or news topics. Just be careful not to go overboard here. Keep things as natural-looking as possible in order to prevent potential over-optimization penalties.

Overall, try to pay attention to the types of content in your industry that are receiving exposure through QDF searches. For which specific search queries do you see "fresh" results appearing? How long, on average, are the articles that get listed in the fresh results? Do the types of websites that get picked up for the fresh results have any common features?

By paying attention to how QDF queries are being applied to your industry's keywords and following the strategies above, you should be able to quickly and easily uncover ways to leverage Google's freshness update for SEO.

## SEO Friendly Navigation and Usability

Another important consideration to make at this point in your site planning process is how you'll structure your navigation, or the way people move through your site. Developing a logical, easy-to-follow navigation structure is a key part of making sure your users are able to access your content easily.

Search engines like sites that satisfy their users and the best sites have the following characteristics in common, so put some thought into how you'll link the pages together on your site and how you'll improve your users' experiences:

- Easy to use navigation and simple site structure.
- Professional website design and accessibility to modern browsers (Firefox, Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome etc.).
- High quality and credible content.
- Site Map (a page listing and linking to all other major pages on your site which allows search engine spiders to crawl (search) your site easier.



Here's how to make sure your site's Site Map is as useful as possible for both your readers and the search engines:

In general, a sitemap is a page on your site that includes a listing of links to all the other pages on your site. Sitemaps are a vital part of your site's architecture, as they allow the search engine spiders to crawl your site and index your pages more easily. A small site may need only one sitemap to achieve these benefits, while larger sites may use multiple sitemaps to highlight different groups of pages.

When it comes to creating a sitemap for your website, you have a couple of different options:

- Create a global XML sitemap that is dynamically updated as new products are added. This will improve the crawl and indexation speed of your site, as well as eliminate the time needed to manually update your sitemap every time your product line changes. There are a few things you'll want to keep in mind with this type of sitemap:
  - An XML sitemap is only for search engine bots, meaning that it offers no site navigation benefits to website visitors.
  - XML sitemaps can be created using a number of different scripts, including Wordpress plugins and other add-on programs.
  - In general, the default location of XML sitemaps is <http://www.site.com/sitemap.xml>. Maintaining this structure makes it easier for the search engines to find and index your sitemap.
  - Google and Bing XML sitemaps can be easily submitted through Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Tools (other search engines use the robots.txt file to identify the location of the sitemap).
  - When creating XML sitemaps, be sure to use Sitemap 0.90 protocol (<http://www.sitemaps.org/protocol.html>).
- Create an HTML sitemap for all the main pages. This will make it easier not only for search engine bots, but also for users to navigate through the site, although it must be updated by hand every time the site changes. Consider the following information when building HTML sitemaps:
  - An HTML sitemap is a page on your site that links to all your important pages, providing an index for both users and search engine spiders.
  - To get the maximum benefit from this type of sitemap, you'll need to link from the sitemap to all main pages (you can also link to non-important pages such as about us, contact us, and privacy policy).

- You'll also need to link to the sitemap from all pages on your site. This can be easily done by linking to the sitemap in the footer using the anchor text "sitemap".
- Depending on the size of your site, you may find it necessary to maintain multiple HTML sitemaps to account for different types of content or groups of pages.

Take a look at the following example from TripAdvisor to see how sitemaps can be implemented on live sites:

The screenshot shows the TripAdvisor homepage. A red arrow points to a red box containing the text: "Multiple sitemaps to link to all important pages throughout the site". Below this, a red box highlights the "Site maps:" section, which lists: "Tourism pages | Hotel pages | Restaurant pages | Things to do pages | TripAdvisor pages".

The page displays a grid of links for various regions, categorized by continent:

- United States**
  - Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California
  - Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia
  - Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa
  - Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland
  - Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri
  - Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey
  - New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio
  - Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina
  - South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont
  - Virginia, Washington, Washington DC, District of Columbia, West Virginia, Wisconsin
  - Wyoming
- Africa**
  - Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso
  - Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad
  - Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt
  - Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana
  - Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia
  - Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania
  - Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger
  - Nigeria, Reunion Island, Rwanda, Saint Helena, Senegal
  - Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland
  - Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia
  - Zimbabwe
- Andorra**
  - Andorra la Vella, Andorra la Vella Parish, Escaldes-Engordany Parish
- Asia**
  - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia
  - Christmas Island, Georgia, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Kyrgyz Republic
  - Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan
  - Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
- Australia**
  - Adelaide, South Australia, Brisbane, Queensland, Cairns, Cairns District, Canberra, Australian Capital, Darwin, Top End, Northern



By the end of this preparation process, you should have a list of the keywords you want to target, web content that's optimized to these keywords and ready to be uploaded to your site, and an understanding of how you'll structure your website for maximum usability and SEO benefits.

**Congratulations - you're now ready to optimize your website!**

As you begin building your website, it's important to keep the following on-page search engine optimization principles in mind, as they will ensure your site ranks in the search engines as well as possible.

## URL Structure

When adding new pages to your website (or editing old pages during the site redesign process), URLs should be formatted to match your site structure in order to help search engines and users access your content as easily as possible.

Keep all of the following recommendations in mind when structuring your site's URLs:

- Do not place tagging codes at the end of your URLs. This dilutes your SEO value.
  - For example: <http://www.site.com/?#1a2s3d>
- The specific URL you choose should - first and foremost - describe the page it's referring to.
- Include keywords only if they're related to the page content. Don't jeopardize relevancy to stuff keywords into your URLs.
- Separate word phrases with hyphens to make your URLs easier to understand for readers and search engine spiders alike.
- Do not capitalize any characters:
  - URLs are case sensitive
  - Although you can use capital letters, it's best to stick with lower case, as these are more commonly entered by users manually typing URLs into their browsers.
- Be consistent with your URL structures throughout your site

Check out the following article for more tips on how to structure your URLs correctly:

<http://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-best-practices-for-url-structure/7216/>

# Page Titles

Pages titles are meant to be accurate, concise descriptions of a page's content. There are a few easy rules to follow when it comes to page titles.

- Search results only display 70 characters any page titles that exceed 70 characters will be cut off with an ellipsis.
- It's better to place your keywords at the beginning of the page title and try to leverage branding by ending every page title with your company name.
- Don't forget to consider the user experience when coming up with you page titles. This means, don't force the keyword usage since the page title is the first impression of your site to new users.
- Add your brand name to the end of your page titles, separated by a pipe character. This will increase user trust, increase your clickthrough rates and help prevent your site from being penalized for over-optimized page titles.

# H1 Tags

In addition to your page titles, H1 tags should be used on all pages of your site as another opportunity to support keyword optimization. Text contained in "Heading1 (H1)" tags gives the search engine spiders more information about the main subjects the content should be indexed for, giving the keywords used here additional weight as ranking factors that determine in which SERPs your pages should be included.

Make H1 texts keyword friendly and reflective of your page title by following these guidelines:

- All H1 tags should be unique, different from page titles and other H1 tags.
- There should only be one H1 tag on each page.
- H1 tags should include keyword variations, not just your main keyword.

# Image Optimization

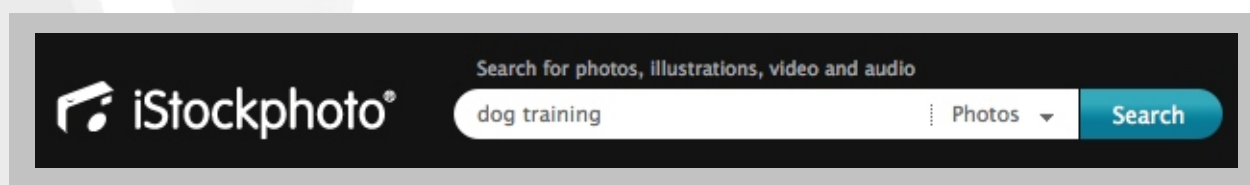
Optimizing the images on your site for SEO can drive traffic to your website. Image SEO has a lot of benefits, as images can be included in universal search when people enter a query into Google. People can also find your site when they use the image search function if you've properly optimized your images.

There are several things you'll want to consider when carrying out optimization for your images, whether you're trying to improve your users' experience, or get your images to appear in the universal search results.

## Find the Right Images

Finding good images is important, as having high quality images on your web page can improve your visitors' experience and motivate them to share the page, which will create good backlinks to your site. The following are a few good resources to use when you need to find images to use on your site:

- [Flickr](#) - Make sure to use the “[creative commons search](#)” and credit the author by linking their name back to the photo.
- [stock.xchng](#) - This site provides royalty-free stock images for use on your site.
- [iStockPhoto](#) - This company sells high quality stock images, and can be a good choice when you need to find something specific.



You can also search Google Images when looking for images, but you want to adjust your search parameters so that you use images with proper licensing. Google Images allows you to search for creative commons and public domain licenses.

It's important to be cautious about using images without the proper permissions, because if you do, the owners of the images can take legal action against you. To be safe, don't use an image if you didn't buy it or get it from an explicitly labeled Creative Common License search.

## Use Keyword(s) in the File Names

It's important to use keywords in the file names of your images because search engines can see this data and use it to evaluate what the image is about and what the image may be relevant to. Remember search engines are trying to evaluate information the same way people do, so if the search engine evaluates the file name "iStock\_04040426125MED.jpg" what meaning if any would that name have to a human being?

If the picture happens to be of a dog running, then the file name should be "Running-Dog.jpg," as this will allow Google to evaluate the image better and bring it up in the search results when someone searches for something that might be relevant to it. For example, if you're writing a blog post about martial arts training, find an image that displays some kind of martial arts drill and then give it an appropriate filename.

In addition, Google recommends putting all the images on your site in one place, as opposed to having them spread out around the site in different folders. They also recommend that you use common file types like jpeg, gif, png, and bmp for maximum SEO benefit.

## Create Descriptive Alt Text

Another way to tell Google what your pictures are relevant to is with the use of alt tags. Unlike text, search engines can't read images and analyze them semantically to see what they're relevant to. This means that the search engines must rely on you to add alt text to your images to determine what the picture is about and give you the proper SEO benefit.

## Make Your Images Match Your Content

When you incorporate images into your content, you want to make sure that the image you're using is actually relevant. If a human being read your text, would they consider the image to be related to what you're writing about? The answer to this question should be, yes. The image should also be related to all the other things you've optimized this far, including alt text, anchor text and the image URL.

# Internal Links

While building external links back to your website is a great way to improve your overall SEO (we'll talk more about this in the next section), you'll also want to consider how to take advantage of link anchor text when linking between pages on your own website!

One way to generate keyword-rich anchor text pointing to your site is with the internal linking strategies you use - meaning the links that point from one page on your site to another.

## In-Text Links

Because Google and the other search engines prefer sites that have a shallow navigation structure (where information on any page can be accessed within a few clicks), it's a good idea to link to 2-3 other pages on your site within every piece of content you post.

## Breadcrumb Links

Bread crumbs are another great way to build backlinks throughout your site and improve your user experience at the same time. For example, the picture below shows an example of breadcrumb navigation that tells users that they're currently in the electronics department, viewing the auto electronics section, and looking at in-dash stereos:



These kinds of bread crumbs are usually dynamic and can change based on what the visitor searches for while on site. With bread crumbs like this, you can access the same page through several paths, while also building links that improve your site's SEO:

Consulting > Services > Implementation > Service A

Consulting > Services > Optimization > Service A

Consulting > Services > Upgrade > Service A

Of course, getting the optimization of your website's content right is only half the battle. When it comes to search engine optimization, the things that are happening on other people's websites are just as important.

Specifically, the biggest part of off-page SEO is backlinks the links that point from other people's websites back to your own. The number and quality of these links can play a huge role in how your page is ranked in the search engine results pages, so it's important to spend some time building these links.

But before we begin exploring different links for creating backlinks, it's important that you understand why these links are so important from the perspective of the search engines.

Let's take Google, for example. Google's ultimate goal is to provide the best possible search results whenever its users stop by the website and enter their keyword phrases into its search box. As long as Google's results are better than its competitors, people will continue to use Google over sites like Bing, Yahoo and smaller search engines resulting in more money in Google's pockets.

But since Google's index is mostly built by robots not highly-trained website analysts Google must rely on indicators of quality to identify which sites provide the best value to users. A robot can't read each post on your site and objectively determine if it's higher quality than another site it just indexed instead, it must look for clues that indicate how highly other people regard your content.

One such clue is the number and strength of the sites linking back to your content. In a perfect, non-commercial world, a backlink represents a vote of confidence that is, another website is saying, "I think your website content is good enough that I'm going to recommend it to my own readers." As you get more of these votes of confidence - your perceived authority grows in the eyes of the search engines, leading to more rankings in the natural search results.

Of course, this process rarely operates that cleanly. Website owners long ago figured out that the SERPs could be gamed by creating artificial backlinks, which - consequently - led the search engines to take measures designed to weed out sites that attempt to manipulate the SERPs with spam backlinks. Sites with too many low quality backlinks, links that look unnatural or that appear to have been paid for are all now possible triggers for penalties that can be assessed based on backlink quality.

Clearly, there's a fine line to be walked between promoting your site effectively and increasing your SERP rankings with high-quality backlinks, and doing damage to your site's reputation by soliciting the wrong kinds of links. As you implement the following link building techniques, it's important to always keep an eye on your SERPs rankings and incoming traffic in order to catch any penalties that may be assessed for over-optimization.



Now that you know why backlinks are so important, let's take a look at several different types of link building activities - including both simple and advanced strategies - that can be used to attract high quality backlinks back to your website.

## Beginning Link Building

This first set of link building techniques represent a good place to get started with your off-page SEO campaigns. These techniques are all easy to implement, but be aware that the links generated using these methods aren't typically as valuable as links created using some of the more advanced methods we'll get into later. Keep in mind that a good link building strategy incorporates as many of these techniques as possible to create a natural looking link building profile.

### Directory Listings

One of the easiest ways to build links to your site is with the use of directory listings. Directories are simply websites that include collections of links, curated according to the site's objectives.

For example, the [Yahoo Directory](#) - one of the web's most widely used link directories - aims to provide its members with high-quality resources in a number of different content areas. Other directories may exist to group blogs on chosen topics, to list sites in a particular niche or to provide a chance for users to exchange links within set industries.

By submitting your site to a directory, you not only gain a backlink from the directory site, you're also putting your site's name and description in front of all the site's users, who may use the link to discover your site and access your content.

However, it's important to be aware that not all directories are created equally. A search for "website directory" on Google will turn up millions and millions of listings, but many of these sites are low quality pages that are designed to attract links in order to increase their own advertising revenue.

Instead, you'll want to be selective about the directories to which you submit your site. Be sure to consider the site's overall PageRank and MozRank scores (both measures of the relative quality of a website), as well as the scores of the exact page your directory link will be posted to. Even if the index page of a directory holds a high PageRank of 7, this doesn't matter if your website link will be published on an internal page that isn't even indexed by the search engines.

Also, be aware that not all website directories are free to use. Top directories like the Yahoo Directory or DMOZ may charge upwards of \$300 to simply submit your site without a guarantee that your site will be published if it doesn't meet the directory's overall quality standards.



So how can you get started building backlinks through directory listings? First, read up on the process with SEOMoz's article, titled, "[Conquer Link Directory Best Practices for SEO](#)". Then, look to the company's "[SEO Web Directory List](#)" to find good directories to target, based on your website's niche, style and target audience.

Once you've selected a few link directories, navigate to their sites, as each directory will have a different process for submitting proposed listings. In most cases, though, you'll need to have a short description of your website, as well as a list of relevant keywords, for your listing, so be sure to have these items prepared before you begin the process of building backlinks through directory listings.

## Social Bookmarking

Another great way to get quick and easy links pointing back to your site is to submit your content to sites like Digg, Reddit, Stumble Upon, and Delicious. Sites like these can play a big role in link building and driving traffic back to your site.

The power in these sites lies in the user base. Users come across content on these sites and then vote it up or down. If a piece of your content hits the first page of a site such as Digg or Reddit, hundreds of thousands of people will see your site and potentially click through to the content you published.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean that there will be an increase in revenue (as visitors from Digg and Reddit often have a very low impact on revenue), but the real value of these visitors is in the links that tend to follow them. Many users from these sites have their own blogs, and will link out to interesting content they find through these social sharing sites.



