

V2.1

SEO SECRETS

The DIY guide to topping google



GLENN MURRAY

divine *write*

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Introduction

If you're like most people, the term "search engine optimization" will mean very little. Either that or it just means expense! But it doesn't have to be that way...

If you feel like you're standing in a dark room handing money to strangers to get you in the search engines, then this e-book is written just for you.

This e-book is written by a business owner for other business owners, CEOs, marketing practitioners, and webmasters. It explains Search Engine Optimization (or SEO) in layperson's terms. It won't make you an expert, but it will give you some insight into what you should be spending your money on, and just as importantly, what you shouldn't.

The book is structured like a procedure – a series of steps to get you from where you are now to where you want to be: ranking high. Although you don't always have to perform the steps in the order that I've written them in, doing so worked for me, so I reckon it'll work for you too.

As you work your way through this e-Book, refer to the Glossary (on p.175) if you're unsure of a particular term, or the Bibliography (on p.186) if you're reading offline and you want to investigate things a little further on your own.

If you have any suggestions or feedback, or would like to be notified of future updates to this book, please email me at glenn@divinewrite.com. You can also [connect with me on Twitter](#).

About the author

I'm a specialist SEO copywriter. I specialize in writing web copy that will help increase a website's search engine ranking (while also remaining engaging and compelling to readers).

I rank no.1 in the world for most of my important keywords (on google.com.au).

Keyword	Google.com.au worldwide rank
copywriter	No. 1
SEO copywriter	No. 1
website copywriter	No. 1
advertising copywriting	No. 1 & 2
website copywriting	No. 1
copywriting	No. 2
internet copywriter	No. 5
copywriting forum	No. 5

I've also achieved a page 1 worldwide ranking on google.com.au for my second site, www.articlepr.com for its most important keywords: "article pr" and "article submission".

Based just north of Sydney, Australia, I've been a **copywriter for 7 years** and was a **technical writer for 9 years** before that. Numbered among my clients are some of the world's leading companies including Toyota, IBM, Virgin, Telstra, Honeywell, Kimberley-Clark, Safe-n-Sound, Doubleday, the Australian Government, Raine & Horne, PMP Limited, Volante, Reckon and MYOB.

I have a **Bachelor of Arts** in Linguistics and English Literature, and a **Master of Arts** in International Communication.

I'm also a lucky husband and a very proud father of three.



Thanks

Thanks to [David Harry](#), [Bill Slawski](#), [Ben McKay](#), [Fred Schebesta](#), [Rob Adelman](#) and [Daniel Benton](#) for your invaluable technical feedback on V2.0 of this book. If readers like this latest version, I have you to thank. Thanks also to [Patricia Skinner](#), [James Murray](#), [Paul Cunningham](#) and [Clare Lancaster](#) for your support. To [Darren Rowse](#) for your blogging advice and generous spirit. To [Ian Butler](#) for your design. To my affiliates for helping me sell the book. And to all [my Twitter friends](#) who've answered questions and offered valuable advice. You know who you are.

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Step 1

Understand what SEO means

Before launching into an explanation of SEO, let's talk a bit about search engines. I'll assume you know what search engines are, and what they're used for, and start, instead, with some facts that illustrate why they're so important.

Why are search engines so important?

- The Internet is the world's second most commonly used medium after television (Internet Statistics Compendium, 2006)
- Approximately 1.5 billion people use the Internet, worldwide (Internet World Stats, 2008)
- That's a massive 305% increase since 2000! And still it's only 21.9% of the world's population (Internet World Stats)
- 93% of users worldwide use search engines to find websites (Forrester Research)
- 66% of online Americans have purchased a product online (Pew Internet)
- Search engines are the way most people (85%) find new sites, and the way most businesses find new sources for products and services (Direct Marketing Association)
- Roughly 750 million people worldwide over the age 15 conducted a search on the Internet in August 2007 (comScore)
- About 15% of traffic on brand names is landing at competitor, affiliate or 'other' websites in US and AU markets where trademark restrictions are not strictly enforced (Hitwise)

What's the difference between organic search results and paid listings?

Most search engines, these days, return two types of results whenever you click Search:

- **Natural/Organic** – The ‘real’ search results (often called ‘SERPs’ for Search Engine Results Pages). The results that most users are looking for. When we talk about search engine ranking, these are the results we’re talking about. The order of these results is determined by how relevant each is to the searcher’s query. Important: You can’t pay a search engine to give you a high ranking in the natural results. You can only get a high ranking if your content is seen as relevant and important by the search engines.
- **Paid** – Pure advertising. This is how the search engines make their money. Advertisers pay the search engines to display their ad whenever someone searches for a word that is related to their product or service. These ads look similar to the natural search results, but are normally labeled “Sponsored Links”, and normally take up a smaller portion of the window. The order of these results is determined mostly by how much each advertiser is prepared to pay. (This e-book does not cover “Sponsored Links” in any detail.)

When people use search engines, they normally pay a lot more attention to the natural results than the paid results because they know these results are more relevant (and they know the “Sponsored Links” are simply ads).

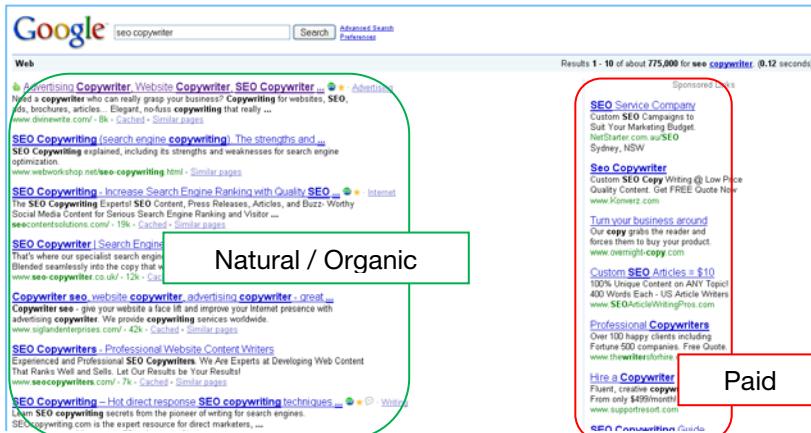


Figure 1 – Natural / organic search results v paid ads

Which is more effective?

For most industries, the natural results are significantly more effective:

- 89% of people *click on* the no.1 result, 33% on no.2, 17% on no.4, 17% on no.5, 6% on no.7 and 0% on no.8 (Microsoft Eye-Tracking Study of informational searches)
- 94% of people *see* the no.1 result, 94% see no.2 (Microsoft Eye-Tracking Study of informational searches)
- Only 50% *see* the no.1 *paid listing* (PPC/paid ads) and only 40% see the no.2 paid listing (Eye-tracking Study, Enquiero, Did-it and Eyetools, 2005)
- Organic results get clicked 8½ times as often as paid listings – *excluding* search results that have no paid ads (Enquisite 2008)

How do search engines work?

Search engine companies like Google and Yahoo are all about finding content that will bring them more traffic (and thus more ad revenue). In other words, their results must be relevant and high quality. In the words of Nathan Buggia of Microsoft Live Search: “Our whole role in life is to find the best content on the web and bring it together with people who are looking for that content. And to do that, we’ve invented a couple of algorithms to figure out what people think is good content.” (SMX East Search Marketing Conference, New York City, October 2008)

Here’s a simplistic explanation of how search engines work:

1. **Crawl** - They send out ‘bots’ (aka ‘spiders’ or ‘robots’) that crawl your pages and send back details for processing.
2. **Index** – They then use really complex mathematical algorithms to deduce the subject matter of your site from frequently used words and the text on links to, from, and within your site. This tells them which searches your pages are relevant to.
3. **Rank** – They consider some 200 factors when ranking, but the most important – of those that you can actually manipulate – is the number of external links pointing to your site, where those links come from, and what anchor text is used in those links. If there are lots of links pointing to your site, all from quality sites, and all with relevant words in their anchor text, you’re likely to rank well. The logic is that if all those webmasters are willing to link to you and they’ve used a variety of relevant words in their links (i.e. they’re not automated links), your site must be relevant and important.

Note that the age of your site and the consistency of your subject matter over time also impact your ranking; they build site authority. Obviously site age can’t be controlled, and I’m assuming your subject matter will remain consistent, so I don’t focus on either in this book.

So what is SEO?

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. It's the art of increasing your site's natural search engine ranking, so that you rank high in the right searches. And remember, being ranked number 1 when you search for your company name or web address doesn't count. You need to rank for the words your target customers use at search engines. So you need to:

1. **Tell the search engines what your site is about**, so they know what searches it's relevant to. This is called 'on-page optimization'. You make your site search-friendly so the bots can crawl it, and you use the right keywords in your content and code (e.g. HTML). By itself, this usually won't increase your ranking much, but it's a necessary first step.
2. **Prove to the search engines that your site is important in its field** (i.e. will likely be helpful to searchers). Embark on an ongoing campaign to increase the number of links pointing to your site (aka "backlinks" or "inbound links"). Of course, not all links are equal; see 'Create great web content' on p.102 for more information on the best kinds of links.

For more information...

- on **choosing** keywords, see 'Choose your keywords' on p.19.
- on **optimizing your web development**, see 'Develop your website right' on p.27.
- on **optimizing your web content**, see 'Optimize your web content' on p.111.
- on **building backlinks**, see 'Generate 'buzz' about your content with Social Media' on p.123.

How long will it take for SEO to increase my ranking?

There are no guarantees in SEO. It all takes time. If your site is new, it'll probably take some time for the search bots to even get there to crawl it. (You can speed this process up by getting a link from a high ranked site.) In fact, because they don't crawl it all at once, it can actually take some time for them to get through the whole thing. And even once they've crawled a page, it can take a while before it's indexed. And then it has to be ranked, which takes yet more time.

To avoid disappointment, expect everything to take months. Not days and not weeks. It typically takes months for a new site to make it into the Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs), and months for any site to see any increase in rankings. It can happen faster, but it usually doesn't.

SEO is an ongoing (often tedious) task. You need to be dedicated and systematic. In other words, you need a strategy. Take a look at the advice offered in this book, to see what suits you best. Then put your thinking cap on and get creative. It's a new and very exciting field; there are undoubtedly many undiscovered ways to build links.

Chapter summary

- People pay more attention to the natural results than the paid listings in search engines.
- You can't pay for a high search ranking.
- Search engines try to make their results as useful as possible. This is how they keep users coming back (and how they make their revenue).
- To a search engine, a site is considered useful if a lot of other sites link to it. This implies it is well regarded in its field.
- Some links are better than others.
- The best links come from relevant, important sites, they include your keywords, they come from pages with few links, and they point to pages deep within your site structure.

- If you have a search engine-friendly site with a lot of the right keywords, used in real sentences, distributed realistically throughout, and a lot of the right sort of backlinks, you stand a good chance of being ranked highly.
- It takes quite a while to increase your ranking. And there are no time guarantees.

Step 2

Choose your keywords

Stop! Before you do anything, you need to know what words you want to rank for. And that means finding out what words your target customers are Googling when they're looking for products or services like yours.

These are your 'keywords'. Only when you know them, can you target them. (That's a fancy word that means use them frequently, and in the right places, on your website, and hopefully get them in some links to your site.)

What is keyword analysis?

The process of uncovering the words your target customers are Googling is called 'keyword analysis' or 'keyword research'.

There are quite a few reliable keyword analysis tools out there. You enter a term that you think your target visitors are Googling, and they tell you how many people are actually Googling that term. They use real search data – usually from the previous one or two months.

You want relevant words and phrases that heaps of people are searching for. Obviously it'll be easier to rank well for keywords that relatively few other sites are targeting, though, and some of these tools will help you there too.