When you're creating content to put on these sites, you need to be aware of a couple of things. First, each of these sites has its own culture, meaning that certain kinds of content appeal to the site's separate users. Because of this, you'll want to spend a little time reviewing some of the content that hit the front page in the past and see what similarities they had. Keep those qualities in mind as you start creating the content you plan to submit to these social bookmarking sites.

## Web 2.0 Site Marketing

Another simple way to build backlinks to your site is to post your content onto free Web 2.0 sites. These pages offer a number of different SEO advantages and can be set up quickly and easily.

Essentially, Web 2.0 sites are community sourced content farms, which rely on participants to create pages based on various topics. Tumblr, for example, is one of the most popular Web 2.0 sites. On this website, users can create their own free pages, populate them with whatever content they deem appropriate and share the sites they've created with other users in the community.

The SEO benefits of participating on Web 2.0 sites are numerous, and include the ability to place content on high PageRank sites for free, as well as draw potential traffic from features within the communities present on these sites.

Of course, Web 2.0 sites aren't some shining beacons of SEO hope: they do have their weaknesses as well. Many of these sites were hit in the Google Panda updates of early 2011, which means that their quality standards are more stringent than ever and that the pages created on their services don't rank as well in the SERPs as they used to. In addition, many of these sites have changed to "no-follow" links (a practice we'll explore later), which diminishes the value of backlinks from these sites.

However, building content on Web 2.0 sites is still one of the fastest ways to go out and build backlinks, so it should still be considered a part of any effective off-page SEO plan. To get started with this link building technique, check out any of the following Web 2.0 sites for more information on how to share your content:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <a href="http://wordpress.com">http://wordpress.com</a>                  | 16. <a href="http://knol.google.com">http://knol.google.com</a> |
| 2. <a href="http://squidoo.com">http://squidoo.com</a>                      | 17. <a href="http://friendster.com">http://friendster.com</a>   |
| 3. <a href="http://weebly.com">http://weebly.com</a>                        | 18. <a href="http://bigadda.com">http://bigadda.com</a>         |
| 4. <a href="http://livejournal.com">http://livejournal.com</a>              | 19. <a href="http://blog.co.uk">http://blog.co.uk</a>           |
| 5. <a href="http://bravenet.com">http://bravenet.com</a>                    | 20. <a href="http://blog.com">http://blog.com</a>               |
| 6. <a href="http://blogger.com">http://blogger.com</a>                      | 21. <a href="http://www.zimbio.com">http://www.zimbio.com</a>   |
| 7. <a href="http://blogsme.com">http://blogsme.com</a>                      | 22. <a href="http://gather.com">http://gather.com</a>           |
| 8. <a href="http://www.wetpaint.com">http://www.wetpaint.com</a>            | 23. <a href="http://diaryland.com">http://diaryland.com</a>     |
| 9. <a href="http://www.wikispaces.com">http://www.wikispaces.com</a>        | 24. <a href="http://edublogs.org">http://edublogs.org</a>       |
| 10. <a href="http://www.xanga.com">http://www.xanga.com</a>                 | 25. <a href="http://opendiary.com">http://opendiary.com</a>     |
| 11. <a href="http://www.tripod.lycos.com">http://www.tripod.lycos.com</a>   | 26. <a href="http://sosblog.com">http://sosblog.com</a>         |
| 12. <a href="http://tumblr.com">http://tumblr.com</a>                       | 27. <a href="http://20six.co.uk">http://20six.co.uk</a>         |
| 13. <a href="http://quizilla.teennick.com">http://quizilla.teennick.com</a> | 28. <a href="http://blog.ca">http://blog.ca</a>                 |
| 14. <a href="http://viviti.com">http://viviti.com</a>                       | 29. <a href="http://hubpages.com">http://hubpages.com</a>       |
| 15. <a href="http://webs.com">http://webs.com</a>                           | 30. <a href="http://blurty.com">http://blurty.com</a>           |

## Social Networking

As an individual, you likely have at least one profile on a social networking site like Facebook, Twitter or Google+ which allows you to keep in touch with friends and family members, as well as share details about your life with the people who follow you.

As a business owner, these sites can be used for similar purposes - except that instead of sharing information on your life and activities with your friends and loved ones, you're sharing details about current business activities and promotion with a network of customers, colleagues and potential contacts.

But although building and maintaining active profiles on social networking services can be a great way to increase exposure for your business (and you certainly should partake of these activities for this reason), your presence on social networking sites may play another important role in your site's success by improving your website's rankings within the SERPs.

In the past, the number of times your links were shared across social networking sites (referred to as "social shares" in the internet marketing world) had no impact on how your sites fell on the search engine results pages. However, in December 2010, representatives from both Google and Bing revealed to [Search Engine Land's](#) Danny Sullivan that social shares are being taken into account as part of the overall ranking algorithms.

According to the representative from Bing:

***"We do look at the social authority of a user. We look at how many people you follow, how many follow you, and this can add a little weight to a listing in regular search results. It carries much more weight in Bing Social Search, where tweets from more authoritative people will flow to the top when best match relevancy is used."***

And according to Google's spokesperson:

***"Yes, we do use [Twitter tweets and retweets] as a signal. It is used as a signal in our organic and news rankings. We also use it to enhance our news universal by marking how many people shared an article."***

Every day, the web is becoming more personalized, and it's likely that the trend of incorporating social media presence into both the search engine ranking algorithms and the SERPs themselves will continue in the future.

So what do you, as a business owner, need to do in order to ensure your presence on social networking sites is as valuable as possible? Consider implementing all of the following tips:

## Step #1 Build profiles on the top social networking sites

Obviously, when it comes to the social networking space, Facebook, Twitter and Google+ are all the dominant forces, so it's important to build and maintain profiles (both business and personal profiles where available) on each of these sites.

However, don't limit yourself to these sites alone. There are plenty of smaller, niche-oriented social networking sites as well, so if your customers tend to hang out on these alternative sites, you'll be missing the chance to connect with them if you aren't present. As an example, if you operate in the craft, home décor or cooking niches, be aware that user engagement is growing exponentially on Pinterest - a hybrid social networking and social bookmarking site. This makes it a great place to invest a little of your allocated social networking time.

## Step #2 Actively maintain your profiles

Don't just set up your profiles and come back months later to check in. Part of the appeal of social networking is the ability to have “real time” interactions with your followers, which makes day-to-day participation on these sites practically mandatory. (Don't worry too much - a simple check in to each of your social networking profiles should take no more than 20 minutes a day.)

For best results, try to check in to each of your profiles at least once a day to respond to messages, share your own status updates or search for and answer relevant questions in your industry.

## Step #3 Make your content “shareable”

Part of your success with social networking sites will depend on how active you are on your profiles, but the remainder will come from how much you can get other people to share your content on these sites.

Since Google and Bing have both admitted to giving the sharing of links on Facebook and Twitter weight within the search engines, it's clear that if you want to succeed with social networking, you've got to get your links out on to these sites. There are a few things you can do to increase your odds of having your content shared on these social networking sites:

- *Add social sharing buttons to your website* - By integrating “Share This” buttons into your website's content that encourage readers to post the information to their own Facebook, Twitter or Google+ profiles, you eliminate any extra effort these visitors would have to go to in order to share your articles.
- *Encourage people to share your content* - Don't just include buttons on your site and hope for the best! End your articles with a phrase like, “If you enjoyed this article, please take a second to share it on Twitter so that other people can benefit as well.” Readers are more likely to take the action you desire if you tell them to do it specifically.
- *Actively promote other people's content* - As you grow your presence on these social networking sites, you'll begin to be seen as more of an authority figure. This is good, as people are more likely to share your articles when they believe they're currying favor with the top websites in an industry. But if you want to be seen as an expert, you've got to do what experts do - in this case, being active on social networking sites and sharing any and all articles you feel will benefit your followers most.

Really, this is only the tip of the social networking iceberg. As you get more experienced building relationships on these sites, keep an eye out for ways to develop your skills and expand the reach of your profiles with things like [Twitter hashtags](#), [Facebook fan pages](#) and other advanced features.

For now, though, it's enough to simply set up your profiles and begin encouraging others to share your content on these sites in order to increase the number of backlinks pointing at your main site and improve your rankings within the search engine results pages.

## Intermediate Link Building

The link building strategies discussed in the “Beginning Link Building” section are all great places to get started, but the problem is that everyone online knows about and uses these techniques. Depending on how competitive your industry is, links from these sources may have already been devalued in some ways, based on the concentration of links from these sources within your niche.

If you really want to stand out and set your site apart while spreading your influence alongside your growing backlink profile, consider any of the following intermediate-level link building techniques:



## Link Baiting

“Link baiting” refers to the process of creating content that has a high likelihood of being linked back to and/or shared virally, including text articles, videos, infographics and other types of web content. And although the phrase “baiting” has some seemingly negative connotations in terms of “trapping” or “tricking” readers, there's nothing inherently bad about the process of creating and deploying linkbait content - as long as the content is valuable on its own merits.

To understand the process of how linkbait content can be used to build high quality backlinks to a website, consider the following example...

A website owner in our favorite dog training niche wants to generate backlinks to his site and increase his traffic, so he writes a helpful, engaging article that he thinks his readers will love, titled “101 Ways to Make Your Dog Do What You Want.” Initially, he only publishes it on his blog, but later, he decides to submit it to a few social bookmarking sites as well.

His regular readers love the article, so they email the link to their friends and share it on social networking sites. At the same time, people on the social bookmarking sites are starting to take notice, resulting in more “votes” for his article on these sites. Eventually, an authority blog in this niche takes notice and publishes a link to the original author's site in order to share the content with their readers.

The result of all this sharing means a lot more traffic flooding into the original site, as well as plenty of backlinks as the article is shared around the web. Our website owner hasn't done any more work than usual, but because he built a “link bait” article that was designed to be shared, he's getting a lot more value out of the piece than he does from his usual articles.

Sounds great, right? If you'd like to take advantage of the power of link bait content, consider some of the following options. Keep in mind that link bait content is content that gets people talking - so really, anything you can do to get people's attention can be considered link bait. However, if you aren't quite sure where to start, you might find a few of the following tried-and-true link bait strategies helpful:

- 1 Create remarkable, unique, original content.** If your content isn't unique, your post won't get linked to. Few link bait pieces were created in three minutes or are of two paragraphs in length. Your posts have to be thoughtful, creative, and a good reflection of time-intensive work.
- 2 Create content that is accessible and useful to a large number of people.** If you're too niche-specific, the potential reach of your content will immediately be reduced. However, don't spread too far, as you want your content to create repeat, loyal visitors to your website. If you stay true to tech, food, or something of that sort, there's a higher percentage chance you'll get some repeat readers.



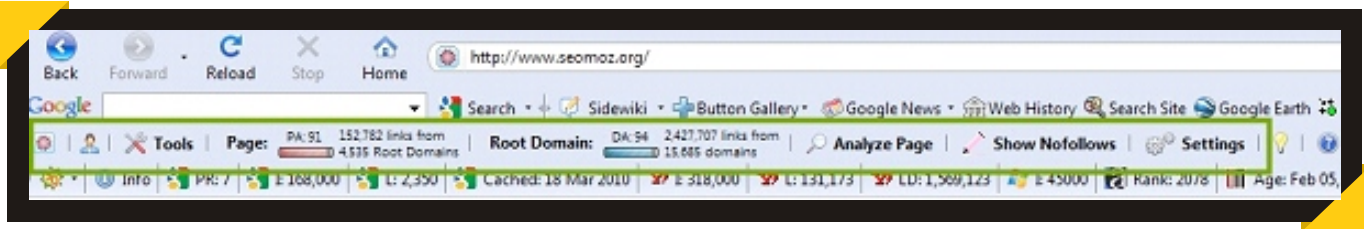
- 3 **Conduct an interview with an industry expert.** People always love to hear insider thoughts from their idols, so if you can snag an interview with an expert in your industry, this content can be used quite successfully as link bait. To do it, contact the authority figures in your industry, request an interview, record it and release the subsequent product on your site. You'll be amazed by how often industry experts accept your interview requests!
- 4 **Be simple.** The more complex and difficult to comprehend your idea is, the less likely your audience is to spread it. Supply something that's easy to digest, but maintains the remarkability link bait requires.
- 5 **Provide value.** If you solve a problem of the reader, you'll spur them to action. Desire to solve the problems of others will come from that initial problem being solved, they'll spread the idea, and your work will take off.
- 6 **Be aware of temporal factors.** Jumping on recent news is the best way to create content that'll be spread throughout the internet. Your link bait doesn't have to address breaking news, but offering a unique spin on recent developments can be a great way to kick start link developments. Blogs like [Mashable](#), [Gizmodo](#), and [Hacker News](#) offer good insights into what's new and worth writing about.
- 7 **Create a video.** People love to watch and share videos online, which makes this type of content incredibly valuable to your link bait campaigns. Use free online tools like Jing or Camstudio to create simple screencast videos, and then upload them to video sharing sites like Youtube and Vimeo to boost your exposure.
- 8 **Understand your audience.** Check the social media platforms you hope your content will go viral on, and see what's "working" there. It's beyond vital to assess what people like and enjoy promoting.
- 9 **Create controversy.** Links are very likely to occur if you pick a fight and call someone out. However, an intelligent audience can tell the difference between good, authentic points and ones that were created to draw in links. Realize an opportunity where calling someone out is worthwhile, and then mold the post and content push to make it go viral.
- 10 **Build a reputation.** If you work on creating and developing a reputation, linkable content will come a lot easier. This can be both on your website and/or on social profiles, where "pushing" your content will come a lot easier if you have a reputable profile.
- 11 **Reveal as much as possible.** Digging into extremely personable details and then referring it back to a public subject can be a superb way to draw in attention. As readers, we love to be let in, and we'll reward you with links.

- 12 **Post regularly.** Your regular viewing audience will be a large part of your “push”. Maintain them by posting with consistency. Five posts one week and one post the next doesn't fly.
- 13 **Use an attractive title.** An extremely important part of the post is the title. To get the content to spread, you have to get the reader to click on the post first. Copyblogger has some [Headline Formulas](#) to work from, as well as, [How to Write Magnetic Headlines](#).
- 14 **Hold a contest.** Everyone loves the chance to win something, which is what makes [hosting a contest](#) or giveaway on your website a powerful way to attract backlinks. Just be sure any promotions you run are done in accordance with local gambling laws in your area to avoid any potential legal trouble!
- 15 **Push at appropriate times.** Post in the morning, because there are more readers to retweet and read your content. In other sectors, it may be appropriate to post on the weekend, as there are fewer new posts. Source: How to Get Traffic to Your Blog.
- 16 **Network.** Find and create friends offline or online, and you'll have additional resources to help you promote and link to your product. This can be extremely powerful, as a real number of friends online can exponentially increase the success of your posts.
- 17 **Reward your network.** Your network isn't there only for you to gain benefit from - be extremely gracious with your links, time and own promotion and your network will return the favor in kind.
- 18 **Analyze other successful link bait.** This, that, this, that, the money, the list, and this one. These are all good examples of link bait that worked. They all worked for different reasons, but if you look between the lines, it's not hard to figure out. Twist the lessons from each to apply to your own site and you'll be well on your way to a PageRank 10 site.
- 19 **Make content easy to spread.** Place retweet buttons and social links in the appropriate places on your post. The more “calls to distribute” you have, the more likely your audience is to do the work for you.
- 20 **Understand linkbait “hooks”.** Todd Malicoat has a good post on Hooks on his website StuntDub, which is built upon at [Smashing Magazine](#). The five hooks are: the News Hook, the Contrary Hook (having an opposite opinion), the Attack Hook, the Resource Hook, the Humour Hook, the Giveaway Hook, the Research/Statistic Hook, and the Incentive Hook.
- 21 **Create a tool.** Creating a tool your audience can use is a superb way to create continuous, long-term link bait. Every time someone thinks your tool can add value to their readers, they'll link to it. As long as it's current, the links will keep flowing in.