Keyword analysis tools

Everyone has their favorites, and you'll quickly identify yours. I like three: WordTracker, Google Search-Based Keyword Tool, and Google Insights. WordTracker makes great keyword suggestions, but the Google tools are free and easier to use. Also, I have my doubts about WordTracker's accuracy. So I use WordTracker to make sure I'm not missing important words, and I rely on the Google tools for the actual analysis.

Have a play and see what you think.

Table 1 - Comparison of three of the main keyword analysis tools

Tool	Cost / yr (USD\$)	Pros	Cons	Main Features
Google Search-Based Keyword Tool	Free	Fast Usable Accurate (actual Google data)	No KEI* No lateral suggestions	Enter your page URL & likely keywords & it lists all searches from the last month that include your keywords Details number of searches & indicates competition Suggests related searches
		Holistic – links your site to keywords to your actual ranking		Click the keyword to see your rank for it Click the magnifying glass to see search trends for that keyword
				Save shortlisted keywords to draft for easier comparison

Tool	Cost / yr (USD\$)	Pros	Cons	Main Features
Google Insights	Free	<p>Fast</p> <p>Very simple to use</p> <p>Accurate (actual Google data)</p> <p>Graphs search trends</p>	<p>Doesn't list actual search numbers – uses a normalized scale of 0-100</p>	<p>Type your keyword and it displays a long term trend of search popularity</p> <p>Visually compare multiple keywords</p> <p>See up-and-coming searches and maps search hotspots</p> <p>Geotargeting – analyze by country and state</p> <p>Reports on a simplified list of related searches</p>
WordTracker	\$329.00	<p>Lateral suggestions</p> <p>KEI</p> <p>Free trial</p>	<p>Accuracy[^]</p> <p>Cost</p>	<p>Enter a possible keyword & it returns the number of searches for that term in the last two months</p> <p>See how many other websites are targeting that keyword</p> <p>See KEI = difficulty to rank for each term</p> <p>See related searches (including lateral suggestions = very creative)</p> <p>Shortlist & compare keywords</p>

* KEI = Keyword Effectiveness Index. It's a ratio of the number of searches to the number of competing sites. It tells you how difficult a keyword will be to dominate.

^ WordTracker gets its data from a secondary (or 'meta') search engine, Dogpile, that pulls results from Google, Yahoo, etc.

Keyword analysis complexities

You'll find these tools very helpful and very powerful. They'll give you a great insight into what people are searching for. But they won't tell you everything. Ultimately, they just provide the raw data. Once you've uncovered that raw data, you need to analyze it to make some decisions.

And this is trickier than it sounds. You'll need to apply all of your knowledge of your business, the benefits you offer your customers, and how *prospective* customers think and talk about your products and services (which may be entirely different from how *actual* customers think and talk, and is almost *guaranteed* to be different from how people in the industry think and talk). You also need to have a good understanding of what your competitors are doing, and why.

And finally, always remember that search engines don't read as humans do. They're nowhere near that smart. So sometimes you have to make allowances for them.

Following is a rundown of some issues that quite often have people tearing their hair out.

Searcher intent

When you're considering the merits of a particular keyword, you also need to carefully consider the *intent* of people searching for it. It's not enough that a word is relevant; it also has to be a word that someone would use when they're ready (or not far off ready) to buy your product, engage your service, subscribe to your mailing list, or do whatever it is that you want them to do.

I'll use my own copywriting website as an example. "Copywriting" is more popular than "copywriter", but I didn't choose it because I know people Google it when they're looking for copywriting jobs, copywriting advice, copywriting tips, copywriting articles, etc. When people want to engage the services of a copywriter, they usually Google "copywriter."

Can't I just use Google Analytics?

No. Google Analytics will tell you what searches brought your current visitors to your site. It won't tell you anything about your *target* visitors. E.g. Let's say you run a cinema website and the majority of your visitors arrived after Googling "movies". That doesn't mean you should necessarily target "movies". What if 10 times that many customers are finding a competing cinema after Googling "cinema"?

Single keyword or keyword phrase?

If you're a niche business, target niche keyword *phrases*, not single keywords. Include extra detail, points of difference or your location. For example:

- "cheap second hand computers" instead of "computers"
- "small business income tax accountant Sydney" instead of "accountant Sydney"
- "thai restaurant delivery Highland Park" instead of "restaurant"
- "small blue widgets" instead of "widgets"

Why? Because:

1. The more specific the keyword, the fewer websites there will be targeting it. This means you'll move up the rankings faster, and you'll find it easier to achieve a high ranking.

2. The search results for the more generic keywords tend to be dominated by the big multinationals.
Search for “computers” and you’ll see there are around 955 million results and the top rankings are dominated by the big authority sites, like Wikipedia, Computer.org, Apple, etc.
3. Searchers know they’ll find what they want faster, if they’re specific. According to OneStat.com, 58.93% of people search for either a 2-word phrase or a 3 word phrase.
4. Most people Google generic keywords when they’re researching a purchase and specific keywords when they’re ready to buy. So by targeting a more specific keyword, you’ll attract more qualified traffic.

Of course, if you need to target hotly contested generic keywords, go ahead. But I’d still recommend starting out with a niche phrase that includes your generic term. E.g. It won’t take you long to rank for “small business income tax accountant Sydney”, and this will generate income while you’re waiting for your link profile and site authority to grow enough to rank for “accountant Sydney”.

Plural or singular?

The simplest answer is to look at what the majority of your target visitors are Googling, and go for that.

But if searches are equally split, think about intent. Maybe people Google “tennis shoe” when they’re deciding whether to buy a tennis shoe or a running shoe. And maybe they Google “tennis shoes” when they’re ready to buy a pair online. As an online shoe shop, you’d choose “tennis shoes”. As a shoe manufacturer, you’d choose “tennis shoe”.

Still no closer to a decision? Consider the number of competing sites. If you sell televisions, you’d be better off targeting “TVs” than “TV”, because then you’re not competing against all the TV stations and TV guides.

If even that doesn’t help (i.e. there’s no statistical, semantic or competitive reason to choose one over the other), then just choose whichever one is easiest to optimize for. Or go with both (that would certainly be the easiest to implement).

Google’s smart enough to index you for both if there’s no good reason not to.

Split, merged and hyphenated words

“Copywriter”, “copy writer” or “copy-writer”? Google knows they’re different words so, as always, go with whatever version your target visitors are Googling most.

If there’s no clear distinction, again, consider intent and competition. Failing that, just choose whatever’s easy to optimize for. Google’s smart enough to know that they all refer to the same animal. Search for “copy-writer” and you’ll find plenty of results that contain only “copywriter”. (In fact, Google bolds “copywriter” even when you search for “copy-writer” or “copy writer”.)

Related words

All the important search engines use a thesaurus when analyzing your site’s content. Once they identify what your target keywords are, they then check to see if the rest of your content is related to those keywords.

(Actually, they use a fancy name for it: “latent semantic indexing (LSI)”, and it’s a lot more complicated than I’ve indicated here. But if you think of it as a thesaurus, you’ll be just fine.)

For example, a naturally evolved site about tennis shoes wouldn’t just contain “tennis” and “shoes”. It would also contain words like “footwear”, “sole”, “foot”, “feet”, “upper”, “inner” and “surface”. And probably “grass”, “clay” and “court”. Possibly even “racquet”, “basketball” or “running”.

If it does, the search engines will deduce that it’s very relevant to people who’re searching for “tennis shoes” (and that it’s less likely to be a cheap spam site that’s just stuffed full of the single term “tennis shoes”).

Of course, the corollary of this logic is that if your site has evolved naturally and is actually useful, you won’t need to worry about these issues too much.

Bang for buck

According to a [ClickZ study](#), most people who make it to your site will have searched for one of a very small sub-set of words. They say that “just 4 percent of all unique search queries made up more than half of all site

searches.” So, don’t try and be all things to all people. Pick the words that you think will deliver the most traffic, and – at least in the beginning – focus on them exclusively.

Target your suburb or city name for local traffic

If local search traffic is important to your business, you should also target your suburb or city.

A note on WordTracker's KEI

WordTracker's KEI is helpful, but don't base your decision on it alone. A keyword with a good KEI might be completely irrelevant or offer such low traffic that its ROI would be terrible. And one with a bad KEI might be highly relevant with great potential ROI. Indeed, it might be your only sensible choice. Glean whatever value you can from the numbers, then use your discretion.

Chapter summary

- Find out what words your customers are searching.
- Don't base your decision purely on statistics.
- Consider searcher intent.
- Use keyword phrases in competitive fields (not single keywords).
- Develop a long term keyword strategy that will increase your ranking for hotly contested single keywords even as you target your keyword phrase.
- Make your decision about singular v plural & hyphenated words based on searchers not search engines.
- Related words enhance your optimization and generally make their way into your copy naturally.
- Focus exclusively on bang for buck in the beginning.
- Target your suburb or city name if local traffic is important.

Step 3

Develop your website right

Search engine bots don't use websites the way you and I do. They need your site to be designed and built in a particular way. If you don't do it right, you can severely hamper your search engine presence.

Development checklist

There are quite a few web development dos and don'ts to remember. Here's a checklist that'll make it all a little easier to grapple with. You'll find further detail on each of these items below.

Do

- Choose the right web host (p.29)
- Use HTML text copy, links & breadcrumb trails (p.30)
- Position your content toward the top of your HTML code (p.32)
- Create lots of content and regularly update your site (p.33)
- Optimize Your HTML Meta-Tags (p.34)
- Use image captions (p.39)
- Cluster pages around keywords (p.39)
- Optimize your internal links (p.40)
- Add Titles to internal links (p.42)

- Link to related sites (p.43)
- Check for broken links (p.43)
- Add a sitemap page (p.42)
- Create a Google sitemap (p.45)
- Use permanent 301 redirects for changed URLs (p.46)
- Create a custom 404 error handling page (p.46)
- Create a robots.txt file (p.48)
- Use subfolders or subdomains – they're both OK (p.49)
- Consider making dynamic URLs to static (p.49)

Do Sparingly or Avoid

- Duplicate content (p.51)
- Flash (p.56)
- AJAX (p.57)
- JavaScript (p.58)

Don't

- Use text within images (p.58)
- Rely too heavily on footer links for navigation (p.59)
- Use empty hyperlinks with deferred hyperlink behavior (p.59)
- Use Silverlight (p.60)
- Use Frames or iFrames (p.60)
- Use spamming techniques (p.61)

TIP: As you work your way through the above do's and don'ts, you may find it useful to occasionally check how the search engine bots see your site. Google recommends you use [Lynx](#). In their words: "If fancy features such as JavaScript, cookies, session IDs, frames, DHTML, or Flash keep you from seeing all of your site in a text browser, then search engine spiders may have trouble crawling your site." ([Google Webmaster Guidelines](#))

Choose the right web host

Google shows different search results to different people, depending on where they're searching from. This is particularly true of shopping-type searches for goods that are likely to be purchased in person (as opposed to online). For example, if you Google "bank" in the US, you'll probably see Bank of America at number 1, whereas if you Google "bank" in Australia, you'll probably see The Commonwealth Bank.

When deciding what sites to display, Google considers where each is hosted. It assumes that Americans will want to see American banks, and that American banks probably host their websites with American web hosts.

Put simply, if you're after visitors from a particular country, choose a web host with servers in that country. And if you're after visitors from a particular city, choose a web host with servers in that city.

For more information...

- on **local search**, see 'Submit your site to the search engines' local business centers' on p.99 and 'Local search' on p.170.

Use HTML text copy, links & breadcrumb trails... and anything else important

Obviously, your copy, links and breadcrumb trails are critical to your visitor. They explain your offering, and help the visitor navigate and stay oriented. So the search engines will want to crawl these elements in order to figure out what your site's about.

As a rule of thumb, search engines have trouble reading anything that's not straight HTML. They can *sometimes* make *some* sense of non-HTML, but they can *always* read HTML. So play it safe. Unless you have a really good reason to do otherwise, make sure that all important copy, all important links – *including your main navigation* – and all breadcrumb trails are straight HTML.

When you view the source code (right-click a web page and select View Source), HTML text should look something like this:

```
<h1>Cheap second hand computers</h1>
<p>Did you know that most second hand computers are retired because of their
software, not because of their hardware?</p>
```

That's a level one heading followed by a paragraph. Simple stuff – just how the search engines like it.

Here's how a typical HTML link looks in the source code:

```
<p>Most computers slow down because they're overloaded with <a
href="http://www.cheapsecondhandcomputers.com/unhealthysoftware.htm">poorly
maintained software</a>. It's generally got nothing to do with the
hardware.</p>
```

The bold bit's the link.

And here's how a typical HTML breadcrumb trail looks in the source code:

```
<p>You are here: <span>Company</span> <span>/</span> <a href="contact.htm" class="active">About Us</a></p>
```

If you saw the resultant copy on a web page, you'd be able to select it with your mouse – letter by letter. As a rule of thumb, if you can't do that, the search engines can't read it.

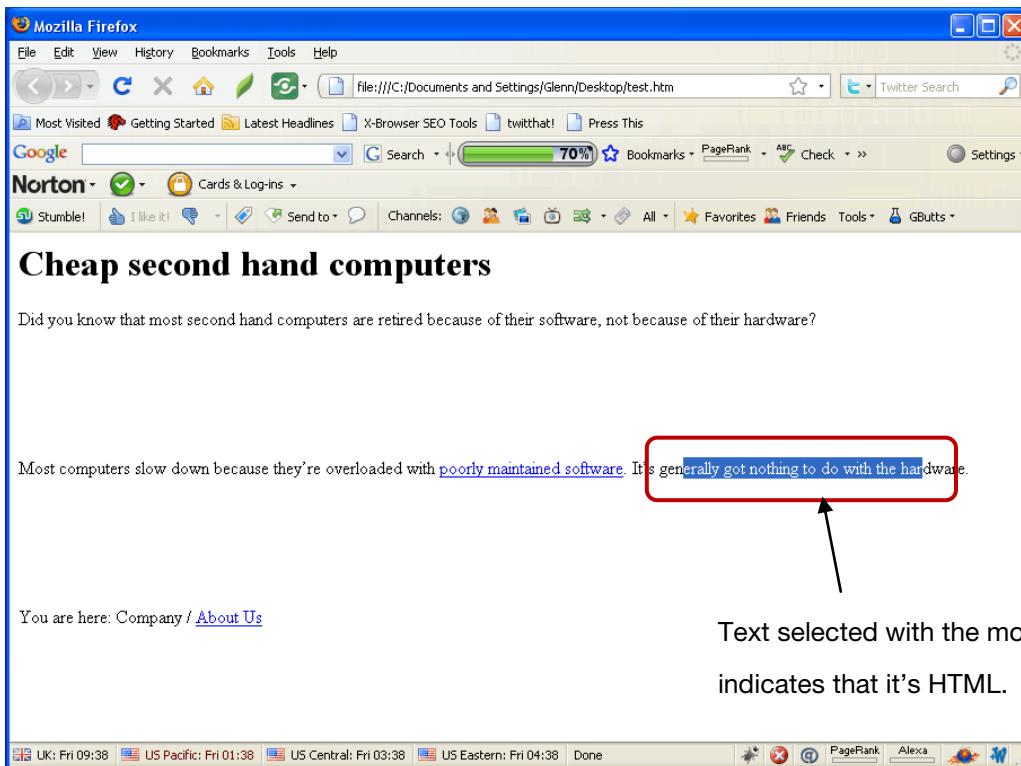


Figure 2 - A web-page created from straight HTML - note the selected text

Of course, that's a broad generalization, but it's a good starting point. In practice, it's a little more complicated than that. In practice, the search engines can read *some* stuff you can't select, and they *can't* read some stuff you can select. But there's no point complicating matters like that unless you have a specific reason to do so.

TIP: You can also view the content without a stylesheet to see more-or-less what the search engines can read – assuming you’re using [FireFox](#) as your browser. Select View > Page Style > No Style.

For more information...

- on **search friendly drop-down/rollover navigation menus**, see ‘Avoid JavaScript’ on p.58.
- on **using Flash**, see ‘Avoid Flash’ on p.56.
- on **using AJAX**, see ‘Be careful with AJAX’ on p.57.
- on **using JavaScript**, see ‘Avoid JavaScript’ on p.58.

Position your content toward the top of your HTML code

When the search engines look at your page, they don’t actually see the display version that you and I read. They read only the HTML behind the page. But they’re like us one key respect; they pay more attention to words at the top. They figure that’s is where the most important words will be.

What’s more, if there are two links on a page to the same target page, Google appears to only take the anchor text of the first into consideration when indexing. (For more information on this, see Rand Fishkin’s blog post, [Results of Google Experimentation - Only the First Anchor Text Counts.](#))

So by placing your content toward the top of the page of code, you ensure that the keywords and links within are properly taken into account when your pages are indexed.

It’s quite common for web developers to code pages such that elements like images, sidebars, JavaScript (including Google Analytics code) and even footers appear above content in the code. (The page still displays

correctly to visitors – just not to the search engines.) This can bury your content 1000 words or more down the page of code.

There's absolutely no reason for this to happen. All of these elements can be coded after your content, especially if your developers are using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), as they should.

Note that by placing your JavaScript toward the bottom of the page of code (e.g. before the </body> tag), you'll make your page load faster for visitors. (They won't have to sit and wait for the code to run before the page displays.) But there's a trade-off. With your Google Analytics code loading late, it may not register all visits because people may leave quickly, closing the page before the Analytics code has finished running.

Create lots of content and regularly update your site

In Google's eyes, it's unlikely that a rarely updated site with minimal content is going to be helpful to visitors. It and the other search engines like to see lots of content, and they like to see it updated regularly.

Fortunately, that approach goes hand-in-hand with the most effective link building method, 'link baiting'. Content is one of link baiting's two core components (the other being social media).

Of course, I'm not talking any old rubbish, here. I'm talking useful, unique, high quality content. That's the only sort that works.

For more information...

- on **link baiting**, see 'Link baiting' on p.103.
- on **creating great content**, see 'Create great web content' on p.102.

Optimize Your HTML Meta-Tags

Within the HTML code behind your page, there are things called ‘meta tags’. These are short notes within the header of the code that describe some aspects of your page to the search engines.

Although there is some debate over how important meta tags are to SEO, it’s generally agreed that they shouldn’t be ignored.

Title tag

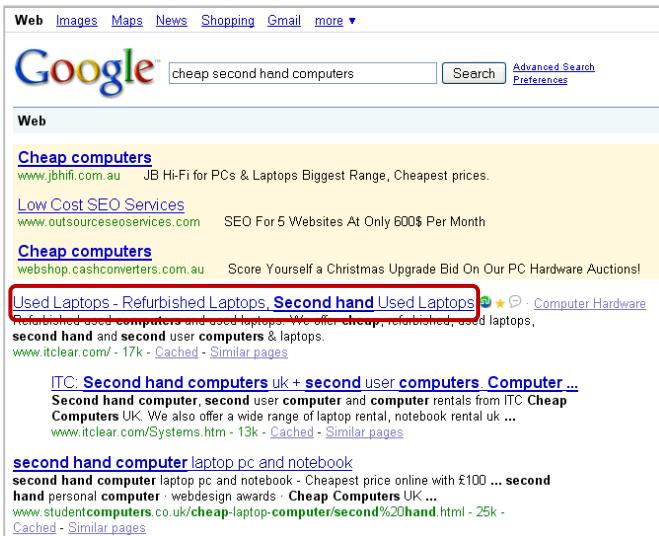


Figure 3 - How the Title tag displays in Google

Because it functions as the headline of your SERPs listing, the search engines figure it’s likely you’ll make it something fairly relevant to the content of the target page, in order to get people to click through. As a result, they pay more attention to it than the other tags when indexing your site.

Try to use your keyword at least once in the Title, as close to the beginning of the tag as possible. But don’t use it again and again and again. That’s keyword stuffing, and you could be penalized.

You have 66 characters (including spaces) in which to write a compelling, keyword rich headline for your listing. The better your title, the more people will click on it. Be descriptive and accurate. In fact, why not consider the four criteria for an effective headline?

- Self Interest – Does it promise a benefit to the searcher?
- Quick, Easy Way – Does it offer one?
- News – Does it contain any?
- Curiosity – Does it sound interesting?

Also it can be a good idea to include your company name in the Title. Above all else, this helps develop brand recognition (especially when you rank on page 1), and lends credibility to your listing. E.g:

World's cheapest second-hand PCs GUARANTEED – CheapCom.com

And finally, it's best not to use the same Title tag on every page. It's supposed to be a headline, compelling searchers to click through to your page. If it's generic enough to be suitable for every page, it's not going to be particularly compelling.

What's more, if Google sees duplicate Title tags, it may choose to display DMOZ data instead of your actual tag data.

How the Title tag should look in the code

```
<title> World's cheapest second-hand PCs GUARANTEED – CheapCom.com </title>
```

TIP: If Google's link looks different from your Title tag, Google may be using data from DMOZ instead.

This can happen if your Title and/or Description tags are identical on all pages. To fix, update your DMOZ directory listing (if outdated), then give each page of your site a unique Title and Description.

This will usually resolve the problem. If not, double-check that the offending title doesn't appear somewhere on your site.

Description tag

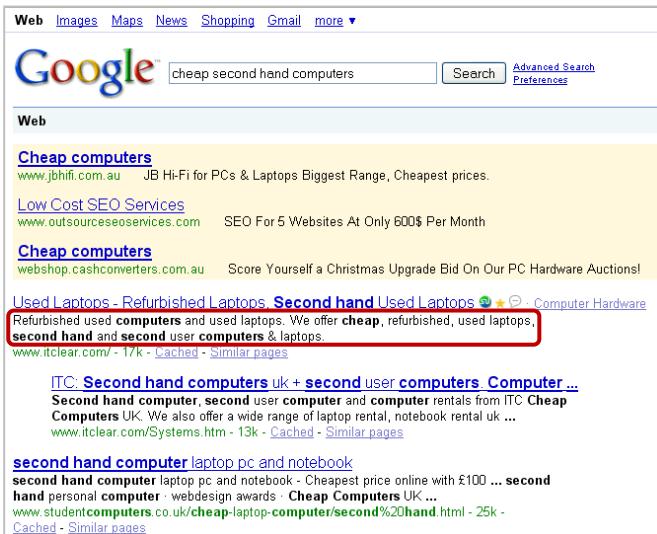


Figure 4 - How the Title tag displays in Google

Think of your description tag as the copy for an ad. You have 155 characters (including spaces) in which to craft an informative, compelling description. Try to use your keyword at least once in the Description, as close to the start as possible. For a product website, you might consider including the vital statistics about each product in the Description tag. E.g. Brand names, model numbers, colors, etc.

Note, however, that you don't actually have to define a Description tag. Most search engines are capable of extracting what they need for the description from your site copy. [Danny Dover, of SEOmoz, recommends](#) defining a Description tag for the Home page, and leaving the rest blank and letting the search engines decide what to display (they'll choose what content to pull from your page based on the search query).

I'm not convinced. If you leave the search engines to their own devices, there's no guarantee they'll choose a section that's well written or even intended to be the "copy for an ad" as I've suggested the Description should be. I recommend defining the Description on all pages.

It's not a good idea to use the same Description on every page. It's supposed to be helpful and persuade searchers to click through to your page. If it's generic enough to be suitable for every page, it's not going to be particularly engaging, compelling or helpful.