## Guest Blogging

Guest blogging is another great method for link building, as it enables you to get links from sites that are already trusted and considered authoritative by Google.

If you haven't already, you'll want to download the SeoMoz and SearchStatus toolbars and install it in order to filter potential guest posting blogs and weed out the bad ones. Here's how this process works:



- Identify several blogs that are relevant to your business.
- Check each blog to make sure they have at least a PageRank of 1 and/or a Mozrank above 0.0 (you'll get this information from your toolbars)
- You should simultaneously make sure that the blogs you plan to get a link from have no more than 10 outbound links in the side bar, and no more than 4 outbound links in the footer
- Make sure there are absolutely no links going to websites related to SEO, porn (adult) sites, payday loans, diet pills, pharmaceuticals, or online gambling.

Now you'll have a slightly smaller list of blogs that can be considered to be in a "good neighborhood." Go ahead and start contacting the blog owners by proposing a topic to blog on and asking if they think it would make a good addition to their blog's content.

When they agree to let you blog on their site, write a truly unique and interesting post that their readers will find useful. In the resource box at the end of your article, put 1 or 2 links back to your website in order to get an SEO benefit from your work.

## Press Releases and PR

A really effective method for getting backlinks is by submitting press releases to sites like <http://www.prweb.com> or [www.businesswire.com](http://www.businesswire.com). These press releases, if they are compelling enough, will be picked up by large news sources online and can lead to powerful backlinks from big news websites.

While getting backlinks using press releases can be very rewarding, it can be very difficult to get large news websites to pick up the story. You need to optimize your press release by using keywords in the title that make the article more likely to get picked up by the editors of these publications. At the same time, you need to make the keywords something that will also be SEO friendly for your website.

Another method for getting exposure (and a link) from the press is contacting editors and writers directly. Find people who have written in the past on things that may relate to your company and then reach out to them to let them know what you're working on and how it may be related to something that they're working on now. Write very specific and very personal emails to these writers and editors and they may choose to write about you and give you a link.

## HARO (Help a Reporter Out)

Once you've started using press releases to promote your site and build backlinks, you'll find that it's an easy transition to begin using the "Help a Reporter Out" (HARO) site for these same purposes as well.

HARO provides a unique service in the world of media and promotion by connecting reporters and other publishers with expert sources as quickly as possible. As a website owner, you can sign up to be a "source" through the service and then fill out a profile that details what your areas of expertise are. Then, when reporters need expert sources for their upcoming articles and publications, they can search the database of participants and contact them directly for comment.

Of course, there are a few things you'll want to be aware of when it comes to participating in HARO as a means of generating backlinks to your site. The first is that you need to treat any potential communications with HARO reporters as high priority items. When a HARO reporter is working on a story, he or she will likely turn up dozens of potential sources and contact all of them in order to increase the chances of getting a quick response.

If you drag your heels on every communication that comes from the service, you risk missing out on these opportunities for exposure to other business owners who are faster to respond!

In addition, when you're first starting out with the service, it's important to respond to as many requests for comments as you get. Although some of the reporters who work with the service may seem like "small potatoes", you never know when an article will be picked up for syndication by a larger network, increasing your exposure and the strength of the backlink you generated dramatically.

## Sponsorship Link Building

Sponsorship link building refers to the process of joining various organizations within your industry and sponsoring the different events that these groups put on.

As an example, let's continue with the dog training tips example we began with earlier. Suppose you sell dog training products and are eager to both build relevant backlinks to your website and build exposure for your websites amongst the dog owners who would be most interested in your products.

Because you want these backlinks to pull double-duty (instead of just sitting on another website pointing back to your own), you decide to search for organizations within your industry that allow you to sponsor events. One possible match, in this case, would be the American Kennel Club. By becoming a partner with the agency and signing up to sponsor events around the country, not only would you receive backlinks back to your site from both the organization's member directory and any event listing pages, you'd also get your business name in front of the people who are most likely to purchase your products.

To find organizations that will allow you to pursue sponsor backlinks, search Google and the other search engines for “organization +your industry keyword” or “association +your industry keyword”. Try to choose the specific keywords you search for based on the words your prospects would be using. Remember, you want to uncover organizations that target your prospects - not other business owners like you!

Once you've found a few potential organizations, contact them to learn more about the specific cost to join and sponsor events, as well as the perks that are available to members. If your budget for link building is limited, you'll need to carefully evaluate which organizations offer you the best value for your money based on site quality and potential traffic.



# Advanced Link Building

The following techniques aren't easy to implement, but if you manage to pull them off, you stand to benefit significantly in terms of both higher SERP rankings and increased traffic to your site. Proceed with caution!

## Competitor Analysis

The link building techniques described in previous sections above are all great places to start, but what happens if you implement them all and still aren't able to achieve the SERP rankings necessary for your website's success? What if, after all your hard work and effort at building links, your competitors still manage to outrank you for the keywords you're targeting?

The answer then is to go straight to the source and uncover how your competitors are creating the backlinks that are giving them an advantage.

The first step in this process is to visit both the [Majestic SEO](#) website and the [Open Site Explorer](#). There are also several paid third-party tools you can use to obtain this data (as well as paid membership options for both of the sites listed earlier), but these two options will both give you quite a bit of free data to work with.

Enter your competitor's URL into the search field for each of these sites and see what data you can come up with. The following graphic shows the results of a simple Majestic SEO query into blogging giant Prologger's backlinking history:



Summary

Top Backlinks

Referring Domains

Top Pages

Summary

Root Domain: problogger.net



Use Fresh Index: ☒



Use Historic Index: ☐

## Domain Information

Referring Domains

**27,917**

External Backlinks

**664,107**

**611** Referring Backlinks are **Educational**

**17** Referring Backlinks are **Governmental**

**104** Referring Domains are **Educational**

**10** Referring Domains are **Governmental**

**19,289** Referring IP addresses


**11,212** are **Class C subnets**

**61,492** Indexed URLs

From this summary alone, we can glean quite a bit of important information. As we can see, the site makes use of both standard, educational and governmental backlink sources. If our backlinking techniques have focused on standard backlinks alone up to this point, introducing educational and governmental links could be a good way to improve our rankings.



Unfortunately, unless you upgrade to the site's premium subscription (which isn't a bad idea, considering the amount of information you'll have access to), you won't get a ton of information from the free version of Majestic SEO. We can, however, find a little more detail on a site's backlink profile using the Open Site Explorer:

 OPEN  
SITE EXPLORER

[More SEO Tools](#) [Login](#) [Register](#)

[compare up to 5 sites](#)

Link metrics for the page <http://www.prologger.net/>

Page Authority	Domain Authority	Linking Root Domains	Total Links	Facebook Shares	Facebook Likes	Tweets	Google +1
91/100	90/100	10,867	268k	PRO Only	PRO Only	PRO Only	PRO Only

Inbound Links

Top Pages

Linking Domains

Anchor Text

Compare Link Metrics

Advanced Reports

Show

links from

pages to

and

1 - 60 Inbound links from 10,867 domains [First](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [Download CSV](#)

Title and URL of Linking Page	Link Anchor Text	Page Authority	Domain Authority
[No Data] <a href="#">www.studiopress.com/themes/genesis/</a>	(img alt) Darren Rowse	94	96
[No Data] <a href="#">www.studiopress.com/</a>	(img alt) Darren Rowse	94	96
blogging Articles, Posts, Blogs, Videos - Tech... <a href="#">technorati.com/tag/blogging</a>	ProBlogger	94	100
Blog Tips to Help You Make Money Blogging - Pro... <a href="#">www.prologger.net/</a>	[No Anchor Text]	91	90
A design and usability blog: Signal vs. Noise (... <a href="#">37signals.com/svn/</a>	Pro Blogger	90	92

Using this service, we get a little more information about the specific links pointing to the site, as well as their relative quality. Using the tabs at the top of the report section, we can also identify the most popular pages on the site, determine which sites are linking the most to our competitors, track the anchor text they're using in their links and compare other interesting metrics (detailed stats on links from social network sites are available for a fee).

As you go through these statistics, you'll want to ask yourself a few questions, according to BlueGlass's "[A Stalkers Guide to Competitive Research](#)":

When looking at the top pages, make note of what kinds of sites are considered to be "top backlinks." Are they:

- News sites where they may be distributing press release information?
- Other prominent sites within the industry that they may have a relationship with?
- Are they reaching out to large publications or networks?
- HOW are they obtaining links on these sites? Are they contributing guest posts, or are they sending information through specific editors?

When sifting through their general backlinks:

- Are they contributing to blogs or publications as a guest author?
- Is content marketing a part of their strategy? If so, what types of content are they actually marketing out there?
- Is there an abundance of site-wide or footer links?

As before, use the results of these questions to power your own backlink building efforts. If you see that your competitors are relying heavily on one type of link over another, consider that this backlink allocation may be a more successful combination in your industry than the links you're currently pursuing. Try aligning your backlink style ratios to more closely match your competitor's, while keeping an eye on whether your traffic or rankings suffer from these efforts.

In addition, use the backlink data you've uncovered to specific link sources that you can target for your own backlinks. If you're having trouble coming up with ideas of sites to guest post on or directories to submit your site to, finding specific examples of these types of sites in your competitors' backlink profiles could give you a good idea on where to get started.

## Link Sculpting

Creating "one off" links by drafting press releases, posting your articles on social networking sites and releasing link bait content are all great ways to generate links pointing back to your site, but they do have their limitations.

A press release that starts out on the home page of a powerful, high PageRank press site, for example, may have a strong initial impact that wanes as the content is pushed further and further into the archives. Similarly, posts to social networking sites may garner some initial interest, but their influence will also diminish as more and more content is submitted to these sites.

So while these beginning and intermediate techniques should certainly play a role in your site promotion efforts, they should also be balanced with techniques that allow you to harness the power of link sculpting - aka, controlling the way Google and the other search engines index and weight the backlinks you create.

Think about it... If posting an article to a Web 2.0 site results in a link that points back to your website, how much more powerful would that link be if there were several other backlinks pointing back to your Web 2.0 article? Or, if a link from one high-ranking website directory is considered powerful, could you funnel that power through another backlink pointing at your site - consequently increasing its value as well?

To understand what makes link sculpting so powerful, we first need to understand what “link juice” is and how it's used to value links around the internet.

According to [The Keyword Academy](#), “link juice is the currency of the Google.” Although this explanation sounds intentionally vague, consider that beyond simply considering the number of backlinks pointing at a website, Google needs a way to prioritize links from some sites over others in order to create the SERPs.

In our previous discussion about the way Google and the other search engines values backlinks, we left out one important thing - the fact that not all backlinks are created equally. This makes sense. If Google counts backlinks as “votes of confidence” about a site's value, it wouldn't be useful to have a link from the Yahoo Directory count for the same benefit as a link from a spammy, foreign language site.

Instead, Google has developed an algorithm that assigns value to backlinks based on a number of different factors, and this value is known throughout the internet marketing community as “link juice”. Although the exact factors and their specific weighting within this prioritization rule will never be fully disclosed, all of the

- **The link originates from a high PageRank site** – A link from ESPN.com, for example, will naturally be considered to be higher value than one pointing from DenverSportsNewsToday.info.
- **The link comes from a relevant site** – When the whole principle of “votes of confidence” is taken into account, it's easy to see why relevant links (for example, a backlink to our dog training tips website from a dog breeding website versus a furniture restoration blog) count for more in the eyes of the search engines.
- **The link is a “do-follow” link** – In some cases, a website may want to link out to another page, but without giving it the “vote of confidence” Google ascribes to backlinks. To prevent this from occurring, the site can add a “no-follow” tag to the link, which tells the search engines that no link juice should be passed to the recipient site.

The following are a few of the advanced link building techniques you can use to help sculpt the power of the links pointing to your site by manipulating the way the authority of your links is perceived and enhancing the amount of “link juice” is passed to your site:

## “Second Stage” Link Building

Link juice is passed between links, which means that the authority generated on one site is passed on to other sites, in a percentage that roughly mirrors the number of outgoing links the originating site has.

To understand how this occurs, let's look at a simplified example. Consider a scenario where Site A links to Site B. In Google's eyes, Site A has an authority score of 80 and contains links to three other pages besides Site B. In this instance, Site B receives roughly 20 points of link juice from its link from Site A. If Site A decides to link to another four sites, the link juice Site B receives has now diminished to 10 points.

(Again, keep in mind that this example has been simplified dramatically, and does not account for all of the factors in Google's link quality evaluation algorithm. It is intended for illustrative purposes only.)

As a website owner, knowing how link juice is passed from site to site enables you to find ways to manipulate the system. Following our example above, let's say that Site A is a page you've built on a Web 2.0 site and Site B is your site that you're trying to promote. Because there are thousands and thousands of links emanating from Web 2.0 sites, the amount of link juice that these sites can pass through their links is minimal.

But instead of just sitting back and accepting that some links will be worth less than others, you can take matters into your own hands by directing other backlinks to point at Site A. Say that you typically create social bookmarks in order to promote pages on your site. But this time, instead of creating bookmarks that point to your pages (in this case, on Site B), you point them to your Web 2.0 property, Site A. By doing so, you've increased the strength of the backlink pointing from Site A to Site B by imbuing it with extra link juice.

When this type of link scheme is built as part of a larger, interrelated system, it's referred to as a link wheel, which we'll get into more later in this section. However, you don't need to create these “[second stage](#)” backlinks as part of a wheel structure. Simply pointing a few extra links at any of your backlinks will make them stronger in the long run.

The following are a few of the different ways you can use Stage 2 link building to improve your presence in the natural search results:

- **Break in to highly competitive SERPs** – In some cases, search results pages may be too competitive to rank well in using first tier links alone. If you're struggling to gain traction for one of these highly-competitive keyword phrases, try adding some Stage 2 links to your profile as well to maximize the amount of link juice that's flowing to your site.



- **Create result relevancy while targeting less competitive keywords** – Suppose, following our previous example, we find that the keyword phrase “dog training” is lucrative, but highly competitive. One way to approach this scenario would be to create a piece of backlink-generating content that uses a less competitive keyword (say, “dog training tips for black labs”) as the anchor text back to your site. By then creating Stage 2 links to this article using the anchor text “dog training,” you stand a good shot at getting your site ranked for the more competitive keyword variation.
- **Eliminate negative brand mentions from the SERPs** – Occasionally, you’ll come across SERP listings that mention your website or your brand in a negative fashion (whether these mentions are justified or simply the result of a competitor bad-mouthing you). By creating Stage 2 links to the SERPs listings that refer to your company more positively, you could potentially crowd these negative mentions out of the SERPs.

## Building Out Mini-sites

One way to multiply the power of these “second stage” backlinks is to create them, not just from standard backlinking resource sites, but from complete minisites that you’ve designed and built for the purpose of creating high-quality, highly-relevant links.

Based on past sections of this guide, you should have a good idea of what constitutes a good link and what makes a link less valuable. By now, it should be clear, for example, that a do-follow link from the home page of a PageRank 2 site within your industry will be more valuable than a no-follow link from a website directory in a foreign language even if the home page of that site has a higher overall PageRank.

But knowing what makes a good backlink and actually finding the sites from which to solicit these links can be pretty different tasks. So why not simply build your own sites in order to generate high-quality backlinks?

This might sound like an unnecessary amount of effort, but in many instances, investing the time into building up minisites within your industry for the sole purpose of generating backlinks to your main page turns out to be worth it when doing so enables you to outrank a competitor who isn’t using this technique.

To build your own backlinking minisites, you’ll want to follow most of the same procedures used when building your main site. For example, you’ll still want to register a keyword-rich domain name (.com, whenever possible), install a platform like Wordpress to manage your content, select an appropriate design theme and load your site with unique keyword-oriented content that will be released over time.

Of course, you don’t need to put quite as much effort into these feeder sites as you do to your main page, so it isn’t necessary to go to all the trouble of sharing your content on social networking sites, engaging your readers, setting up an email newsletter or performing any of these more advanced tasks, unless you find that these tools would be helpful in growing your minisite.