What's more, if Google sees duplicate Description tags, it may choose to display DMOZ data instead of your actual tag data.

TIP: If Google's description looks different from yours, Google may be using data from DMOZ instead. This can happen if your Title and/or Description tags are identical on all pages. To fix, update your DMOZ directory listing and give each page a unique Title and Description, then direct all search engines to NOT use DMOZ data, by adding one of the following meta tags to your page's code:

```
<meta name="robots" content="NOODP">
```

How the Description tag should look in the code

```
<meta name="DESCRIPTION" CONTENT="Cheap second hand computers for sale - Find  
a cheap second hand Dell computer for the kids. All computers come with  
Windows & Office installed & a 2 year warranty." />
```

Alt tag

When vision-impaired people access your page, their screen reader describes pictures by reading aloud their Alt tags.

Because the search engines assume your pictures have something to do with your subject matter, they pay some attention to the Alt tag when indexing your page. Try to include your keyword at least once in your Alt text. But don't overdo it, or you may be penalized.

How the Alt tag should look in the code

```

```

Keywords tag

A comma-separated list of keywords that are most relevant to the subject matter of the page.

Stick to about 300 characters and don't repeat your keywords over and over. You can, however, include variations of your keyword, such as "copy", "copywriter", "copywriters" and "copywriting." You can also re-use a keyword so long as it's part of a different phrase.

The Keywords tag isn't visible to visitors of your website (unless they view the source). It's really just a legacy from a time when the search engines used it as their sole means of identifying a site's subject matter.

These days, most search engines pay it little or no mind. The key exception is Yahoo. Yahoo likes your Keywords tag to be 'aligned' with your web copy. So don't include keywords in your tag that don't appear in your copy if you want to rank in Yahoo.

How the Keywords tag should look in the code

```
<meta name="KEYWORDS" CONTENT="cheap second hand computers, reliable second  
hand computers" />
```

Use image captions

No magic here. And nothing technical. Just another way to get your target keywords on the page. In addition to your image Alt tags, add a caption to your images, explaining their content. Because they're outside the flow of the copy, they're easy to optimize without impeding readability. You can even include links. In fact, you can even add images just for SEO, so long as they still add some value to your reader too.

Structure your site around keywords

Visitors and search engines, alike, prefer a structured site. As discussed on p.116, it's good practice to structure your site around the keywords you want to target. This is generally called 'clustering', 'theming' or 'siloing'. The easiest way to explain clustering is to illustrate it:

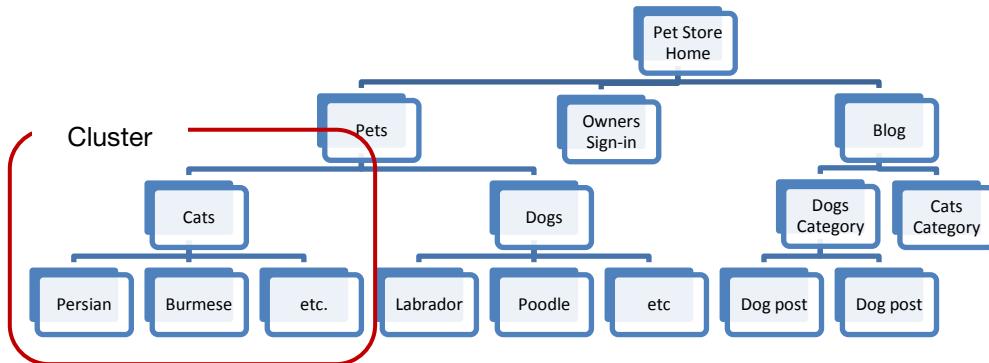


Figure 5 – Structure your site around your keywords – ‘Theming’

This approach:

- Makes your site more usable;
- Allows you to target many different keywords, site-wide, but still focus on a small handful per page;
- Allows you to target both broad keywords (up high, e.g. “pets”), and specific keywords (down low, e.g. “Persian cats”);

IMPORTANT: You must also consider your message, not just your keywords, when you structure your website. If you structure your website without thought to the content, you'll end up trying to squeeze the copy into an inappropriate structure.

For more information...

- on **structuring pages around keywords**, see 'What if I want to target more than one keyword phrase?' on p.116.

Optimize your internal link architecture

For search engine bots, text links are like doorways from page to page and site to site. This means websites are generally better indexed by search engines if their bots can traverse the entire site using text links.

```
<a href="http://www.example.com/product-catalog.html">Product Catalog</a>
```

Figure 6 - The HTML of a typical text link

But there's more to it than that. Links from top level pages (like the 'Home' and 'Products' pages) carry more weight than links from lower level pages (e.g. the '10 reasons why the ball bearings in our widget last longer' page). The logic here is that if you link to a page from a top level page, you obviously want a lot of your visitors to see that link, so it must be key to your subject matter and business model.

Internal links also tell the search engines what pages are important. In other words, if you link to a page again and again and again, and you use meaningful anchor text, Google will assume that page is a core part of your subject matter, and index you accordingly.

What's more, every time you link to a page, it's passed a bit of PageRank. Link to it enough, and it will become one of your higher ranking pages, as it develops 'link equity'.

So when you're planning the structure of your site, if it doesn't adversely impact the user experience:

Add a sitemap page (e.g. www.divinewrite.com/site.htm) to your site, so that all pages are accessible via at least one text link. And consider adding an open format sitemap specifically for the search engines. (See 'Create an open format / Google sitemap' on p.45.)

Keep your page hierarchy as flat as possible. Some pages in your site will attract many backlinks, and some will attract very few. By keeping your page hierarchy flat, you ensure that all pages are within just a few internal links of each other, and that as much internal link-equity as possible flows through to the pages that attract few backlinks. Most SEOs recommend a maximum of four levels. (See Figure 7 below.)

Link to your most important pages often (with simple text links). This builds the 'link equity' of those pages.

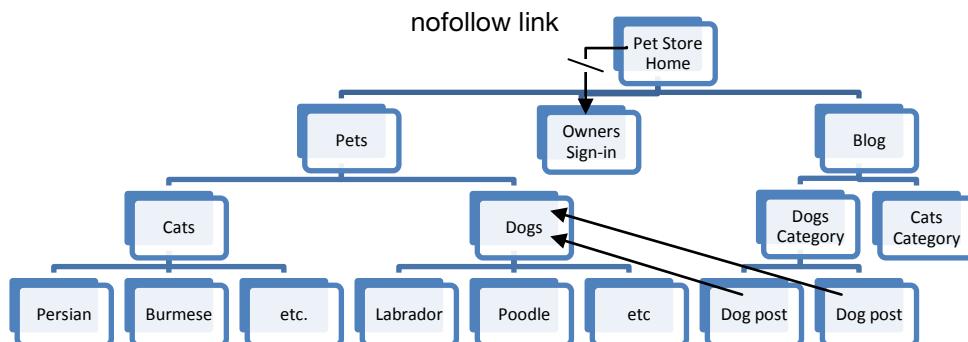
Limit links to fewer than 100 per page. Remember the visitor; use leading usability expert, [Jakob Nielsen's advice](#):

“ ...include links to other resources that are directly relevant to the current location. Don't bury the user in links to all site areas or to pages that are unrelated to their current location.”

Place your links prominently on each page. The search engines pay more attention to links toward the top of the page, and visitors are OK with prominent links too. [Jakob Nielsen cites a study](#) by Vora et al. that suggests users performed 26% faster when the anchors were part of the main text.

Consider adding a nofollow to links that point to less important pages, so that the search engines don't visit those pages. This increases the relative link equity of all your other pages. A nofollow looks like this:

```
<a href="page1.htm" rel="nofollow">go to page 1</a>
```



Link from your blog to your

Figure 7 – Visualizing internal link architecture

TIP: If you sign up to [Google Webmaster Tools](#), you can use one of its features to see if Googlebot (the Google crawler) can find your internal links. ('Links > Pages with internal links').

Add Titles to internal links

HTML links can include a Title, which becomes a tooltip when a visitor hovers their mouse over the link. They're also read out by screen readers for the vision-impaired people. Because this aids accessibility and [helps reduce visitor disorientation](#), and because it's indicative of the content of the destination page, search engines crawl it and it plays a part in how they index the page (albeit a small part).

Link titles look like this:

```
<a href="http://www.divinewrite.com/portfolio.htm" title="Copywriting portfolio for Divine Write Copywriting">Portfolio</a>
```

Link to related sites

Linking to external sites may seem ill-advised, because you're sending away visitors. But it's actually a very good idea. Assuming you link to relevant, helpful sites, your visitors will thank you for it, and will be more likely to bookmark your site and come back repeatedly.

This is particularly true of outbound links to 'hub sites' – the really, REALLY big ones in your field. If you link out to them, the search engines figure you're adding value to your visitors, and this is argued to count in your favor.

Here's [what Matt Cutts \(the 'Google Insider'\) has to say on external links](#):

“ ...if the user is happy, they are more likely to come back or bookmark your site or tell their friends about it. And so, if you try to hoard those users, they often somehow subconsciously sense it, and they are less likely to come back or tell their friends about it.”

Translation? Outbound links can impact your ranking favorably. (When discussing ranking factors, Matt usually talks in terms of visitor experience.)

Check for broken links

Broken links are bad for visitors because they convey the impression that your site is not well maintained, and they're bad for SEO because they can stop the search engine bots from crawling all your pages.

Note that [Google specifically advises webmasters to check for broken links](#). It's entirely possible that Google views broken links as a sign that your site is in poor repair, just as human visitors do, and that the existence of broken links may impact your ranking simply because Google wants well maintained sites at the top of its SERPs.

What's more, broken links can impede your chances of getting listed in the DMOZ directory (see 'DMOZ & Yahoo Directories' on p.144 for more information on DMOZ), and will likely discourage other webmasters from linking to you. Both of these outcomes would be detrimental to your rank.

You can use a tool called [Xenu](#) to find broken links. It's simple to use and the reports are self-explanatory.

Add a sitemap page

Create a sitemap page containing a list of text links to every page in your site. Link to your sitemap from the footer of every other page. (Your sitemap page is not the same thing as an open format / Google sitemap. Open format / Google sitemaps are discussed on p.45 below.)

If your site has a lot of pages, it may take you some time to create your sitemap page. Although I've never tried any, there are a few tools out there that claim to automate the process. Like Smart IT Consulting's [HTML Site Map Script](#).

TIP: Because site maps are used by both search engine bots and human visitors, you need to make it user-friendly. Try using bolding and indenting to represent your site hierarchy. See <http://www.divinewrite.com/site.htm> for an example.

If your site has any pages that are referenced by more than one URL (e.g. pages with URLs that track visitor information – those with affiliateID, trackingID, etc.), use the cleanest, shortest, most user-friendly URL on the sitemap page. This will help the search engines choose the correct URL to display in their SERPs. See 'Avoid duplicate content' on p.51 for more information.

Create an open format / Google sitemap

A Google sitemap is an optional XML file that lists all of the public pages on your site, and a whole bunch of data for each, including when it was last updated, how often you update it, and how important you consider it.

A Google sitemap won't affect your ranking, but it may affect how quickly you appear in the SERPs, because Google may index your pages faster and more often. None of it's guaranteed though.

To create a Google sitemap, download and run [softPLUS GSiteCrawler](#). It's a very easy program to use; all you do is type your site's URL and a couple of other simple details, and it does the rest. It'll even upload the resultant XML file to your FTP site automatically! (It has to go in your site's root directory.)

GSiteCrawler also handles self-hosted WordPress blogs and phpBB forums.

Once you've uploaded your Google sitemap, sign in to your [Google Webmaster Tools](#) account, and submit (or re-submit) it. Google will ask you to verify your ownership of the site by placing an HTML file with a particular name in the root directory, or by adding a line of code to one of your files.

TIP: To get best use out of a Google sitemap, you should really re-crawl your site and re-upload the XML file each time you add a new page to your site. But GSiteCrawler has you covered there, too, as it allows you to [schedule automatic crawls and updates](#). You'll still have to manually re-submit the sitemap in [Google Webmaster Tools](#), though.

Use permanent 301 redirects for changed URLs

If ever you change a page's URL, you need to redirect the old URL to the new one. If you don't, all old links will point to a page that no longer exists, including any search results. Visitors won't be able to get through, and you won't get any PageRank from backlinks.

Your web developer will know what you're talking about when you instruct them to use 301 redirects. But just in case, [here's an instruction](#).

IMPORTANT: Be aware, however, that when you move a page to a new location, its PageRank can take a while to catch up with it. Google recommends maintaining the 301 redirect for as long as you have control of the original URL. (Just one more reason to avoid moving your pages!)

Create a custom 404 error handling page

A 404 error handling page is some geek's name for the page that displays when someone tries to reach a non-existent page on your site. Usually this happens when they click on a broken link, you've deleted or moved a page, or they just mistyped the URL.

Unfortunately, the standard 404 page – provided by your ISP – truly lives up to its geeky name! It usually looks something like this:

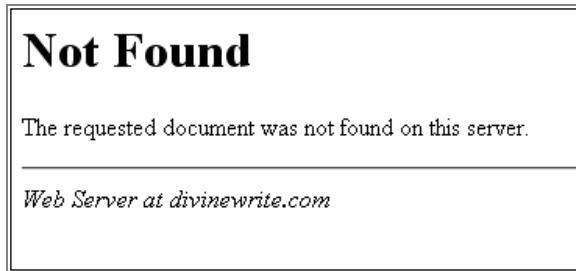


Figure 8 – A standard ugly & very geeky 404 error handling page.

Not very friendly, is it? When confronted with this, the only thing a would-be visitor can do is click Back. And if the link that brought them here is on another site, that's likely the last you'll see of them. So creating a visitor-friendly, helpful 404 error handling page is a must.

Most of the issues surrounding 404 error handling pages pertain to conversion, not SEO. However, there are two that are search-related:

You have to find out from your web host how to report the 404 status to the search engines. In other words, how to tell the search engines that your 404 page is an error page, and shouldn't be indexed or displayed in the SERPs.

Broken links are backlinks waiting to happen. To fix them, you have two choices: i) notify the webmaster in control of the incorrect link, and ask them to fix it; or ii) set up a 301 redirect for each, to redirect the incorrect link to the correct URL. Once you know how to do them, 301 redirects are a lot easier and faster, but they do put a slight strain on your web server.

For more information...

- on **setting up a custom 404 error handling page**, see Google's [Custom 404 pages](#), Bruce Clay's [Improve SEO With a Custom 404 Page](#) and Jeff Atwood's [Creating User Friendly 404 Pages](#).
- on **identifying and fixing 404 links**, see 'Leveraging 404 links' on p.152.

Create a robots.txt file

Use this file to tell the search engine bots what they can and cannot crawl and/or index. (You might, for instance, not want search bots to crawl and index your admin page, or your e-book.)

Visit [The Web Robots Pages](#) to learn how to create a robots.txt file, or create one 'point 'n click' style with [Google Webmaster Tools](#). When you're done, put it in the root directory on your web server (e.g. www.yourdomain.com/robots.txt.)

You can check that your robots.txt file is working properly using the Analyze robots.txt tool in [Google Webmaster Tools](#).

Oh, and make sure you keep it up to date so you don't accidentally block any bots.

If, for some reason, you don't have access to your site's root directory, you can add a Robots meta tag to the header section of every page in your site that you don't want crawled and/or indexed. Note, however, that not all bots will honor the meta tag, so it's not as reliable as the robots.txt file. The Robots meta tags are as follows:

- `<meta name="ROBOTS" CONTENT="ALL" />` tells the bots to crawl and index your entire site
- `<meta name="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NONE" />` tells the bots not to index anything.

- `<meta name="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOINDEX, FOLLOW" />` says don't index this particular page, but follow its links to other pages (e.g. for use on secure or private pages).
- `<meta name="ROBOTS" CONTENT="INDEX, NOFOLLOW" />` says to index the page but not follow its links.

Here's an examples of what the robots tag looks like in practice.

```
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Cheap second hand computers admin page</title>
    <META NAME="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOINDEX, NOFOLLOW">
  </head>
```

Use subfolders or subdomains – they're both OK

Over the years, there's been a lot of talk about whether low-level content should be stored in subfolders or sub-domains. The truth is, it really doesn't make any difference to your SEO. Just choose the option that suits your technical capabilities (and any other requirements).

Consider making dynamic URLs static

When a site's content is called from a database, its URLs are normally generated on the fly. You can tell if a URL is dynamic because it'll have characters like, "?", "=" and "&" in it. This is typical of sites that utilize a Content Management System (CMS) – including blogs. E.g.:

<http://www.mysite.com/main.php?category=books&subject=biography>

Static URLs, on the other hand, are tied to their content, and are generally a combination of the page's filename and directory location. E.g.:

<http://www.divinewrite.com/portfolio.htm>

The three main problems with dynamic URLs are:

1. They can lead to duplicate content issues – See 'Avoid duplicate content issues in your blog' on p.75 and 'Avoid duplicate content' on p.51 for more information on duplicate content.
2. Search engines can have trouble reading them properly – Google can now read and index them very effectively. (There are, after all, millions of sites with dynamic URLs in Google's SERPs.) But that's not to say that they can read and index them as effectively as they can static URLs. In fact, [Google's Search Quality Team says](#),



...the decision to use database-driven websites does not imply a significant disadvantage in terms of indexing and ranking."

The important words here are, "significant disadvantage." What's more, not all search engines crawl dynamic URLs as effectively as Google.

3. They reduce click-thrus from search engine results, they're harder to remember, share and write down, they're easily clipped, they're often not keyword rich, and they often don't give readers any clue about what to expect at the destination site.

These issues can be overcome by rewriting your dynamic URLs in such a way that they become static. For example, the following dynamic URL:

<http://www.mysite.com/main.php?category=books&subject=biography>

Could be rewritten to become the following static URL:

<http://www.mysite.com/pagebooks-biography.htm>

Unfortunately, static URL rewriting is not without risks of its own. If done incorrectly, it can cause Google problems crawling and indexing your pages. Google now outrightly advocates dynamic URLs:

 Providing search engines with dynamic URLs should be favored over hiding parameters to make them look static.”

Of course, it's important to remember that Google's a public company, answerable to shareholders. It's ability to crawl and index dynamic URLs better than its competitors is a significant competitive advantage, if leveraged. Who's to say that the above advice isn't merely an attempt to leverage that ability?

My advice? If you're using a CMS that doesn't offer trustworthy dynamic URL rewriting, stick with dynamic URLs. If, however, your CMS rewrites dynamic URLs very well (e.g. WordPress or any CMS using mod_rewrite), then consider rewriting to static URLs – if it will help your customers and aid your promotions significantly. Rewriting dynamic URLs isn't likely to have a huge impact on your rankings, so I would avoid it unless I was sure it wasn't going to cause problems.

Avoid duplicate content

You have duplicate content when:

- you have more than one version of any page
- you reference any page with more than one URL
- someone plagiarizes your content
- you syndicate content

And it's a problem for two reasons:

1. **Duplicate content filter** – Let's say there are two pages of identical content out there on the Web. Google doesn't want to list both in the SERPs, because it's after variety for searchers. The duplicate content filter identifies the pages, then Google applies intelligence to decide which is the original. It then lists only that one in the SERPs. The other one misses out. Problem is, Google may choose the wrong version to display in the SERPs. (There's no such thing as a duplicate content *penalty*.)
2. **PageRank dilution** – Some webmasters will link to one page/URL and some will link to another, so your PageRank is spread across multiple pages, instead of being focused on one. Note, however, that Google claims that they handle this pretty well, by consolidating the PageRank of all the links.

Below are some examples of duplicate content and how to resolve them.

Multiple versions of the same page

Multiple versions of the same page is clearly duplicate content. (e.g. A print-friendly version and the regular display version.) The risk is that Google may choose the wrong one to display in the SERPs.

Solutions:

Use a no_follow link to the print-friendly version. This will ensure that Google's bots don't crawl it, and that it won't be indexed. The HTML of a nofollow link looks like this:

```
<a href="page1.htm" rel="nofollow">go to page 1</a>
```

Or use your robots.txt file to tell the search bots not to crawl the print friendly version.

Multiple URLs for a single page

Even though there's really only one page, the search engines interpret each discrete URL as a different page.

There are two common reasons for this problem:

1. No canonical URL specified
2. Referral tracking & visitor tracking

No canonical URL specified

A canonical URL is the master URL of your home page. The one that displays whenever your home page displays. For most sites, it would be <http://www.yourdomain.com>.

Test if your site has a canonical URL specified. Open your browser and visit each of the following URLs (substituting your domain name, of course).

- <http://www.yourdomain.com/>
- <http://yourdomain.com/>
- <http://www.yourdomain.com/index.html/> (or index.htm)
- <http://yourdomain.com/index.html/> (or index.htm)

If your home page displays, but the URL stays exactly as you typed it, you have *not* specified a canonical URL, and you have duplicate content.

Solutions:

1. Choose one of the above as your canonical URL. It doesn't really matter which one. Then redirect the others to it with 301 redirects. (Your web developer should know how to set up a 301 redirect, but just in case, here's a [301 Redirect How to...](#))

3. Specify your preferred domain in [Google Webmaster Tools](#) (you have to register first). To do this, at the Dashboard, click your site, then click Settings and choose an option under Preferred domain. This is the equivalent of a 301 redirect for Google. But it has no impact on the other search engines, so you should still set up proper 301 redirects.
4. Create and submit an open format (Google) sitemap and ensure that it uses only the appropriate ('canonical') URLs. (See 'Create an open format / Google sitemap' on p.45' for more info.)

Referral tracking & visitor tracking

If you're storing referrer and/or user data in your URLs, your URLs will vary depending on who the visitor is and/or what link they clicked to arrive at your page. This may be the case if you manage a forum (e.g. a phpBB 2.x forum) or you participate in an affiliate program.

In addition to the duplicate content filter and PageRank dilution problems, this sort of duplicate content makes your site a 'bot-trap', significantly increasing the time it takes search engine bots to crawl your site. In Google's words:

 Duplicated content can lead to inefficient crawling: when Googlebot discovers ten URLs on your site, it has to crawl each of those URLs before it knows whether they contain the same content (and thus before we can group them as described above). The more time and resources that Googlebot spends crawling duplicate content across multiple URLs, the less time it has to get to the rest of your content." (From the [Google Webmaster Central Blog](#))

Solutions:

1. If you host a forum on your site, find out if upgrading to the most recent version will resolve the problem. (e.g. [phpBB 3.0 handles dynamic URLs](#) in a search-friendly way.)
2. Devise an appropriate strategy for referrer/visitor tracking. This is well beyond the scope of this book (and my expertise). Please see Nathan Buggia's [URL Referrer Tracking](#) for more information.

WordPress

WordPress causes a lot of duplicate content issues by naturally pointing to the same content with multiple different URLs. (e.g. A single post can be accessed through the blog's home page, search results, date archives, author archives, category archives, etc. And each of these access points has a different URL.)

Solution: For advice on overcoming duplicate content issues on WordPress blogs, see 'Avoid duplicate content issues in your blog' on p.75.

Someone has plagiarized your content

If someone has plagiarized your content, Google may mistakenly identify their plagiarized version as the original. This is unlikely, however, because most webmasters who plagiarize content are unlikely to have a very credible, authoritative site.