However, if you commit to posting new content to your minisite on a regular basis (consider outsourcing the creation of this content if the time commitment of running feeder sites in addition to your main pages is overwhelming), you'll be surprised by how quickly your site will be given a PageRank score of 1-2. Once you've earned this ranking, point a link from the site back to your main website and reap the benefit of a highly-relevant, incredibly powerful backlink.

## Link Wheels

Essentially, a traditional link wheel includes 5-10 Web 2.0 sites (as described above), all of which have one link pointing to a main site and one link pointing to the next Web 2.0 property in the wheel, resulting in a structure that resembles a bicycle or wagon wheel. Ideally, the PageRank that's passed from Web 2.0 site to Web 2.0 site strengthens each link that then points towards the money site.

Consider the following traditional link wheel structure, as designed by [LJ Interactive](#):

Suppose that, for the sake of simplicity, each of the Web 2.0 sites in the link wheel pictured above has 20 points of link juice that can be passed on through links. If the Hubpages property contains two links pointing away from the site, conveying 10 points of authority, both Digg and the home site will receive these benefits.

But now, in addition to the original 20 points of link juice, the links coming out from Digg have additional authority that they're able to pass on. As the wheel gets bigger, this benefit increases, making links from a link wheel more powerful than links pointing directly from Web 2.0 sites to the main site.



At least, that's the case in theory. The problem - as you might expect - is that this defined wheel structure is incredibly easy to detect. When a new website pops up with thousands of links pointing at it in this particular arrangement, it's easy for the search engines to understand that the site in question is trying to game the system and achieve an artificially high rank.

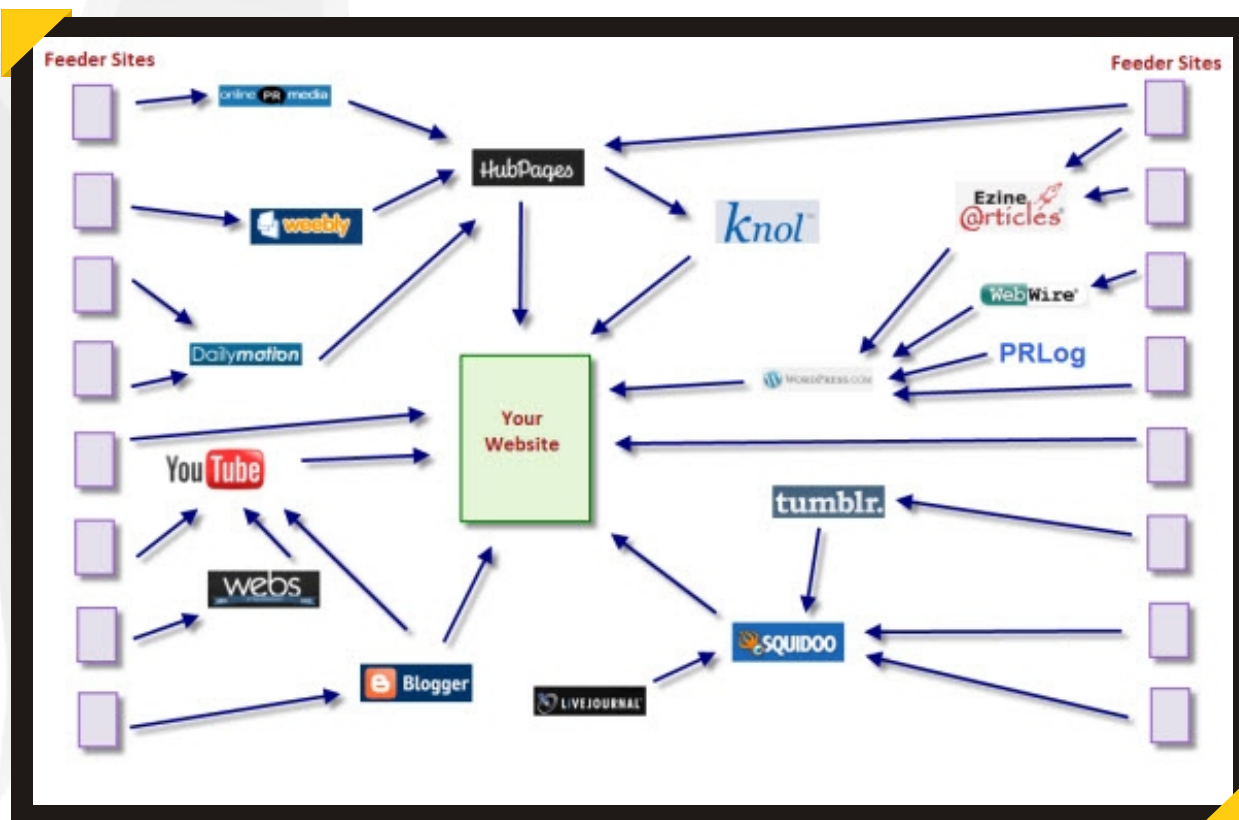
However, this doesn't mean the link wheel structure isn't valuable. The concept of concentrating and passing on link juice between Web 2.0 sites is very valid, but in order to minimize any potential over-optimization penalties assessed by the search engines for using this easily-detectable technique, it's important to use the following rules when building link wheels:

- 1 **Use unique content on every spoke property you build.** Although past link wheel creators have advocated spinning a single article and then using the variations resulting from this content to build every property in the link wheel, the increased importance of site quality conferred by the Google Panda updates makes using spun articles a very bad idea.

Yes, it's a lot easier to use spun articles than unique content, but doing so runs the risk of having your Web 2.0 properties penalized as a result of the recent algorithm changes. So instead, every single spoke property you build needs to be created using totally unique, useful content. Essentially, you need to build every spoke property with the same care and attention you'd give to your main site in order for this strategy to work successfully.

- 2 **Create your spoke properties over time.** Instead of rushing out and building an entire link wheel in a day (which worked in the past but has since been penalized), build your spoke properties over time for maximum benefits. Think of the new link wheel as a long term project and add new content to your wheel as you have time, returning to interlink the properties at a later date.
- 3 **Avoid the traditional spoke and wheel format entirely.** In the past, link wheels could be simple, with 5-10 Web 2.0 spokes pointing at a center site in a perfect circle. However, as this link format has been identified and devalued by Google, building a successful link wheel now requires website owners to create more complex linking structures.

Check out the following diagram by [Affhelper](#), which also incorporates the use of feeder minisites as described above into the mix:



As you can see, there's no defined, circular link wheel structure as in the previous example. Instead, the format is disjointed, with various feeder sites and backlinks pointing at different Web 2.0 properties - some of which are interlinked and some of which stand alone. Although it isn't recommended that you follow this exact pattern, it's important that you vary your internal linking methods in order to create a more powerful link wheel.

Finally, if you'd still like to pursue link wheels as an SEO and traffic generation technique, keep in mind that you'll want to be careful about how you link back to your main site. If your site is still young, sending thousands of links back to it via link wheels can raise a red flag with the search engines that the site is being promoted artificially.

Instead, consider sending any additional backlinks you create to the Web 2.0 properties used in your link wheel structure. These older, more established sites can tolerate more backlinks without triggering any penalties, and the additional link juice they generate will flow through the Web 2.0 properties you've created back to your main site. Over time, the effects of these additional links will turn your link wheels into power backlink sources that result in both increased traffic and rankings for your main site.

## Link Reclamation

Despite the fact that link building is an established practice within the search engine optimization world, there are plenty of instances where your site and the content you share won't be linked to correctly.

For example, suppose another site in your industry references an article you wrote recently and even quotes you as a source - then fails to link back to your page to give you due credit. As a website owner, you can either get frustrated by this, or you can turn it into a perfect opportunity to build additional backlinks to your site.

This process is called "link reclamation" and it involves searching out instances online where your site has been referenced, but not linked to correctly. Once you've identified these link opportunities, you contact the site owner to see if he or she would be willing to rectify the situation and provide your site with a link back.

There are two parts to this process:

### Step #1 Identify unclaimed backlinks

The easiest way to find instances where your content, name or business name has been referenced, but not linked to is to set up Google Alerts for any relevant keywords. To do this, navigate to <http://www.google.com/alerts> and fill out the following screen:

Google Alerts

Search query:

Result type:

How often:

How many:

Deliver to:

[CREATE ALERT](#) [Manage your alerts](#)

You'll need to set up a separate alert for every keyword you want to track, but once this system is in place, you'll receive an email message whenever your keywords are detected online. This allows you to click through to each referenced site to see if you've been properly attributed with a backlink.

## Step #2 Contact website owners

If you find that the sites that appear in your Google Alerts have mentioned you and your business but not linked back, you'll want to contact their owners to request that a backlink be created.

In most cases, the appropriate contact information can be found by navigating to the website and locating the "Contact Us" page. However, if the websites highlighted in your Google Alerts don't have this information readily available, you can also perform a DNS lookup in order to identify the email address associated with the website's hosting account.

Once you have the email address, send the site owner a polite, but firm email. Consider the following email template, or create your own to meet your specific needs:

Dear [Site Owner],

I was just looking through your website and noticed that on [Date], you referenced my company in your article titled, "[Article Title]". While I appreciate the additional exposure your content has generated for my business, I would like to request that you create a link back to my website in order to attribute the material you shared appropriately.

Please modify the following content with the link below:

"[specify exactly how you want the link structured here]"

Thank you so much for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Keep in mind, you probably won't hear back from every website owner you contact and not all those that do get in touch with you will be willing to modify their content according to your wishes. If there is a serious breach of copywriting law where you feel that the site owner in question has plagiarized too much of your content without proper attribution, follow the standard web practice of submitting a DCMA notice to the site owner (and, potentially, the site owner's host if proper rectification is not achieved).

However, in most cases, it's best to simply submit your link requests and then take whatever new links you're able to generate in this way. Following up several times with a web owner who hasn't responded to your contact isn't the best use of your time - especially when there are so many other great backlink building techniques to use!

## Link Building with Widgets

One final advanced link building technique that deserves mention here is the use of widgets to automatically generate backlinks pointing at your site. Here's how the system works...

You (or a web developer you hire) create a useful widget or tool that other webmasters can incorporate into their sites. Most often, this is done through the use of Wordpress plugins - that is, mini-programs that are installed onto a user's website in order to provide some extra functionality beyond what the standard Wordpress platform offers. Through its inclusion on these third-party sites, the plugin includes a link back to your own website - meaning that every time your plugin is installed on a new website, you earn a new backlink.



Now, although this technique can be powerful, there are a number of different things you'll want to keep in mind to use it correctly:

- **Building a widget takes time or money** – Even if you're a talented web developer who can do all the coding himself, building a tool like this for public distribution will take time. If you can't code, you'll need to pay someone to create your widget, in which case you'll want to keep a close eye on the ROI of your new links compared to what you've invested in the project.
- **Your link should be relevant to the plugin** – Don't use widgets as an opportunity to spam unsuspecting users with irrelevant links. Instead, build widgets that provide value to your users and that can be tied back to your brand through the use of relevant in-widget backlinks. Following our dog training example, it would be far better from both an SEO and a transparency standpoint to build a freely-available widget related to a dog training topic that then links back to your site than to promote your dog training links from within an unrelated widget.
- **Your link should be visible to the user** – Link building with widgets is one off-page SEO technique that can quickly veer off into "grey hat" territory when the links in question are included in a subversive way. Instead of hiding your link in CSS or code files – hoping your end users won't notice and remove it – make it visible to the people who install your plugin.

Interestingly enough, if you explain to users that including the link back to your site is what enables you to make your widgets available free of charge, you'll find that the vast majority will be willing to leave it intact, leading to much better results overall than what you'll find when you try to sneak your links in unnoticed!

## Important Link Considerations

In order to get the biggest possible SEO benefit from your backlink campaigns, you'll want to follow a few guidelines that ensure the search engines interpret your links correctly and give your link profile the value it deserves. Be sure to incorporate all of the following considerations into your link building efforts for maximum SEO benefit:

### Choose the Right Anchor Text

Anchor text is simply the text used to form a hyperlink. Google uses the text that forms a link as a means of understanding the relevancy of site to which the link is pointing. It is structured like this:



```
<a href="http://www.yoursite.com">Anchor Text</a>
=
Anchor Text
```



If you go out and build links pointing back to your website using the words “ninja supplies” in the anchor text, then Google will think that your site is relevant to ninja supplies and your site will be more likely to appear in the search results when someone searches for terms related to ninja supplies.

To understand how this works, let's look at a real world example of how a marketing agency BOMBED when naming their company. First, many website administrators put PDFs on their websites for their visitors to read. To be helpful, they instruct visitors to download Adobe's PDF reader if the visitor doesn't already have it installed on their computer. When they do so, they use the anchor text, “click here” to link to the PDF reader download.

So, some creative folks at an agency decided to name their company “Click Here”. Well, guess what - the PDF is an industry standard file format, and nearly every site that hosts PDF files contains a link to Adobe's PDF reader with the anchor text “Click Here.”

Because of this, if you Google the company's name (“Click Here”), they have no chance of ever ranking in the top spot for their own name because SO many people have used the anchor text “click here” to refer to Adobe's PDF reader. See why choosing your anchor text carefully is so important?

## Watch Your Link Quality

Unfortunately, search engines have a history of being cheated by black hat SEO workers trying to game the algorithm. In fact, it's estimated that as many as 60% of the pages on the Internet are total spam. In an effort to keep all that junk out of the search results pages, search engines have a method of measuring trust built into their algorithm based on the profile of links pointing back at a website.

What does this mean for you? It means you need to be street smart when you build links back to your website. If you build links to your website from spammy websites, this can actually hurt your rankings.

But what constitutes “link spam” and how can you ensure that your link building efforts stick to the straight and narrow? Consider all of the following indicators of link quality:

## Link Type

The type of link you build makes a tremendous difference in whether or not the search engines value your backlink profile highly or whether they devalue the connections you've spent your time building. As you might expect, all of the search engines will value a link to your website from within the content of a Huffington Post article over a blog comment link generated by a spambot!

To give you a feel for which types of links tend to be rewarded by the search engines - and which ones should be avoided - check out the following lists of link types as developed by Rand Fishkin of SEOMoz:

## Clear Spam

- Comment Spam
- Guest Books
- Link Farms
- “Bad Neighborhood” Links

## Low Quality

- Junk Directories
- Do-follow Blogs
- Forum Signatures
- Social Media Profiles
- Sites You Own
- Reciprocal Link Exchanges

## Moderate Value

- Partner Websites
- Blogrolls
- Good Directories

## Awesome Stuff

- Editorial Content
- Linkbait
- News Websites

In general, the better you are at aligning your link building efforts with these guidelines, the better your chances will be of getting your site ranked highly in the search results pages.

## Link Velocity

In addition to the types of links you build, you'll want to be cautious about the rate at which you acquire them. When your site is first starting out, building too many links too quickly (a metric that's referred to as “link velocity”) looks unnatural to the search engine spiders and can result in penalties to your site.

To understand what an ideal link velocity looks like, consider what would happen if you built a site without knowing anything about search engine optimization. Your goal for the site wouldn't be to make money or to earn Top 10 rankings, but simply to share information you're passionate about. In the beginning, you'd have very few links pointing back to your site, but as your readership grew, the number of new links created each day would increase naturally.