Solution: You can contact the offender and ask that they remove the content, and you can also report the plagiarism to Google (<http://www.google.com/dmca.html>). You can also proactively monitor who's plagiarizing your content using [Copyscape](#).

You syndicate content

If you publish content on your site and also syndicate it, your site's version may not appear in the SERPs. If one of the sites that has reprinted your article has more domain authority than yours, their syndicated version may appear in the SERPs instead of yours. Also, other webmasters may link to the syndicated version instead of yours.

Solution: One way to try and avoid this situation is to always publish the article on your site a day or two before you syndicate it. Another is to always link back to the original from the syndicated. Whatever the case, the backlink from the syndicated article still contributes to your ranking. You just may not get as much direct search-driven traffic to the article (which really isn't the point of content syndication, anyway).

Avoid Flash

Google CAN read Flash (SWF files). A bit. But you should still be very wary of Flash if you want a high ranking.

Below is a quick explanation of why.

- **Google can't read all types of JavaScript** – So if your Flash file is invoked with JavaScript, it may not be read.
- **Links in Flash may not be 'follow-able'** – [Tim Nash](#) conducted 30 tests over 4 domains to see what information the search engines saw from a Flash file. His results suggest that links in Flash are stripped of anchor text and appear not to be followed.
- **Other search engines can't read Flash at all** – Google isn't the only search engine out there. It may be the biggest, but the others are still important. Yahoo has the ability to read Flash, but at the time of writing, it appears they still don't. None of the others do.
- **Many mobile phones don't handle Flash well** – Over the last year – thanks mostly to the release of the iPhone – mobile search has become very popular. But it's still very much in its infancy, and many mobile phones don't yet handle Flash properly.
- **More technical reasons to avoid Flash** – If you're still not convinced, read Rand Fishkin's SEOmoz blog post, [Flash and SEO - Compelling Reasons Why Search Engines & Flash Still Don't Mix](#). Or read Vanessa Fox's (ex-Google Webmaster blogger) blog post [Search-Friendly Flash?](#)

But if you insist on using Flash...

If you really, really, REALLY want to use Flash, despite all of the potential problems above, then at least make sure you make available an underlying text version of its content, complete with keyword-rich links. Just to be sure. And if it's a whole page or a whole site, make sure you deliver it at the same URL, so there are no duplicate content issues.

For some more technical advice on optimizing Flash for search, read Jonathan Hochman's article, [How to SEO Flash](#), first.

Be careful with AJAX

AJAX enhanced sites can deliver a rich visitor experience, but they can also be very difficult for search engine bots to crawl. Following is a checklist to help you develop AJAX pages that are visitor AND search engine friendly.

- Develop your AJAX pages using 'Progressive Enhancement'. In other words, create your structure and navigation in HTML, then add all the pretty stuff on top with AJAX (including JavaScript versions of your static HTML links – aka HIJAX). That way, the search engines will be able to see all the things that are important to them.
- Ensure your static links don't contain a #, as search engines typically won't read past it.

For more information...

- on **the technical ins and outs of using AJAX**, see [AJAX-enhanced sites](#), [AJAX and Non-JavaScript Experiences for SEO friendly websites](#), [Hijax](#) and [Progressive enhancement with Ajax](#).

Avoid JavaScript

Google can now read JavaScript to discover links within. But there's no consensus about how much PageRank those links pass on to the pages they point to. The most credible comment I've read on this was by [Rand Fishkin, back in 2007](#):

“...although Javascript links are sometimes followed, they appear to provide only a fraction of the link weight that normal links grant.”

My advice is to steer clear of JavaScript for content and links, at least until there is general consensus in the SEO community that those links are treated exactly as standard HTML links are treated.

If you want navigation menus that drop down on mouse rollover, use standard rollovers and/or CSS formatting instead of JavaScript. Your developer will know what this means.

DON'T use text within images

Search engines can't read words that are presented in image files. So if you embed your copy in images, you'll find it a lot harder (if not impossible) to get indexed for the right searches.

So don't have your graphic designer lay out a beautiful page of copy and save it as a .gif or .jpg file, then upload it to your site. For all its beauty, it'll be completely wasted on the search engines.

Your best bet is to present all important text as straight HTML text. You can get fancy with sIFR text replacement if you want, but that starts getting fairly complicated, so you'd want to have a pretty good reason.

DON'T rely too heavily on footer links for navigation

Most visitors don't pay too much attention to footer links. Not surprisingly, the search engines are following suit. [Yahoo already ignores them](#):

“The irrelevant links at the bottom of a page, which will not be as valuable for a user, don't add to the quality of the user experience, so we don't account for those in our ranking.” (Priyank Garg, director of product management for Yahoo! Search Technology (YST)).

What's more, [Google has filed a patent application](#) for “Systems and methods for analyzing boilerplate...”

Although it may not actually use that technology to discount the impact of footer links, it's certainly not out of the question. Remember Google tends to ignore the things visitors ignore, and to place great emphasis on the things they value.

I'm not saying *don't* put nav links down there; I'm saying don't use them as your main form of navigation.

DON'T use empty hyperlinks with deferred hyperlink behavior

Make sure the targets of all your hyperlinks are real. Don't use empty hyperlinks that have some sort of deferred behavior.

DON'T use Silverlight

Just don't do it. Perhaps things will change, but for now, if you want your pages to rank, steer clear of Silverlight. Straight from the horse's (Google's) mouth:

“ ...we still have problems accessing the content of other rich media formats such as Silverlight... In other words, even if we can crawl your content and it is in our index, it might be missing some text, content, or links.”

Simple.

DON'T use Frames or iFrames

Pages that use frames aren't really single pages at all. Each frame on the page actually displays the content from an entirely different page. The frames and their content are all blended and arranged on the page you see according to the instructions found on another page entirely, called the 'frameset' page.

The problem with this is that search engine bots only see the 'frameset' page. They don't see the page you see at all, nor the individual pages that make up the page you see. And this is where the problem lies. Those individual pages may have lots of really helpful, keyword rich content and links, and the search engines don't see it.

Although you can use the "NoFrames" tag to provide alternate content that the search engines can read, you'll still be undermining your SEO because the links and content within a frame aren't considered part of the page they display on. This means there's no alignment between backlinks pointing to that page and the content that page displays. In other words those backlinks won't seem as relevant to the bots. Likewise, the links on the display page won't pass on any PageRank to the pages they point to, because they actually exist on a page that doesn't have a public URL, and which therefore doesn't attract any backlinks.

DON'T use spamming techniques

Before discussing what sorts of spam you should make sure you're not engaging in, let me first say this: it's almost impossible to spam unintentionally. Search engine spamming usually involves quite a bit of work and knowledge.

But just to be sure, here's a quick look at what you *shouldn't* be doing.

What is search engine spam?

A website is considered search engine spam if it violates a specific set of rules in an attempt to seem like a better or more relevant website. In other words, if it tries to trick the search engines into thinking that it's something it's not.

On-page spam

On-page spam is deceptive stuff that appears on your website. According to Aaron D'Souza of Google, speaking at the October 2008 SMX East Search Marketing Conference, in New York City, the following are considered on-page spam:

- **Cloaking** - Showing one thing to search engines and something completely different to visitors.
- **JavaScript redirects** – Because search engines don't usually execute complex JavaScript, some spammers will create a page that looks innocent and genuine to search engines, but when a visitor arrives, they're automatically redirected to a page selling Viagra or Cialis, etc.
- **Hidden content** – Some webmasters just repeat their keywords again and again and again, on every page, then hide it from visitors. These keywords aren't in sentences, they're just words, and they provide no value. That's why they're hidden, and that's why it's considered spam. The intent is to trick the search engines into thinking that the site contains lots of keyword rich, helpful content, when, in fact, the keyword rich content is just keywords; nothing more. These spammers hide their keywords by

using very, very, very small writing (1pt font), or by using a font color that's the same as the background color.

- **Keyword stuffing** – Severely overdoing your keyword frequency. Just try to ensure you use your target keyword phrase more often than any other single word or phrase. If it feels like you're using it too often, you probably are. If it feels contrived to you, it will to readers too. (See 'How many times should I use a keyword?' on p.113 for more information on keyword frequency.)
- **Doorway pages** – Page after page of almost identical pages intended to simply provide lots and lots of keyword-rich content and links, without providing any genuine value to readers.
- **Scraping** – Spammers who are too lazy or incapable of creating their own content will steal it from other sites, blogs, articles and forums, then re-use it on their own site without permission, and without attributing it to its original author. The intent is to create lots of keyword rich content on their website, and trick the search engines into thinking their site is valuable, without actually doing any of the work themselves.

Off-page (link) spam

According to Google, the following link schemes are considered spam:

- Links intended to manipulate PageRank*
- Links to web spammers or bad neighborhoods on the web
- Excessive reciprocal links or excessive link exchanging
- Buying or selling links that pass PageRank

According to Sean Suchter of Yahoo (now with Microsoft), the search engines are always on the lookout for websites that:

 ...get a LOT of really bad links, really fast." (Speaking at the 2008 SMX East search marketing conference.)

They also look out for links out to bad sites.

But if “Links intended to manipulate PageRank” are spam, then every webmaster who follows [Google’s own advice for improving the ranking of your website](#) is spamming:

 “In general, webmasters can improve the rank of their sites by increasing the number of high-quality sites that link to their pages.”

Clearly, in point one above, Google is referring to people who are out-and-out spamming. Creating undeserved links that offer absolutely no value to visitors.

Chapter summary

- Choose the right web host.
- Use HTML text copy, links & breadcrumb trails.
- Position your content toward the top of your HTML code.
- Create lots of content and regularly update your site.
- Optimize Your HTML Meta-Tags.
- Use image captions.
- Cluster pages around keywords.
- Optimize your internal links.
- Add Titles to internal links.
- Link to related sites.
- Add a sitemap page.
- Create a Google sitemap.
- Check for broken links.
- Use permanent 301 redirects for changed URLs.
- Create a 404 error handling page.
- Create a robots.txt file.
- Use either subfolders or subdomains – they’re both OK.

- Consider making dynamic URLs static.
- Avoid duplicate content.
- Avoid Flash, AJAX & JavaScript
- Don't use text within images.
- Don't rely too heavily on footer links for navigation.
- Don't use empty hyperlinks with deferred hyperlink behavior.
- Don't use Silverlight.
- Don't use Frames or iFrames.
- Don't spam.

Step 4

Host and optimize your own WordPress blog

If implemented, maintained and promoted appropriately, a blog can be an incredibly powerful way to boost your ranking. Probably *the* most powerful. Blogs allow you to quickly and easily add lots of keyword rich content to your site and update that content regularly, while at the same time attracting backlinks and visitors. All the things the search engines like to see.

[WordPress](#) is a free tool for publishing blogs. With it, you can configure your blog to appear at a certain URL, manage its appearance, write and publish blog posts, categorize and tag those posts, receive, moderate and publish comments, manage members, and set up RSS feeds so that other people can subscribe to your blog. It comes with virtually everything you need, inbuilt, and if there's a feature that's not inbuilt, it's pretty likely you'll be able to find a free plugin that does it.

WordPress isn't the only blog tool out there, but it's definitely the most popular. (And it's the only one I've used, so it's the only one I can talk about with any authority! :-)

'Out of the box,' WordPress is naturally fairly search-friendly. Mostly because it makes writing and publishing lots of content really easy, and content's half the SEO battle. But it's far from perfect. There's actually quite a bit to do in order to get it really search-friendly.

For more information...

- on **optimizing your blog posts**, see ‘Optimize your web content’ on p.111.

Host your own

Although you can get WordPress to host your blog on their servers, you should *definitely* host your own. Then you can just tack it onto your domain, ensuring you get full benefit of all backlinks. (Mine, for instance, is www.divinewrite.com/blog.) You can't do that with a hosted version. Hosting your own is a bit more work, but it's worth it.

Ensure you have FTP access to your web server

In order to install the latest version of WordPress and the plugins referenced below, you'll need FTP access to your web server. That means you'll need an FTP client (I recommend [SmartFTP](#)), and you'll need to know your FTP host and login details. Your web host will be able to supply these.

Install the latest version of WordPress

If you haven't done so already, install the [latest version of WordPress](#). Some of the below plugins may not work with earlier versions. (All my instructions below relate to Version 2.7 – the latest at the time of writing.) If you're using an earlier version of WordPress, you'll find [upgrade instructions here](#). (Ensure you follow these instructions very carefully. They're not overly difficult, but they're detailed and time-consuming, and if you make a mistake, it can be costly.)

Install & activate all of these WordPress plugins

Once WordPress is installed and you've tested that it's working OK, you'll need to install and activate a number of plugins. I'm not going to discuss the plugins here. Rather, in the sections following, wherever a plugin comes into play, I'll explain how and why. For now, you'll just have to trust me!

Note that each plugin has installation instructions either on the download page or in the downloaded `readme.txt` file. They're all simple to install.

[Akismet](#)

[Redirection](#)

[Meta Robots](#)

[All in One SEO Pack](#)

[FeedBurner FeedSmith](#)

[SEO Slugs](#)

[Subscribe To Comments](#)

[AddThis](#)

[Tweet This](#)

[Yet Another Related Posts Plugin \(YARPP\)](#)

If you have trouble installing or using any of these plugins, it may be that either your version of WordPress or your theme is incompatible. If you're confident that the problem lies elsewhere, you should contact the developer of the plugin directly.

Link to related content

When linking within your blog content, you can follow the same guidelines as you would for links within the rest of your site's content. See 'Optimize your internal link architecture' on p.40.

Optimize your categories for your main keywords

WordPress allows you to create categories to group related posts, to make it easy for visitors to find the information they're after. By default, these categories are listed as links in the right sidebar on every page of your blog. What's more, when you assign a post to a category, that category link is listed with the post as well.



Figure 9 - Your chosen categories are listed with the post (from [Ben McKay – Just Me and My Search Marketing](#))

For best SEO results, you should create a category for each of your main keywords. Because by the time you've completed all the steps in this section, your categories will actually be used as keywords (in the Keywords meta tag).

This arrangement gives you a series of target keywords on every page. (And they actually *help* your visitors!)

What's more, this approach themes your blog, just as you're theming your site (see p.39 for more information on site theming).

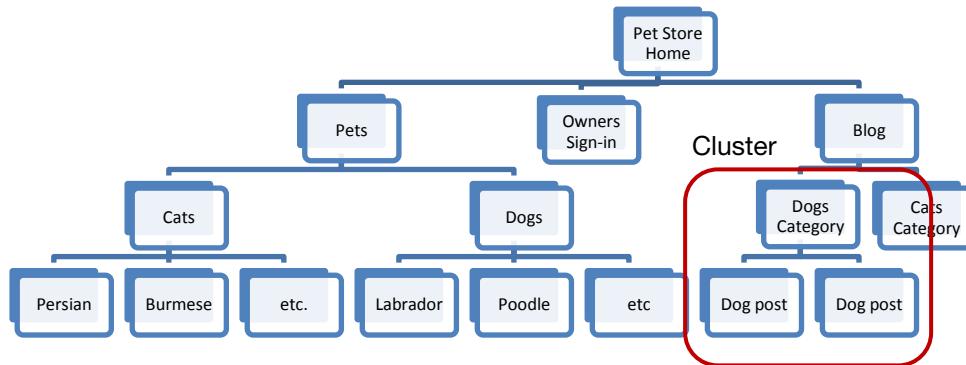


Figure 10 – Clustering your blog posts around keywords (theming)

Oh, and you may have read elsewhere that you should limit yourself to only one category per post, but that's only a problem if you're not dealing properly with duplicate content. And you will be. (See 'Avoid duplicate content issues in your blog' on p.75.)

Optimize your blog Tags for minor keywords

Tags are another way to group posts. They're handy for incidental groupings that won't add any visitor value in the right sidebar. E.g. Today on my blog, I wrote about the illogical notion of outsourcing your blog writing to cheap ghostwriters. I mentioned Twitter and Social Media in the post, but chose not to create a category for each, because those subjects aren't core to my blog, and they're not important keywords. Instead, I tagged the post with "twitter" and "social media."

For best SEO, you need to make these tags display with your post, along with your Category links. This isn't the default WordPress behavior; you need to configure it in your theme. I'm no programmer, but the following line of code in index.php did the trick for me. (I put it next to the 'Posted in' code.)

```
<?php the_tags( 'Tags: ', ', ', ', '<br />' ); ?>
```

Automate a meaningful, compelling & search friendly Description meta tag

By default, WordPress inserts the first 55 characters of your blog post in the Description meta tag. Although this is convenient, it isn't always ideal. The description is critical to click-thru from the search engines, so it's part promo, part summary (see 'Description tag' p.36). The post's introduction, on the other hand needn't be as heavy on the promo, and it will quite often set the scene in a way that would be inappropriate in the SERPs description.

The [All in One SEO Pack](#) plugin overcomes this problem by using the contents of the 'Excerpt' field in the Write Post screen. Whatever you enter in this field is automatically inserted in the Description meta tag. And if you leave it empty, the first 55 characters of your post are used, as per WordPress default behavior.

To set this behavior:

1. In WordPress, go to Settings > All in One SEO
2. Enter %description% in the Description Format field
3. Tick the Autogenerate Descriptions field

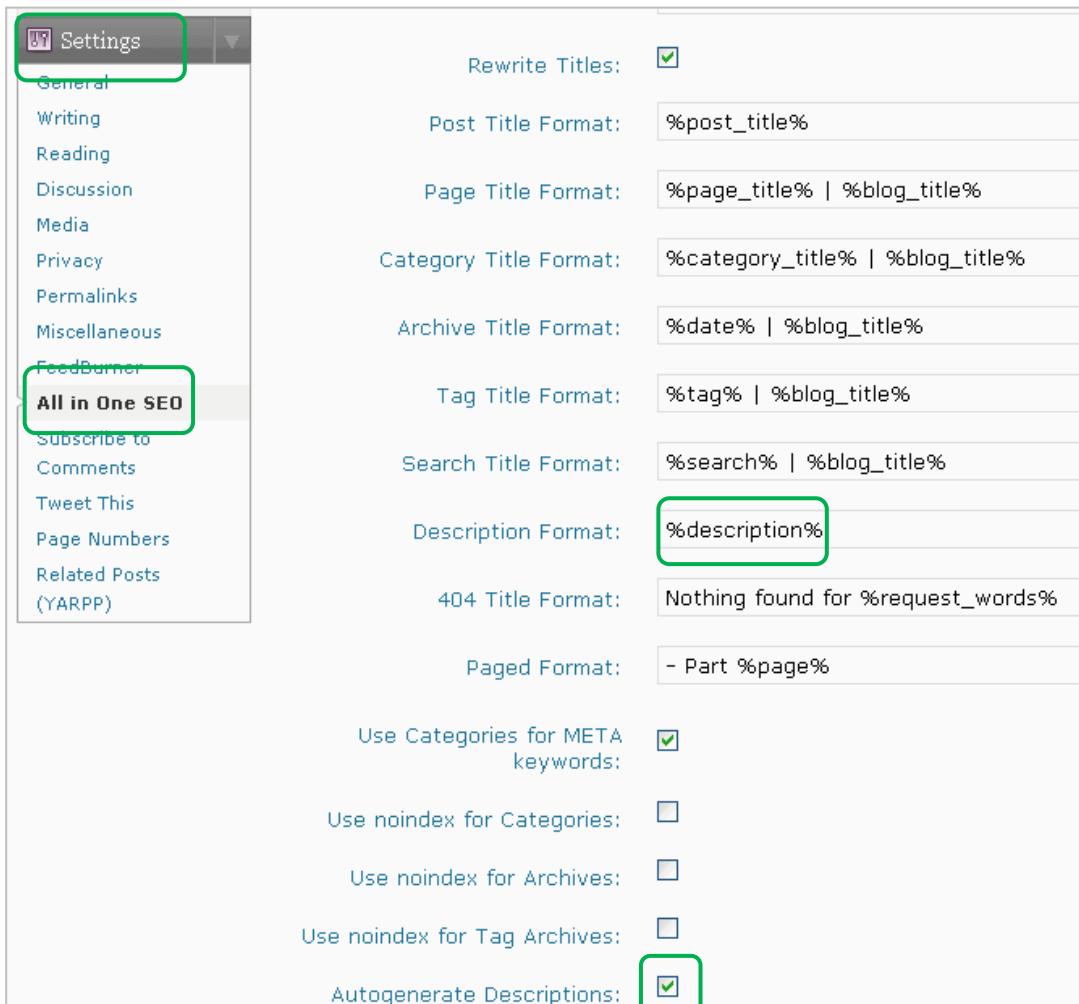


Figure 11 - Use the contents of the Excerpt field for your Description tag, with the All in One SEO Pack plugin

Also, it's a good idea to stop the search engines from using DMOZ data for your description in the search results, and to stop Yahoo from using the Yahoo directory for the same. Sometimes they do this.

To stop search engines using DMOZ data for description:

1. In WordPress, go to Plugins > Robots Meta
2. Tick both of the following check boxes:

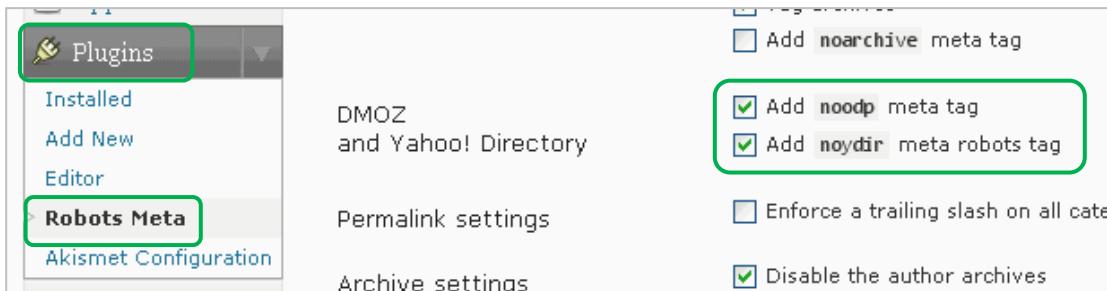


Figure 12 - Use the Meta Robots plugin to stop the search engines from using DMOZ & Yahoo Directory for your Description tag

Optimize your URLs

Although there's no real consensus on whether it's particularly beneficial to have your keywords in your URLs, it certainly can't hurt.

Switching to Pretty Permalinks

WordPress allows you to use 'Pretty Permalinks,' so that instead of your URLs looking something like this:

www.yourdomain.com/blog/2008/11/09/10-reasons-cats-make-good-pets/

They'll look something like this:

www.yourdomain.com/blog/cats/10-reasons-cats-make-good-pets/

or this:

www.yourdomain.com/blog/10-reasons-cats-make-good-pets/

IMPORTANT: When you switch to Pretty Permalinks, **all your existing post URLs will change**. But Google will still have all the existing URLs indexed. Also, all existing backlinks will still point to the old URLs (only new links will point to the new URLs). This will **dilute the PageRank** of the post. So you have to **redirect the old URLs** to the new ones. Be aware that this can take a lot of time.

To switch to Pretty Permalinks:

1. Check the [requirements for Pretty Permalinks](#)
2. In WordPress, Select Settings > Permalinks
3. Paste one of the following into the Custom Structure field:

`/%category%/%postname% /` (e.g. /cats/10-reasons-cats-make-good-pets/ WordPress chooses the category based on the first category you selected when you posted (alphabetically).)