If, on the other hand, you started to manipulate the results by building your own backlinks, you could trigger a link velocity penalty. According to Tad Chef on the [SEOptimize blog](#):

*“Google is checking the link velocity - aka the rate in which you earn links - and if you get more links than you deserve, you risk a penalty even if the links are perfectly legit.”*

Of course, opinions are varied on how many links it takes to trigger a link velocity penalty. As an example, consider the various responses to the discussion [“How Many Backlinks Per Day is Too Many”](#) on the Affiliorama site:

*“Getting 3 backlinks to an article for a week or 2 would appear natural to search engines.”*

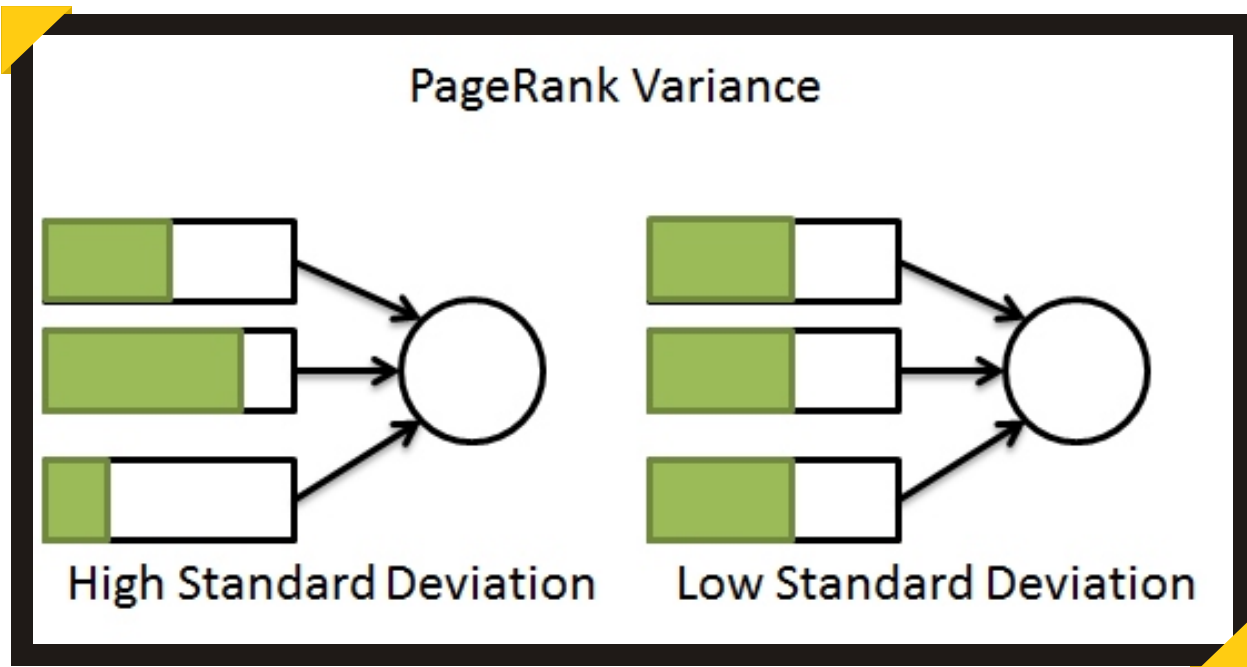
*“You can create 10 back links per day.”*

*“You can do more than that. I sometimes do 50-100/ day. I would not do much more than 100 though.”*

So while there's no magic number (that we know of...) that determines how many links are appropriate and how many will trigger a penalty, it's a good idea to keep your link building efforts within reason compared to the average number of backlinks pointing to your competitors' websites.

## Link Variance

“Link variance” refers to the distribution of the PageRank of sites in your profile - an idea that's best understood graphically using the following image from [SEOMoz](#):



Essentially, if you build a 100% natural site with no SEO-specific link building activities, chances are you'd attract a wide variety of linking sites. Maybe a few of your blog posts would be shared on social media sites, maybe you'd get mentioned on a few blogs - heck, maybe you'd even pick up a high quality link or two from the top news sites in your industry.

But regardless of the specific link types you attracted, the odds are good that there would be a significant amount of deviation in the PageRank of the linking sites that connected back to your pages.

Contrast this with the typical marketer's link profile, which relies heavily on a few types of links and results in a much lower standard deviation between the PageRank of linking sites. The graphic above represents what could occur if you focused exclusively on, say, article or directory marketing through the use of automated link correction tools.

Again, there's no hard and fast rule about how much PageRank variance is "enough." However, by varying your link building methods to incorporate some of each of the beginning, intermediate and advanced techniques described earlier in this section, you should be able to naturally acquire links with a wide enough PageRank variance to prevent the search engine spiders from labeling your site as a spam page.

## Link Relevance

By now, you've probably figured out that link building isn't a simple numbers game. Simply acquiring more links isn't enough to guarantee good SEO results - instead, the links you pursue need to be valuable in the eyes of the search engines.

With this in mind, yet another link building factor you'll want to consider is link relevance, which refers to whether or not the topic of the linking site is closely aligned with your own web pages.

Continuing with our earlier example, if you run a dog training website, you'll want to pursue links from related websites (for example, dog breeder websites, dog club websites and so on) over unrelated sites. Assuming their PageRank, authority and other on-page factors are similar, you'd be much better off building a link from the American Kennel Club website than a similarly-regarded “get your ex back” website, as far as the search engines are concerned!

According to the [SEO Cipher](#) website:

*“Assuming the link relevance of two links is equal, the link with the highest SEO value will be the link from the page with more importance (i.e. higher PR). However, if you had to choose between a link with high relevance or high importance, then you should almost always opt for the link with more relevance.”*

## “Bad Neighborhood” Links

By this point, it should be pretty obvious that link quality matters just as much as link quantity (that is, the number of links you build). So in addition to checking the type, speed, variance and relevance of your links, you'll want to ensure that they're being built on legitimate sites. Even a PageRank 6 site can be considered scammy by the search engines even if it meets many of the criteria listed above.

The [KISSMetrics blog](#) offers the following framework for determining if your potential linking sites are located in what the search engines consider to be “bad neighborhoods”:

- **Bad Links** – If you see any links to what is known in the SEO world as negative PPC – pills, porn, or casinos – then get out of that neighborhood ASAP.
- **Too Many Links** – When it comes to any page on a website, there should be a bigger ratio of content to links. The page shouldn't be 90% links, 10 % regular content.
- **Spam** – Sometimes, even though there are not too many links or bad links, there are still pages that have a disproportionate amount of spam on their pages. It may be to seemingly innocent sites, but chances are if no one is moderating the spam, the bad links are bound to come next.
- **Over Abundance of Ads** – Google, ironically a distributor of ads via their own AdSense system, has been cracking down on sites that are more ads than content. Just like a page shouldn't be 90% links, it shouldn't be 90% ads either.
- **Poorly Written Content** – This one is a little harder to spot, but if you are trying to place content on a site, and you see that the articles are poorly written, then you probably don't want your content next to it. It's a sign of sites that may be using “spun” content where someone takes one piece of work and uses software to replace a lot of words to make it seem original.

If you aren't 100% sure whether or not a potential link source constitutes a bad neighborhood link - or if you want to check your existing backlink profile to ensure that no bad neighborhood links are present - check out the free Bad Neighborhood Link Checker tool.

## Link Blending

### Paid Links

One final note on link building considerations...

Because link building can be a time-consuming endeavor, many webmasters find themselves tempted by paid link services like Text Link Ads or other similar programs that allow you to purchase links on other sites for the purposes of gaining traffic and backlinks.

However, be aware that services like these violate the Google, Bing and Yahoo terms of service, and should therefore be avoided at all costs. Although participating in these schemes may temporarily improve your website's results in the SERPs, you risk serious penalties if you're ever discovered.

Instead, focus exclusively on the link building practices described in earlier sections of this guide for maximum benefit within the natural search results!



# Follow Up / Ongoing Site Tweaks

We've covered a lot of different SEO tactics in this report so far, including both things to do on your website and ways to build links pointing to your site from other pages that will increase your odds of ranking higher in the search engines. The good news is that, if you've followed the guidelines above, you've already done a tremendous amount of work to give your website the best possible chance of succeeding.

The bad news is that SEO isn't a "set it and forget it" kind of thing. Search engine optimization is a field that's always changing, which means that you need to be proactive about staying on top of SEO news.

The following are a few of the things you'll want to keep an eye on:

## Code Validation

Errors in your website's code can prevent it from being indexed correctly, which can - in turn - inhibit your ability to drive traffic from the natural search results. For this reason, it's a good idea to check your code after every update you make to your site in order to ensure that no errors have occurred.

One service we recommend for this ongoing task is the W3C Validation Service found here:

<http://validator.w3.org/>

Bookmark this website and be sure to check it out whenever you make modifications to your existing site.

## Site Speed

Google [considers website speed when they determine how to rank your website](#) in the search results. This means that you need to keep an eye on how changes to your website influence your site's loading speed to ensure that you aren't being penalized unfairly. Here's how to do it:

## Minimize HTTP Requests

***Goal:** Reduce the number of files required to display your website*

When readers visit your website, their browsers request the corresponding files to be displayed, including CSS files, Javascript and images. The more files you have (including things like Wordpress plugins, unnecessary scripts or outdated temporary files), the longer your site will take to display.

**Action Item:** Get rid of everything that isn't absolutely necessary to your site's operation. If you have deactivated plugins still stored on your site or scripts installed that you aren't using anymore, remove them so they don't slow down your load times.

## Optimize and Correctly Display Images

***Goal:** Make pictures on your website as small as you can, and make sure the browser doesn't have to resize them.*

Many picture files come with a lot of unnecessary metadata that can significantly increase the size of a picture file on your website. Make sure to compress the images on your site so they're at the smallest file size possible before they no longer appear correctly.

Many designers and webmasters make the mistake of uploading images to their sites with file sizes much larger than they need to be. High definition cameras can take photos that are 10MB in size - this is great if you'll be editing and resizing those images in Photoshop, but an image that size on your website will harm your load times. Remember to resize and compress your images before they're uploaded to your site so that your visitors' browsers don't have to go through this extra step.

**Action Item:** Use applications like [Picnik](#) or [Image Optimizer](#) to resize your images to the correct size (don't rely on the Wordpress resize function to do this, as it adds another step to the loading process). Once the image is the proper size, compress the file and upload the image for use on your website.

## Minify HTML, CSS and Javascript

***Goal:** Get rid of all the extra space in your source code before it gets served up to your visitors' browsers.*

When developers write the code to build your website, they use a lot of spaces and tabs to make the code readable for human beings. Servers and browsers don't care about white space between code clusters - they just read the code and execute the instruction. When you eliminate the white space between the code clusters, you reduce the number of fields the browsers and servers have to read, speeding up your website's load time.

Keep in mind - if you're constantly editing code on certain files on your site, it isn't practical to remove all the white space between code clusters. In these situations, you'll want to use a plug-in to remove all the white space (or "minify") the code for you. These plug-ins will speed up load times without making the code hard to read.

**Action Item:** Remove all the white space from your code, or install a Wordpress plug-in like [WP-Minify](#) or [W3 Total Cache](#) to do this for you automatically.

# Advanced SEO

## Canonicalization of Links

“Canonicalization” sounds like a really big word, but it means something very simple. Canonicalization refers to the variance in URLs used to refer to a single web page. As an example, consider the following URLs:

[www.yourpage.com](http://www.yourpage.com)

[yourpage.com](http://yourpage.com)

[www.yourpage.com/index.htm](http://www.yourpage.com/index.htm)

[www.yourpage.com/home.asp](http://www.yourpage.com/home.asp)

All of these URLs refer to the same home page, but they're all different from each other. Keep in mind search engines are run by robots, which means that they notice every little difference between these, and will treat each one differently even though they all go to the same page.

Now, here's why this is important. If you don't consistently refer to your webpage with one consistent and standardized URL, Google may see your different URLs as duplicate content.

In order to keep the search results nice and clean for searchers, Google typically eliminates duplicate content from its index. So it's useful to start from the beginning using one standardized URL when you link to your website, and when others link to your website. Of course, the problem is that we don't always have control over the way others link to our site.

So how do we fix the duplicate content problem when others link to our site without using the URL we've chosen as our standard? There is a solution we can embed a link element in the HTML code of our website that tells the search engine “I know someone has linked to my site with a funky URL, but here's the URL I want to use as the standard so don't look at this page as duplicate content.”

Basically, we tell the search engines that by using a “rel= canonical” element in the <head> section of your website. The easiest way to do this is to use Yoast's SEO plugin to ensure the links on your site are redirecting correctly.

On the other hand, if you want to handle your site's canonicalization manually, you can specify a canonical URL in two ways (according to Google's instructions):

- Add a rel="canonical" link to the <head> section of the non-canonical version of each HTML page.

For example, to specify a canonical link to the page

<http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish>, create a <link> element as follows:

```
<link rel="canonical" href="http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish"/>
```

Copy this link into the <head> section of all non-canonical versions of the page, such as

<http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish&sort=price>.

If you publish content on both

<http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish> and

<https://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish>, you can specify the canonical version of the page. Create the <link> element:

```
<link rel="canonical" href="http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish"/>
```

Add this link to the <head> section of <https://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish>.

- Indicate the canonical version of a URL by responding with the Link rel="canonical" HTTP header. Adding rel="canonical" to the head section of a page is useful for HTML content, but it can't be used for PDFs and other [file types indexed by Google Web Search](#). In these cases you can indicate a canonical URL by responding with the Link rel="canonical" [HTTP header](#), like this (note that to use this option, you'll need to be able to configure your server):
- Link: <http://www.example.com/downloads/white-paper.pdf>; rel="canonical"

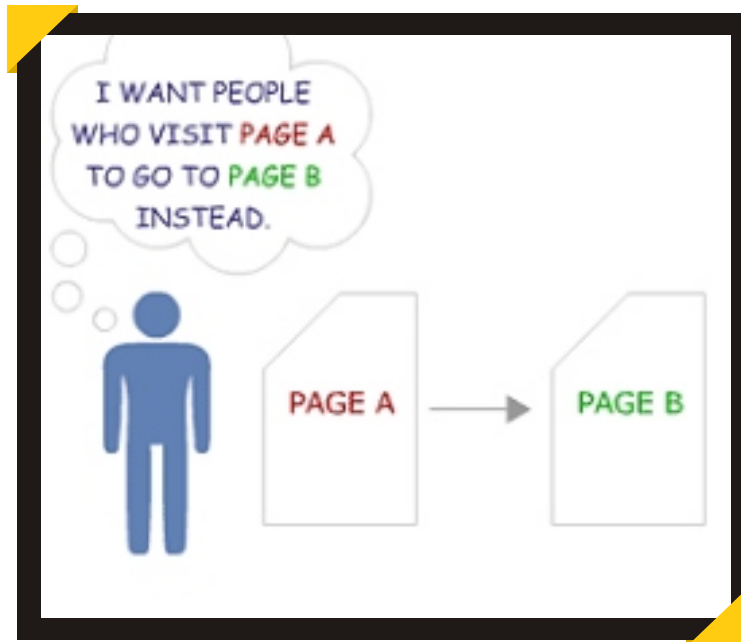
Keep in mind, Google currently supports these link header elements for Web Search only.

## 301 Redirects

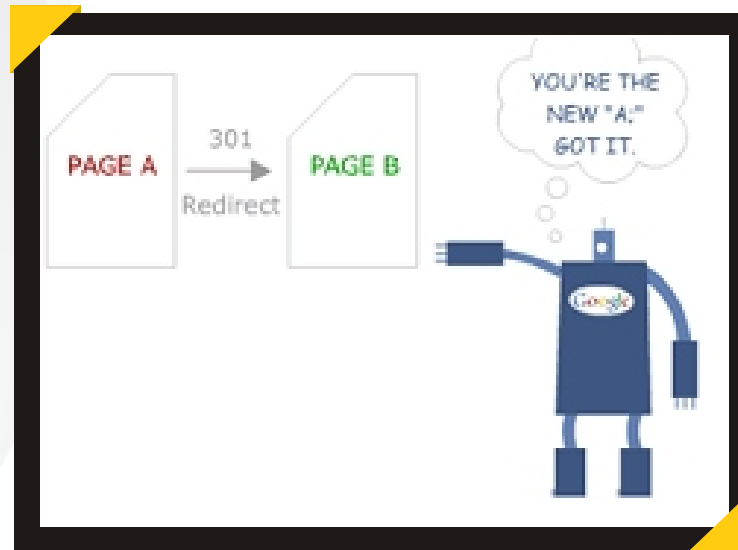
If you're ready to move on to more advanced SEO, you'll also want to consider how 301 redirects are handled on your website.

There's a simple explanation for what a 301 redirect is essentially, you're telling a search engine that you've permanently moved your site from one domain to another and that you'd like them to pass all the SEO value, link juice, and trust your website has accrued to the new domain you've selected in order to maintain your rankings in the search results.

Here's an example. Let's say you bought a new domain that has a nice ring to it - it's shorter, easier to type and works better for your site's content than your original domain name. You want to redirect the old URL to the new URL, but you don't want to lose the value of all the SEO work you've done so far.



There are a number of different options for redirecting one URL to another permanently, but in general, 301 redirects are preferable both for people, and for search engine. When you use a 301 redirect you're telling both the people who come directly to your site by typing it into their browser bar that you're using a new URL (as they automatically land on the new URL) and you're telling search engines that you've permanently moved your URL so they can go ahead and transfer all the link juice and trust you've built up.



Take note that it can take the search engines a good amount of time before they discover the 301 redirect you've implemented and give your new URL credit for all of the old URL's rankings. If your site is not crawled on a regular basis because your site's content is not regularly updated then it can take the search engines even longer to discover the 301 redirect.



## 301 and 302 Redirects Explained



### 301 REDIRECT

Search engines are notified of a permanent address change with the 301 redirect. The value of inbound links will be transferred to the new site over time.



### 302 REDIRECT

Use a 302 redirect when a site must be temporarily redirected. Search engines will anticipate the site address being active again and inbound links will continue to point to the temporarily redirected page.

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## Pagination

### What is the pagination problem?

Basically it applies to websites that have a lot of pages with very similar content, such as magazine sites and large ecommerce sites. For example, an ecommerce website such as Nike.com needs to organize content in a way where the information displayed for one product is very similar to the information displayed on other products, as this creates continuity between pages and improves the user experience.



Unfortunately, when pages are very similar, search engines often mistakenly classify these pages as duplicate content or identify the pages as low value. The end result is that those pages on your site do not get indexed.

Good pagination is simply helping your users (and the search engines) to find the information they want in as few clicks as possible. For this reason, it's a good idea to set up category pages in combination with navigation tools like the one above so that users and search engines can move around your site and access the pages they want as quickly as possible.

An example of a site that does a good job of this is Copy Blogger. They have plenty of articles, but they organize them into groups that present both users and search engines with several different options for navigating the content. In fact, a visitor can get to any article on the Copy Blogger website within three clicks, because they have an archive page that organizes their articles both via category and via dates.

You can see how they organize it here: <http://www.copyblogger.com/archives/>

Still not sure how to apply good pagination practices to your site?

The solution to this problem lies in implementing proper pagination techniques. Consider all of the following tips on how to do this correctly:

- Limit the number of paginated pages on each page (no more than 5)
- Add the rel="next" and rel="prev" tags in the <head> section of each paginated page
- For example: <http://www.site.com/category> (let's say this category page has 50 paginated pages)
  - First Page of Series: <link rel="next" href="<http://www.site.com/category/page2>" />
  - Second Page of Series: <link rel="prev" href="<http://www.site.com/category>" /> <link rel="next" href="<http://www.site.com/category/page3>" />
  - Last Page of Series: <link rel="prev" href="<http://www.site.com/category/page49>" />

**Using these tags helps the search engines to connect these paginated pages as one set of pages.**

## Duplicate Content

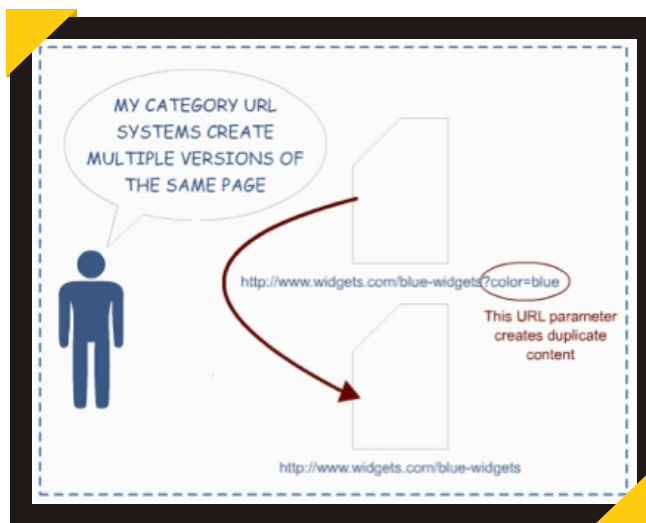
### What is duplicate content?

Put simply, duplicate content involves having multiple URLs on your website where identical content appears. Why is this bad? Basically, Google has a hard time understanding what to include and exclude from their search results pages when they find multiple URLs with the same content on them. This can result in some pages being excluded from the index unnecessarily.

Unfortunately, the search engines aren't nearly as sophisticated as people are in terms of determining what truly is duplicate content and what isn't. Consider some of the following examples in which a duplicate content penalty could be applied incorrectly:

## 1. URL Parameters

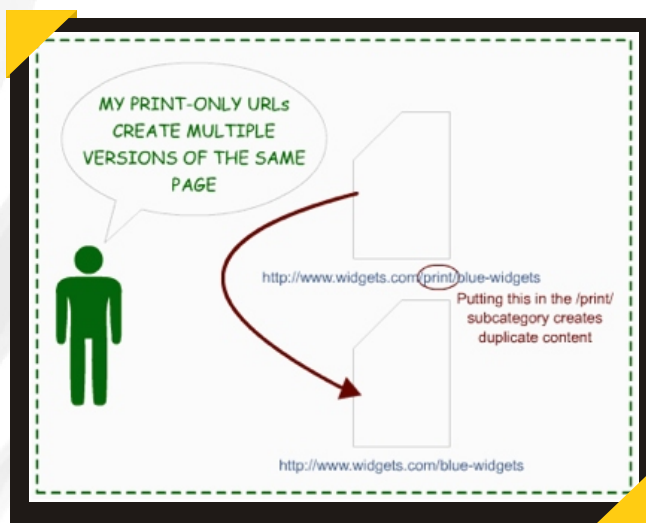
Sometimes, websites append URLs with click tracking parameters, causing your analytics code to trigger duplicate content problems:



## 2. Printer-Friendly Page Versions

When you publish a printer friendly version of your webpage, the URL that sends the visitor there can confuse the search engine. In this case, the search engine robot finds the same text on two pages of your website and thinks you've got duplicate content.

When the search engine spider sees this, it has to figure out which of the two URLs you actually want visitors to see in the search results. But because Google wants to keep its SERPs clean and free from duplicate content, it only includes one page in the index - even though the second page is full of unique content!



### 3. Session Ids

If you use session IDs to track visitors on your website, this can cause a variance in the URLs that visitors see. For example, when the search engine spiders come to crawl your website, they get assigned a session ID, as do all the URLs they crawl during the session.

When this occurs, the robots get confused and have trouble differentiating the session ID URLs and the regular URLs. As a result, the search engine may only include one set of URLs and exclude valuable content.



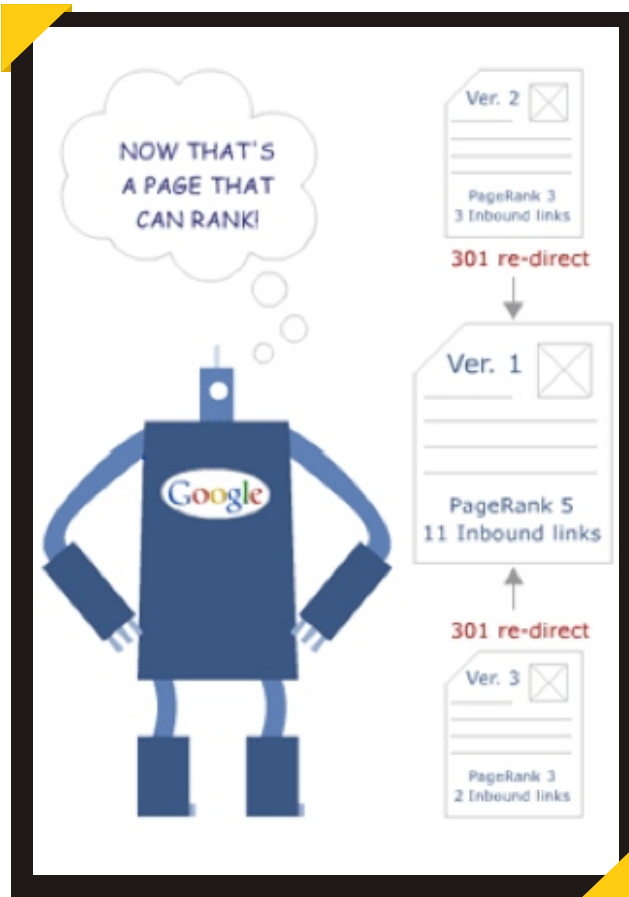
#### So how do you fix duplicate content issues?

Basically there are three ways to take care of duplicate content issues, and two scenarios where'd you'd apply these solutions:

##### Scenario 1: Duplicate content problem because of URLs

When you have multiple URLs that actually point to the same one page of content, you can add a 301 Redirect or a Canonical URL tag.

Both of those solutions tell the search engine that each distinct URL is really just a different way of getting to the same page, and that it should treat these URLs as if they were one and the same. These solutions also tell Google where to send the link juice, trust and authority accrued by all of the similar URLs that are pointing to the same page.



## Scenario 2: You have two pages with the same content and you need to keep them both.

If you have a situation where you have two pages with the same content, and you need both pages for the sake of the user experience or other reasons, the best solution is to add a “Noindex” tag in the header of the page with duplicate content.

For example, it's very typical for blogs to have pages with a lot of duplicate content. A blog may have a summary of five posts on the homepage, as well as a page in the archive section of the blog with the same five summaries for the same five posts.

When the search engine crawls the homepage and then crawls the archive page, it will think that there are duplicate content pages on the site and that it should select only one page to include in the search results. By adding a “Noindex” tag, you're able to tell the search engines exactly which page should be shown in the search results and which page should be excluded.

In this case, we'd simply want to add a “Noindex” tag in the header of the archive page. That way, when the search engine finds duplicate summaries in the archive, it knows that it shouldn't show those summaries in the search results - instead, it should show the summaries from the homepage.



## Schema.org Microdata

In June 2011, Google, Bing and Yahoo announced a rare collaboration to support the use of microdata (as defined on Schema.org) in their search results pages, both through the use of enhanced “Rich Snippet” result displays and better indexing of sites based on the additional data provided by these tags.

Now, if that all sounds confusing, don't worry! In this article, we'll take a closer look at what microdata is, how it's used by the search engines and why you should consider implementing it into your website.

Here's what you need to know...

### What is microdata?

Essentially, microdata is one of three languages (besides microformats and RDFa) of codes designed to provide the search engine spider programs with more information about the content on your website. To understand how this works in practice, consider the following example, given by microdata listing website [Schema.org](http://Schema.org):

*“Usually, HTML tags tell the browser how to display the information included in the tag. For example, `<h1>Avatar</h1>` tells the browser to display the text string “Avatar” in a heading 1 format. However, the HTML tag doesn't give any information about what that text string means and this can make it more difficult for search engines to intelligently display relevant content to a user.”*

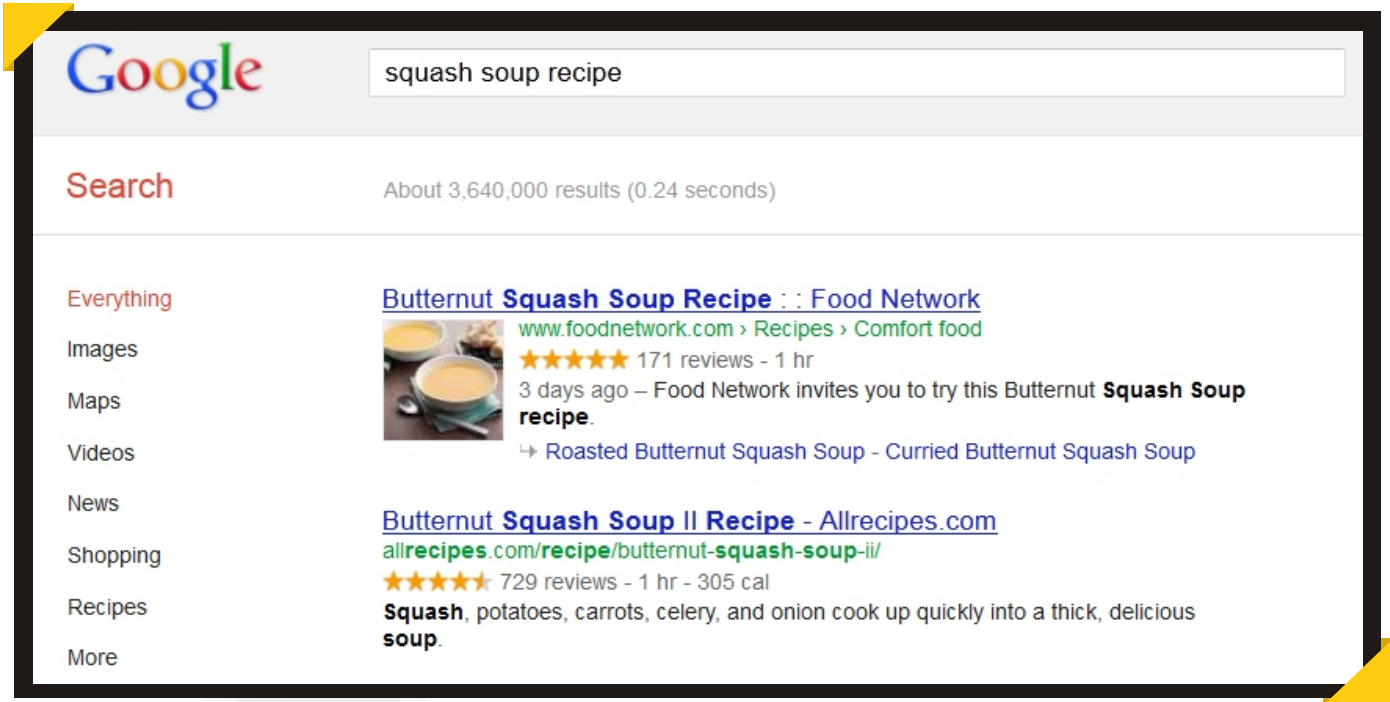
In this case, additional microdata elements could be added to clarify that the “Avatar” in question is a movie, not a specific type of graphic designed to represent a person online. Adding this microdata to our hypothetical website would help the search engines to better understand the content of the web page, allowing it to be indexed and ranked correctly for the appropriate terms.

### Why use microdata to mark up your pages?

Integrating microdata into your website's code offers a number of advantages. First, there's the relevancy benefit referenced earlier, in which included microdata can give the search engine spiders more context for the type of information being shared on a website and how the site should be indexed and ranked.

In our earlier example, adding microdata to mark up HTML code on a web page related to the movie “Avatar” would tell the search engine spiders to rank this page in relation to movie websites - not graphic design sites.

Another added benefit of integrating microdata into your site is the creation of “Rich Snippets”, which display more information on the search engine results pages compared to traditional listings. For example, a Google search for “squash soup recipe” turns up the following results, which have been marked up with microdata to show information beyond typical search engine results page listings, including images, reviews and cooking times:



If you were searching the web for a new squash soup recipe, chances are you'd be more inclined to click on one of these marked up results than on a listing displaying only the traditional title, description and URL.

## Who should use schema tags?

Although, in the past, the existing library of microdata tags has been somewhat limited, this new partnership by the major search engines has expanded the range of available tags considerably. Some of the most popular types of microdata include the following:

- Creative works: CreativeWork, Book, Movie, MusicRecording, Recipe, TVSeries
- Embedded non-text objects: AudioObject, ImageObject, VideoObject
- Event
- Organization
- Person
- Place, LocalBusiness, Restaurant

- Product, Offer, AggregateOffer
- Review, AggregateRating

(A full list of available microdata tags can be found on [Schema.org](http://Schema.org).)

From this list, it's easy to see that some of the businesses that stand to benefit most from the inclusion of microdata include local businesses (especially restaurants, retailers and other small offices), as well as those that sell products online.

However, microdata can be useful to any businesses that are having trouble generating traffic via the natural search results, as including these tags can help your site to be indexed and ranked for more accurate search terms. The resulting Rich Snippets can also help your site to stand out from others on your results page, leading to more traffic for your site.

### How can you get started with schema tags?

To give you a feel for what your finished marked up code will look like, consider the following fictional HTML page from our “Avatar” example referenced earlier:

```
<div itemscope itemtype="http://schema.org/Movie">
  <H1>Avatar</h1>
  <span>Director: James Cameron (born August 16, 1954)</span>
  <span>Science fiction</span>
  <a href=" ../movies/avatar-theatrical-trailer.html">Trailer</a>
</div>
```

In this example, the “Movie” microdata tag has been added to the “div” container, specifying that the information discussed in this text area of the site refers to a movie. The “itemscope” tag tells the search engines that all of the content in this particular “div” container relates to the “itemtype” defined (in this case, “Movie”).

For complete instructions on how to integrate microdata into your site's HTML code, check out the “[Getting Started Guide](#)” posted on Schema.org. Then, once your coding is complete, run your website through Google's “[Rich Snippets Testing Tool](#)” to be sure your microdata is parsing correctly and providing the maximum benefit to your pages.

## Authorship Tags

Recently, Google announced that it would begin highlighting authors and content creators in the natural SERPs using a new metric, tentatively titled “Author Rank.” The idea is that, if you're a regular, well-respected contributor to industry publications, your content should be aggregated within the SERPs and available to search users who have demonstrated an interest in your content.

Of course, for this type of SERPs enhancement to work, Google needs to know which specific pieces can be attributed to you - which it's doing through the use of “authorship tags.” Currently, there are two different ways to let Google know which web articles should be attributed to you:

- 1 Link your content to your Google+ profile using a verified email address, or
- 2 Set up authorship by linking your content to your Google+ profile.

For complete instructions on how to carry out either of these options, check out the [Google Help](#) post on the subject of authorship tags.

To receive this benefit, you'll need to set up a Google+ profile, which many webmasters have been resistant to up until this point. However, considering the way the recent launch of Google's “[Search Plus Your World](#)” update has begun to integrate personalized recommendations from Google+ contacts into the traditional SERPs, taking this action has become a “must do” if you want to leverage the potential traffic opportunities these recent SERPs enhancements provide.

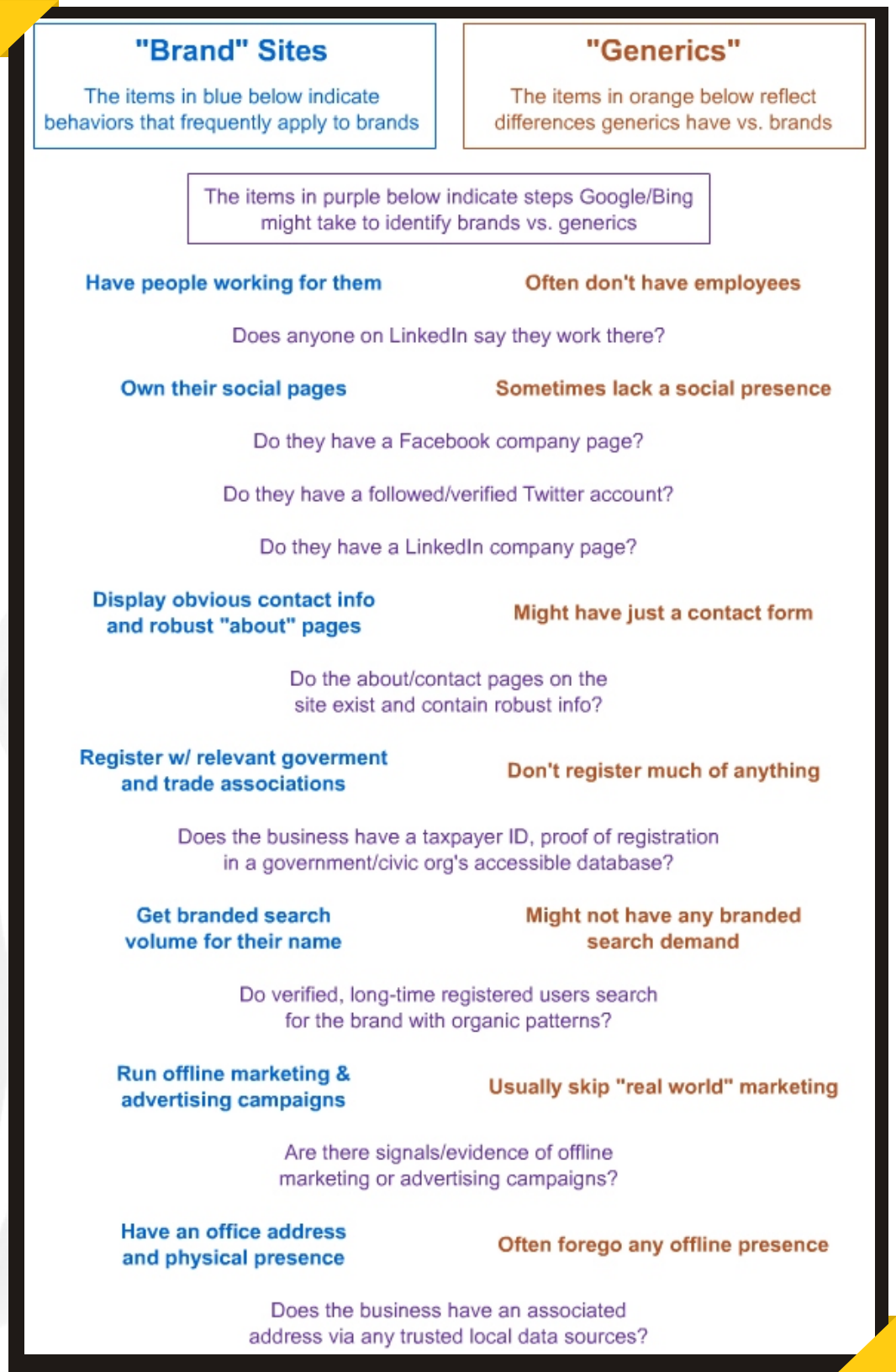
## Branding

While most of the specific web promotion items we've discussed so far relate to specific actions you can take on and off your website in order to build your traffic and exposure in the natural SERPs, it's also important to consider the effect these activities have on your business's overall marketing plan and branding.

Interestingly enough, the next big wave of SEO ranking factors may have nothing to do with the on-page and backlink metrics that have sufficed up to this point. Instead, it's widely acknowledged that Google's next big move will be to reward established brands, as these sites generally tend to provide a better user experience (which Google wants to reward to keep its users happy) compared to thin affiliate sites.

Clearly, though, Google will face the same challenges quantifying different brand indicators that it encounters when trying to evaluate and reward other quality metrics. While it's easy for users to see a site and say, “Yes, this is a quality page,” or “No, I don't trust this website,” the search engine spiders must rely on other quantifiable metrics to determine whether or not a site belongs to an established brand that should be rewarded or not.

To understand a few of the potential factors Google could use to distinguish brand pages from their generic counterparts, consider the chart by [SEOMoz](#) displayed on the following page. Use this map as a guide to put your own branding plan into place by taking the actions listed as possible branding metrics in purple text within the image.





# Analytical Tools and Tracking

In addition to implementing advanced SEO techniques on your website, you'll want to make use of website data analytics programs to be able to track your site's performance and take control of your marketing campaigns. The following are a few analytic and tracking tools you should consider adding to your site:

- 1 **Google Analytics** – Google Analytics is the number one tracking tool on the web. It provides detailed information on every different way traffic comes to your website.
- 2 **Piwik** – Piwik is an open source analytics tool, which means that it's free to install and use on your website. It offers a great dashboard with plenty of helpful reporting options to help you determine how visitors are interacting with your site.
- 3 **GetClicky** – GetClicky is a fun program, as it provides real-time updates on your website's data. Using this program, you can see exactly who's on your website, what they're doing and when they do it.

Of course, it's not enough to simply install an analytics program on your website. If you really want your website to be successful, you've got to act on the results you see and make changes based on your data.

For more information on how to do that, check out the [“What to Do with Your Google Analytics Data”](#) post on the Single Grain site.

# Getting Started with Local SEO

Local SEO isn't a luxury or something only the most technical of businesses need to be concerned with anymore - it's an absolute must for any businesses that count on the search engines to send interested visitors their way through the search engine results pages (SERPs).

And these days, that's just about everyone. According to a 2010 Google study, around 20% of the search giant's total desktop searches have a local intent. Extrapolated out, that's over 2 billion searches a day from Google's desktop search traffic alone!

When you add in the number of consumers searching for local businesses, this number grows substantially; with Bing reporting that over 50% of searches conducted on mobile devices have a local intent.

However, the traditional search engines aren't the only way consumers find local business information. Beyond these resources, consumers may also search for local listings on review sites like Google Places and Yelp, classified ad networks like Craigslist or even social networking sites like Facebook.

The bottom line is this - consumers are using online resources to find information about local businesses. If your listing doesn't appear when relevant search terms are entered, you're sending traffic to your competitors!

Unfortunately, optimizing your local business website to appear in all these various sources - a process known as local SEO - isn't nearly as straightforward as traditional SEO.

When you work with traditional search engine optimization, your goals are relatively simple. You want your target web page to appear highly in the SERPs whenever a particular search phrase is entered, so you take a defined set of actions to increase the likelihood of this occurring. You may optimize your meta tags, integrate your keyword into your content and create backlinks to your content using your target keyword as the anchor text, but whatever course you take, the steps needed to achieve high rankings are fairly well established.

This isn't the case with local SEO, as local algorithms draw from a number of different resources - many of which may be out of your control. For example, the number of positive reviews for your business on Google Places may affect how your site is ranked in the local SERPs, even if you aren't able to influence what types of information your customers post in these listings.

Overall, instead of thinking about optimizing your pages for the search engines, you need to think about optimizing your places. In the rest of this report, we'll get into the specific steps you can use to do this,

as well as the best practices you should follow in order to improve your chances of earning traffic from the variety of local business resources online today.

Essentially, when thinking about local SEO, there are three key criteria you need to keep in mind:

- Relevance
- Prominence
- Distance

Unfortunately, there isn't much you can do about distance - aka, the distance from the specific local search modifiers used to define the SERPs you're listed in. If you've got a restaurant in San Francisco, the odds of your business appearing for SERPs that include the local search modifier "Oakland CA" are much lower than a restaurant based in this area, even if you get a large portion of your customers from the Oakland area.

You can't change how close you are to a given user's search queries, but fortunately, the other two factors can be influenced by the SEO presence you build for your local business.

"Relevance" refers to how closely your business's online presence aligns it with the specific search phrases users are entering online. In this case, a restaurant in Oakland, CA that includes the phrase "Chinese Buffet Restaurant" in its local optimization efforts may be more likely to appear in the SERP for the search query, "Chinese Buffet Restaurant, Oakland, CA" than a restaurant that's optimized for more general terms.

"Prominence", on the other hand, attempts to define the relative authority of each business result that appears in a local query. There are a number of different factors this particular weighting could take into account - including the number of reviews, the number of positive reviews, the relative authority of the reviewers and so on - when determining which businesses should appear more prominently in the local SERPs.

In the following sections of this report, we'll show you how to implement best practices for local SEO into your business website in order to increase both your relevance and prominence in the eyes of the search engines. Following these actions should help your business to increase its visibility online and improve your chances of being ranked highly in the SERPs for all-important local searches.

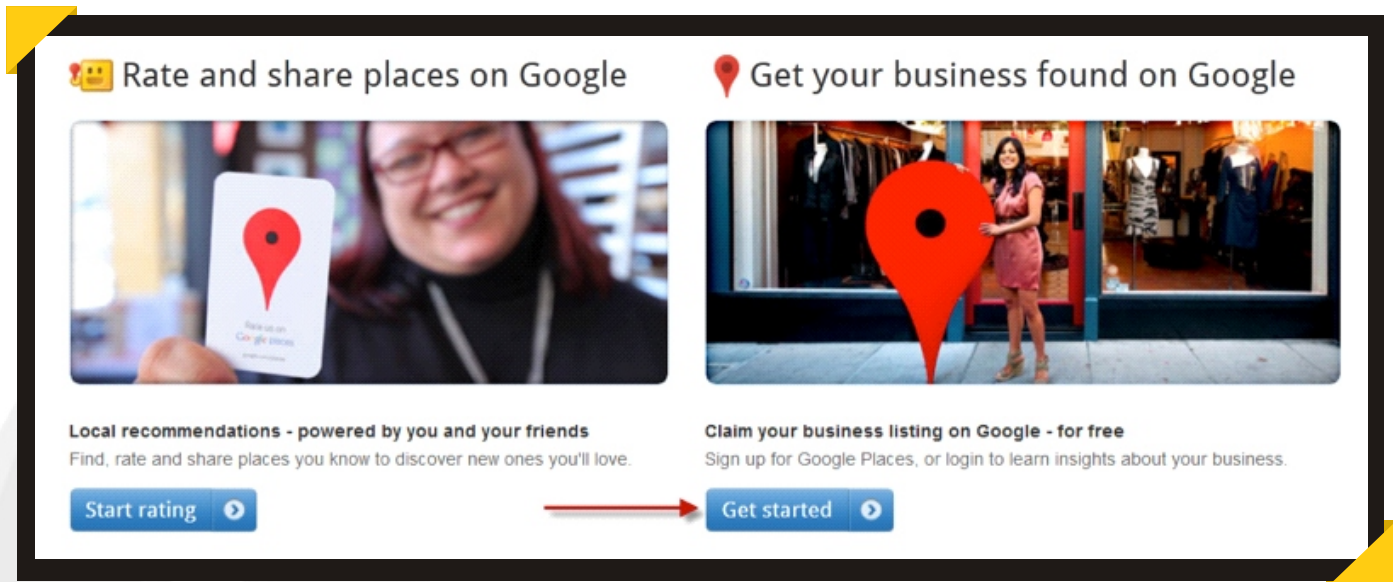
Let's get started!

# Google Places Optimization

The first essential task to optimizing your business for local SEO is to set up your Google Places listing. As Google Places is Google's most trusted source of business data, it's essential that you get this piece of the puzzle right.

To create your Google Places listing, log in to your Google Account and navigate to <http://www.google.com/places>. Keep in mind that your listing will be tied to the Google Account you log in with, so if you anticipate leaving your current organization at any point, use a business account and not your personal email address.

From the screen that appears, select “Get started” under “Get your business found on Google”:



In the next screen, you'll be prompted to enter your business telephone number. Once you've entered this information, Google will search to see if it has any existing information on file for your business in order to streamline the listing process.

The image shows a Google Places sign-up form. At the top, it says "Enter your business's main phone number to see if Google Maps already has some information about your business. You'll then be able to edit any existing information and add new details, including photos and videos. [About Google Places](#)". Below this, there is a "Country" dropdown menu set to "United States" and a "Phone Number" input field with a placeholder "ex: (201) 234-5678". To the right of the phone number field is a button that says "Find business information »". At the bottom, there is a "Tip: Have more than 10 business listings?" section with the text "Add them quickly by using [bulk upload](#)."

Also, note that this screen offers you the option of bulk uploading your listings if you have more than one location. Even if you have several different locations, be aware that it's best to enter each of them manually, as bulk uploads may accidentally be tagged as spam.

Once you've entered your phone number and clicked on the “Find business information” button, a screen will appear allowing you to enter relevant details about your business:

The screenshot shows a web form titled "Basic Information" with a light blue header. Below the header, a note states: "Please note that changing your address or business name will require additional verification via mail or phone." A section titled "\* Required Fields" follows. The form contains several input fields: "Country:" with a dropdown menu showing "United States"; "Company/Organization:" with a text box; "Street Address:" with a text box; "City/Town:" with a text box; "State:" with a dropdown menu showing "Select state"; "ZIP:" with a text box and a small icon; "Main phone:" with a text box and an example "(201) 234-5678" and a link "Add more phone numbers"; "Email address:" with a text box and an example "myname@example.com"; and "Website:" with a text box and an example "http://www.example.com". At the bottom, there is a checkbox labeled "I don't have a website."

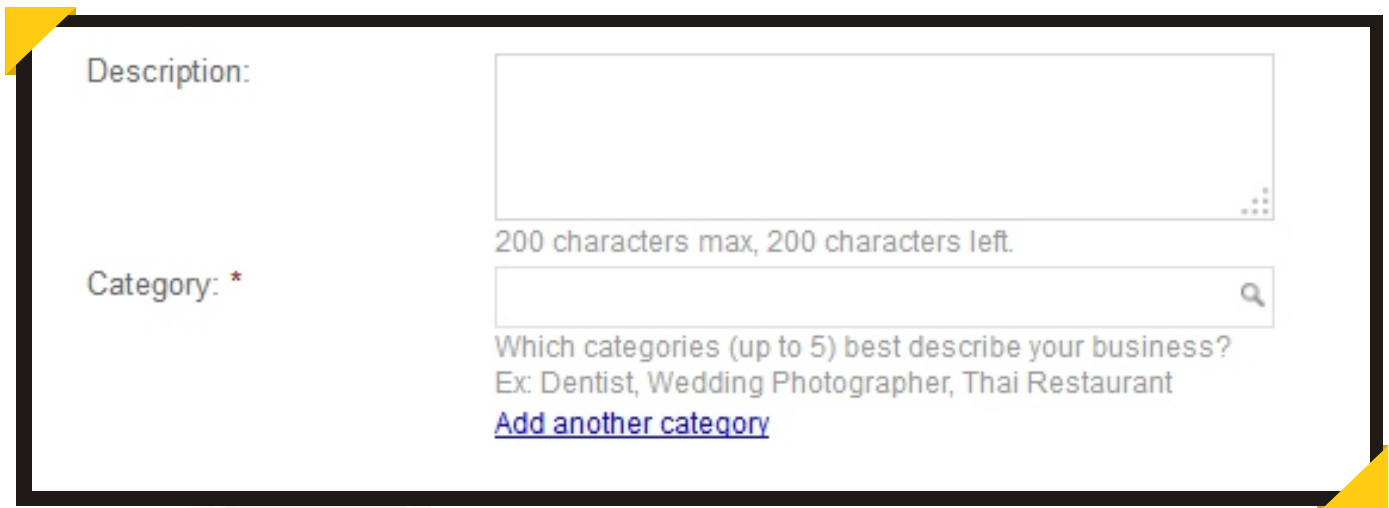
The first few fields in this screen are pretty self-explanatory, although there are a few things you'll want to keep in mind:

- First, you must have a physical location in the region that you are trying to get ranked. Both having an address within the city being searched for and the distance from the centroid (as determined by Google Places) are considered to be ranking factors by Google's Local SEO algorithm.
- The phone number listed in the listing should have the area code of the city you are in. This is another indicator of proximity that's used in the local ranking algorithms.



- Minimize keyword usage in business title (1 or 2 instances only). Include keywords only if they are a part of your actual business name, as incorporating traditional SEO keywords into your Google Places business name listing can lead to data provider mis-matches.
- In the “Website” field, enter your “Contact” or “Location” page as your Google Places landing page URL. Because these pages typically have stronger geographic signals, they may improve your rankings and lead to higher conversions among searchers who see your listing.

In the next two sections of the Google Places business listing form, you have a little more flexibility in terms of targeting the specific local keywords you want your business to rank for:



The screenshot shows a portion of the Google Places business listing form. It features two main sections: 'Description' and 'Category'. The 'Description' section has a text input field with a character count '200 characters max, 200 characters left'. The 'Category' section has a dropdown menu with a magnifying glass icon, followed by instructional text: 'Which categories (up to 5) best describe your business? Ex: Dentist, Wedding Photographer, Thai Restaurant' and a link 'Add another category'.

In the “Description” section, provide a concise description of your business's main services, incorporating various keywords wherever possible.

In the category section, use all five of the provided category fields by entering both standard business categories and any custom categories needed to fully explain the breadth of your service offerings.

The next three sections of the form - “Service Areas and Location Settings,” “Hours of operations” and “Payment options” - are fairly self-explanatory. Enter this data if appropriate, but be aware that it has very little impact on your SERPs rankings.

The final sections of the Google Places listing form - which includes “Photos,” “Videos” and “Additional Details” - give you a few extra options to enhance your local listing. Pay special attention to these areas, as they have the potential to improve your local SEO rankings and make your listing more appealing to local readers.

### ▼ Photos

Add flair to your listing: include photos of your products or your storefront. You can upload up to 10 photos. Please be sure they comply with our [photo submission guidelines](#).

☒ Add a photo from your computer

Browse...

Add Photo

Click "Browse..." to choose a file from your computer.

☐ Add a photo from the web

You have uploaded **0** of up to **10** images for this listing.

### ▼ Videos

Enhance your listing by associating videos about your business. To do so, upload your video on [YouTube](#) and enter the URL below. You can include up to 5 videos.

Add Video

Example: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=dFtfv1JdXI>

Here's what you need to do:

- Use all 10 image spots provided by uploading a number of high quality images to your listing.
- Link to your Youtube account under "Video" section (as Youtube is a Google product, linking these two accounts can be especially powerful).
- Fill out as many of the forms as you can, with as much detail as possible. Every detail you add to your listing through the "Description" tag makes your listing more useful to searchers and the search engines.

Once you've filled out all of these fields, hit "Submit" and your listing will be filed with Google Places. Depending on whether you're entering new information or changing an existing listing, a manual review of your proposed listing may be required. If this is the case for your business, a Google representative will be in touch with you regarding next steps.

Beyond simply submitting your local business information to Google Places, there are a number of other optimization efforts you'll want to undertake in order to maximize your presence in the local SERPs.

In the introduction, we talked about the concept of “Prominence” and how important it is (and will likely be in the future) to getting your business noticed online. Now, it's time to get in to the different factors we can influence that lead to a prominent web presence...

The first of these factors is “citations” aka, the presence of your basic business data across multiple types of websites online. The key components of local citations include your business's name, address and phone number (commonly referred to by the acronym “NAP”). You'll want to include this information on many different websites, being sure to keep the structure of each listing the same so that it counts towards your overall prominence rating.

The following are all of the different places you'll want to submit your NAP data to in order to achieve maximum exposure:

## Data Providers

- a [Localeze](#)
- b [Universal Business Listing](#)
- c [Info USA](#)

## Local Business Directories

- [Yellowpages.com](#)
- [Superpages.com](#)
- [Getfave.com](#)
- [Hotfrog.com](#)
- [Local.botw.org](#)
- [Yelp.com](#)
- [Citysearch.com](#)
- [Insiderpages.com](#)
- [Cityvoter.com](#)
- [Judysbook.com](#)
- [Kuzu.com](#)
- [Shopincites.com](#)

But don't stop there... In addition to these standard business listing directories, you'll want to spend some time identifying additional listing opportunities that may be specific to your industry or geographic area. There are two techniques you'll want to use to find these opportunities:

- 4 Run your competitors' websites through this tool <http://www.whitespark.ca/local-citation-finder/> to find any listing opportunities they're using to promote their businesses. Pay special attention to any mentions of high authority/high trust websites, including any of the following options:
  - a Local organizations and non-profits that include business listings
  - b Chambers of Commerce and related organizations
  - c Relevant .gov & .edu links
  - d BBB and related consumer resource websites
- 5 In addition, enter the following search term combinations into both Google and Bing to uncover any remaining directories you may be eligible to list your business in:
  - "yourcity, yourstate directory"
  - "yourindustry, yourstate directory"
  - "Yourindustry yourstate directory"

As you build up your listing profile across these various resources, consider linking back to your citations from within your own Google Places landing page. Doing so will increase the likelihood that these listings will be indexed by the search engines and improves your chances of acquiring multiple indented listings within the SERPs.

# Traditional SEO for Local Pages

Although local SEO includes plenty of additional factors beyond those associated with traditional SEO, that doesn't mean you're off the hook entirely when it comes to catering to traditional ranking algorithms!

Instead, it's still important to consider traditional SEO factors when optimizing your website for local search results, although the specific factors you'll need to address will be somewhat different. The following primer will give you an overview of the actions you'll want to take on your local business website in order to increase your chances of getting ranked in both the traditional and local SERPs.

## On-Page Factors

On-page SEO refers to the specific activities you carry out within your web pages in order to improve your rankings within the search engines. For example, optimizing your meta tags, creating internal links and optimizing your website content all fall under the umbrella of “on-page SEO”. A full discussion of on-page SEO best practices falls beyond the scope of this report, but the following recommendations should give you a place to get started when optimizing your business pages for local SEO:

- As mentioned previously, be sure to link out to any industry citations you create on the same page that you used for your Google Places landing page URL.
- Consider including a “Testimonials” page on your site that contains text from some of your top reviews and links out to each of your business’s review site profiles.
- Make sure that your NAP details are “crawlable” – that is, that they’re able to be read effectively by search engine spiders. In most cases, this means coding your NAP content into the HTML of your home page and contact/location page, rather than including them in images or script files.
- Optimize your contact/locations page to include the following information:
  - Add the city and state of your business to your meta title tag.
  - Make sure that the title tag of this page includes the same business title you used in your Google Places listing.
- Create at least one internal link that uses the address of your business as the anchor text to link to your contact/locations page.



## External Factors


The second important element you'll want to consider when carrying out traditional SEO work is external SEO essentially, all the actions you perform on other peoples' websites in order to benefit your own pages. Far and away, the biggest external SEO factor is the quantity and quality of backlinks you build pointing back to your website a task that's just as important for local SEO as it is for traditional optimization. Keep the following pointers in mind when conducting external SEO on your business website:

- When building backlinks to your website, focus on obtaining links from sites within your geographic area. These geo-relevant links have the potential to increase the “prominence” of your local SEO profile.
- Consider optimizing the anchor text of these links to incorporate any of the following variables:
  - Specific geographic phrases from your area
  - Descriptions of your products or services
  - Your Google Places business title (this is even better if it can be found in the page title tag of the referring site)

Although these efforts are important, they should only be attended to after your Google Places set up and citation listing campaigns are completed. While traditional SEO activities do have the potential to improve your local SEO, they aren't nearly as strong a ranking factor as the other elements described earlier in this report.


# Customer Reviews


Customer reviews play a major role in local SEO - and for good reason! Imagine, for a second, that you're Google. You want people to use your service to search for local businesses, because the more people that use your service, the more money you stand to earn in advertising revenue.



**1. Gary Danko**  
Category: American (New)  
Neighborhood: Fisherman's Wharf


★★★★★ 2887 reviews  
800 N Point St  
San Francisco, CA 94109  
(415) 749-2060


 and detracting somewhat from the experience. While you'll be hard-pressed to find a better dining experience, Gary Danko does not have that bang-for-your-buck factor that many other outstanding SF **restaurants** boast. I



**2. Kokkari Estiatorio**  
Categories: Greek, Mediterranean  
Neighborhood: Financial District


★★★★★ 1850 reviews  
200 Jackson St  
San Francisco, CA 94111  
(415) 981-0983

 the other reviews didn't say, but i guess i just expected better service at such a **restaurant**. in the end, it's still easily one of the best, if not the best greek **restaurant** i've ever been to.



**3. The House**  
Categories: Asian Fusion, American (New)  
Neighborhood: North Beach/Telegraph Hill

★★★★★ 2027 reviews  
1230 Grant Ave  
San Francisco, CA 94133  
(415) 986-8612

 HANDS down my FAVORITE **restaurant** in SF. This is what I recommend to all my friends when they ask me where to eat in SF. Reservation is a must, it is a rather small **restaurant** and they don't often take walk-ins

In order to get people to use your service, you need to ensure that you provide the best possible search results for local queries.

After all, if a user searches for local restaurants on Google and has a bad experience at the business that's listed first in the SERP, how likely do you think that user is to come back and use your search tools again? And when you consider that this user could then go on to tell his or her friends about the bad experience, it's easy to see why prioritizing the best results in the local SERPs is important to the search engines!

However, if you're Google, you can't simply go to each business to determine which ones are better than others - instead, you need to rely on specific signals to filter the good businesses from the bad businesses.

The presence and quality of customer reviews is one such signal that's especially appealing to the search engines. Customer reviews typically exist outside of the control of business owners (compared to most other traditional or local SEO ranking factors), and although they can potentially be gamed, they're also just as likely to provide the kind of unbiased information the search engines favor.

So what does this mean for you as a business owner? Essentially, you'll need to do two separate things to harness the power of customer reviews:

## Motivate people to leave reviews for your business

Most customers are happy to give you their feedback, but they need to be prompted to do so! Consider any of the following strategies in order to encourage your customers to leave feedback about your business online:

- Offer free wifi at your business so that consumers can access review sites from their mobile phones.
- Display comment cards prominently and encourage customers to use them.
- Mention your comment campaigns within any email marketing communications you send out.
- Create incentives for customers to leave reviews, including discounts or coupon codes for future purchases.
- Consider how easy it is for a customer to write a review on different review sites and encourage users to leave comments on those sites they can most easily access.

## Monitor and respond to negative reviews

Whether due to truly bad experiences or malicious reviewers, chances are your business will receive at least a few negative reviews. Fortunately, though, most review sites offer business opportunities to respond to negative reviews, so make it a priority to monitor review sites for negative feedback and have a plan for how you'll respond to any negative allegations that come up.

Of course, when it comes to getting positive customer reviews, there's one thing you can do to practically guarantee your success in these efforts - offer an astonishingly good product or an astonishingly good service.

This is "Business 101", but when you go out of your way to provide customers with great products and services at reasonable rates, you won't have to encourage your users to leave reviews - they'll want to do so themselves in order to share their experiences with others. There's really no better way to guarantee glowing reviews than to give your customers a reason to be happy with your business!

Customer reviews play an important role in local SEO, as they contribute to the search engines' understanding of a business, as well increase its prominence compared to other local businesses in the same geographic area.

But since local SEO rankings obviously aren't determined by a single factor alone, what other criteria can you think of that share the same type of data? In fact, customer reviews aren't the only digital way consumers interact with local businesses. They may also check in on Foursquare, visit your company's Facebook page or even add your location to their "MyMaps" with Google Places.

These interactions can be referred to as "geo-social media" activities, as they combine traditional social media engagement with defined geographic places. As a local business owner, you'll want to take advantage of all of the following opportunities to maximize your geo-social media presence (and, consequently, your local SEO rankings):

## Claim and maintain your location on all check-in channels

Each of the most commonly used geo-social media sites enables business owners to "claim" their place of business and interact with the users who check in or tag information about your company on these profiles. Be sure to set up and actively maintain your business profile on all of the following networks. You can also enhance your activity within these accounts by submitting geo-tagged photos and videos to your profiles.



- Foursquare
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Yelp
- Panoramio
- Flickr
- Youtube

## Create a “MyMap” featuring your business

Besides its Place listings, Google also allows users to create their own maps of their favorite places. As you might expect, the more times your business is mentioned on MyMaps, the more likely you are to rank well within local SERPs. Consider taking all of the following actions to maximize your presence on this service:

- Using the login for your Google Places account, create a [MyMap](#) pin.
- Add a pushpin for your business location to this map, along with your contact information.
- Embed the MyMap you created on your website in order to increase page views and encourage website visitors to add your business to their own maps.
- Find other MyMaps in your region and contact the owners to see if they’ll be willing to add your business.

Finally, keep in mind that although the recommended actions described in this report represent a good starting point for optimizing your business website for local SEO, this is only the beginning. If you operate in a highly competitive industry, you'll likely need to take more advanced actions in order to beat the companies that are currently holding the top spots in the local SERPs.

In addition, remember that the local SEO algorithm is constantly evolving as the search engines pick up on new criteria to use when evaluating which sites should be listed first in the SERPs. New technologies - such as Apple's SIRI mobile voice recognition platform - also have the ability to influence how people interact with your company's information online, which is why it's so important to stay up-to-date on changes within the industry.

When you're proactive about managing your company's digital footprint and adapting quickly to new technologies, you'll increase your chances of ranking highly in the local SERPs and attracting a flood of new visitors back to your business website.

By implementing all of the advice listed here, you'll be setting your site up to receive the best possible advantage in the search engines. However, it's also important to remember that search engine optimization is an always-evolving field. As we've seen with the recent Google Panda update, industry standards and best practices can change overnight, which makes investing time in staying up-to-date on developments a smart move.

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