- OR -

`/%postname% /` (e.g. /10-reasons-cats-make-good-pets/)

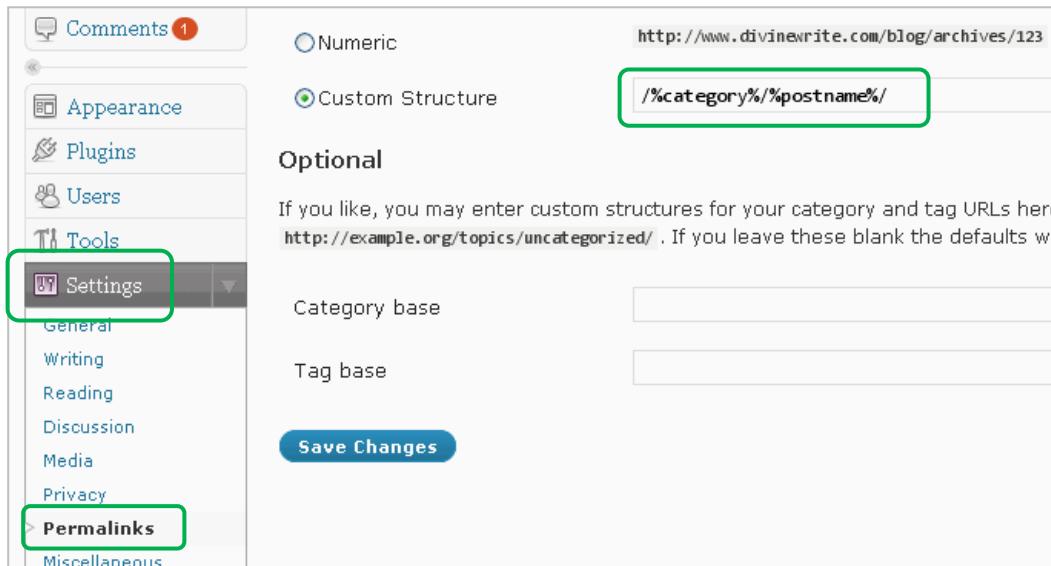


Figure 13 – Switch to Pretty Permalinks

Redirecting your old URLs

Because Google will still have all the existing URLs indexed, and all existing backlinks will still point to the old URLs, you have to redirect the old URLs to the new ones.

To redirect URLs:

1. In WordPress, Select Tools > Redirection
2. Ensure the Redirections Group is selected
3. In the 'Add new redirection section', enter the old URL in the Source URL field
4. Enter the new URL in the Target URL field
5. Click Add Redirection
6. Test that the redirection worked, by pasting the old URL into your browser's address bar. If the redirection worked, the URL should change to the new one when the page loads

Figure 14 – Redirect date-based URLs to Pretty Permalinks, using Redirection plugin

Eliminating common function words

Switching to Pretty Permalinks also introduces another minor issue. Now that you're using your blog post title as part of the URL, you'll end up with heaps of words like, "the", "and", "if", "but", and so on. Fortunately, there's a plugin built specifically to resolve this problem: [SEO Slugs](#). All you have to do is install and activate it,

and from then on, new post URLs will include only the important meaning words (many of which will be keywords). Note that it won't change any of your existing URLs – only URLs of future posts.

Avoid duplicate content issues in your blog

If a single post is accessible through more than one URL, you have duplicate content. The search engines see multiple URLs and assume multiple pages. This is a potential problem for two reasons: 1) the search engines have to guess at which one to display in the SERPs; and 2) when people link to your post, they may use different URLs, thus diluting the rightful PageRank of the post. In theory, Google does a pretty good job of reconciling duplicate content. But it's not perfect. And the other search engines are likely worse.

There are two main duplicate content issues in WordPress that you need to be aware of.

Canonicalization & duplicate content

A canonical URL is the master URL of your blog's home page. The one that displays whenever your blog's home page displays.

Test if your blog has a canonical URL specified. Open your browser and visit each of the following URLs (substituting your domain name, of course).

- <http://www.yourdomain.com/blog/>
- <http://yourdomain.com/blog/>
- <http://www.yourdomain.com/blog/index.html/> (or index.htm)
- <http://yourdomain.com/blog/index.html/> (or index.htm)

If your blog's home page displays, but the URL stays exactly as you typed it, you have *not* specified a canonical URL, and you have duplicate content.

To ensure your blog doesn't suffer any of the problems mentioned above (p.75), you need to set a canonical URL.

To set your canonical URL:

1. In WordPress, go to Tools > Redirection > Modules
2. Select 'edit' to the right of the WordPress module
3. Complete the form as follows*.

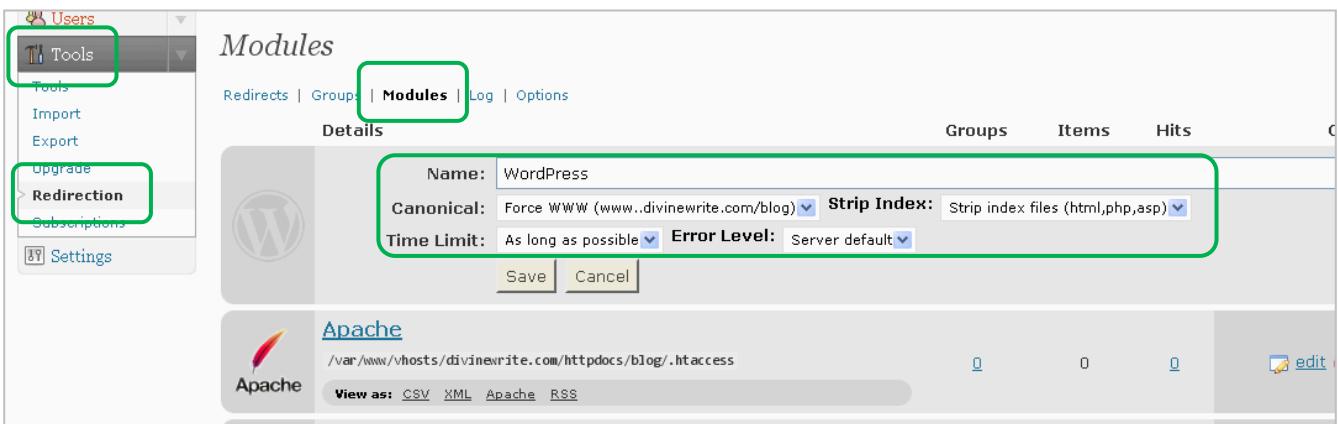


Figure 15 - Eliminate duplicate content issues caused by canonicalization with the Redirection plugin

* Obviously you have to enter your own domain name, not mine.

Duplicate content issues caused by WordPress's natural behavior

Let's say you publish a new post, and you assign it to three categories, and tag it with four tags. By default, this would mean that that single post can now be accessed via 11 different URLs! (i.e. Your blog's Home URL, the main post URL, 3 x category URLs, 4 x tag URLs, the search results URL and your author archive URL).

In the face of so many choices, the search engines may have trouble deciding which one to display in the SERPs, and links from other websites are likely to be split a number of ways. Obviously, you don't want this. You want the main post URL to rank, and to accumulate PageRank from backlinks. Not the version that displays when you click a Tag, Category, Archive, Author or search result link. (The main post URL is the one

that's invoked when you click on the post title from your blog's home page. The other versions are known as 'Archive' pages.)

To overcome these issues, you need to:

1. tell the search engines not to index the Archive pages;
2. remove the Archive links from the right sidebar in your theme;
3. disable the Archive pages; and
4. provide a summary only on your blog's home page and Archive pages.

Tell the search engines not to index the Archive pages

To tell the search engines not to index the Archive pages:

1. In WordPress, go to Plugins > Robots Meta
2. Fill in the check boxes as follows. (Don't change any of the other check boxes for now.)

The search engines will still follow the links to Archive posts; they just won't index them.

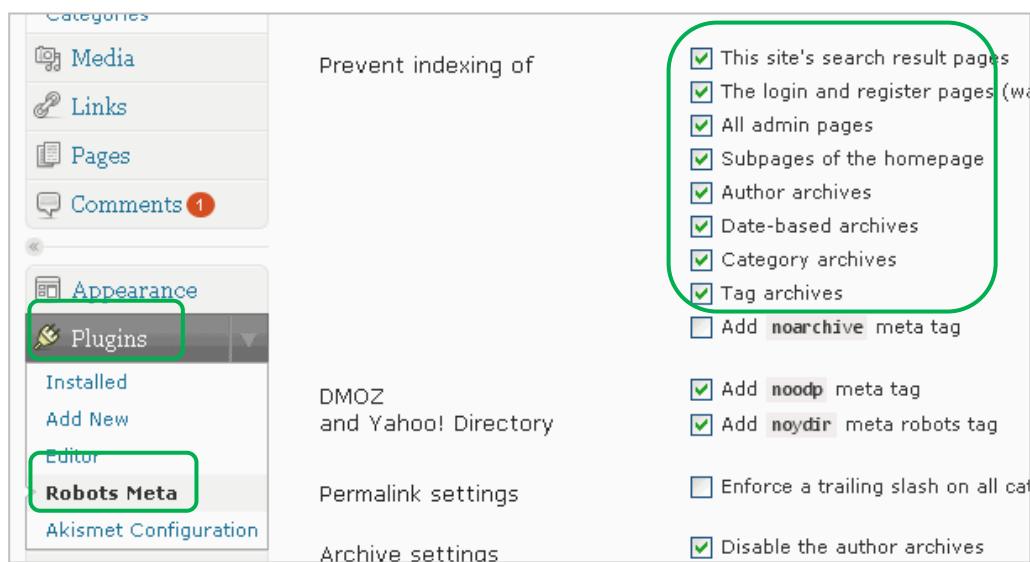


Figure 16 - Stop Google from indexing the Archive pages so only the main post page appears in the SERPs - Meta Robots plugin

IMPORTANT: This won't stop your blog's home page from being indexed. There's no option for that (and you wouldn't want to do it even if there were). To eliminate search engine confusion between the main post and the home page post, you need to shorten the home page post. (See 'Provide a summary only on your blog's home page and category pages' on p.81.)

Remove the Archive links from the right sidebar in your theme

Although the Archive pages are now not being indexed by the search engines, visitors can still find them through links in the sidebar. This, in itself, isn't so bad, but it means that they're more likely to subsequently link to those pages. (And remember, you want them to link to the main post page, not the Archive pages.)

To stop visitors from finding the Archive links, you need to remove them from your theme.

To remove the Archive links from your theme:

1. In WordPress, go to Appearance > Editor
2. Select sidebar.php from the list of Theme Files
3. In the Theme Editor, find the Author link and description. They should look something like the following:

```
<li>
<h2>Author</h2>
<p>Glenn Murray, SEO Copywriter.</p>
</li>
```

4. 'Comment' it out, by adding the bolded bits below (note that you don't have to bold them, I've just bolded them for your convenience):

```
<!-- COMMENTED OUT
<li>
```

```
<h2>Author</h2>
<p>Glenn Murray, SEO Copywriter.</p>
</li>
-->
```

5. Look for the date Archive links. They should look something like the following:

```
<li><h2>Archives</h2>
<ul>
<?php wp_get_archives( 'type=monthly' ); ?>
</ul>
</li>
```

6. 'Comment' them out:

```
<!-- COMMENTED OUT
<li><h2>Archives</h2>
<ul>
<?php wp_get_archives( 'type=monthly' ); ?>
</ul>
</li>
-->
```

7. Save your changes (Update File)

And that's it! Visitors will no longer see the author and date archive links in the sidebar.

Note: Yours will probably be just

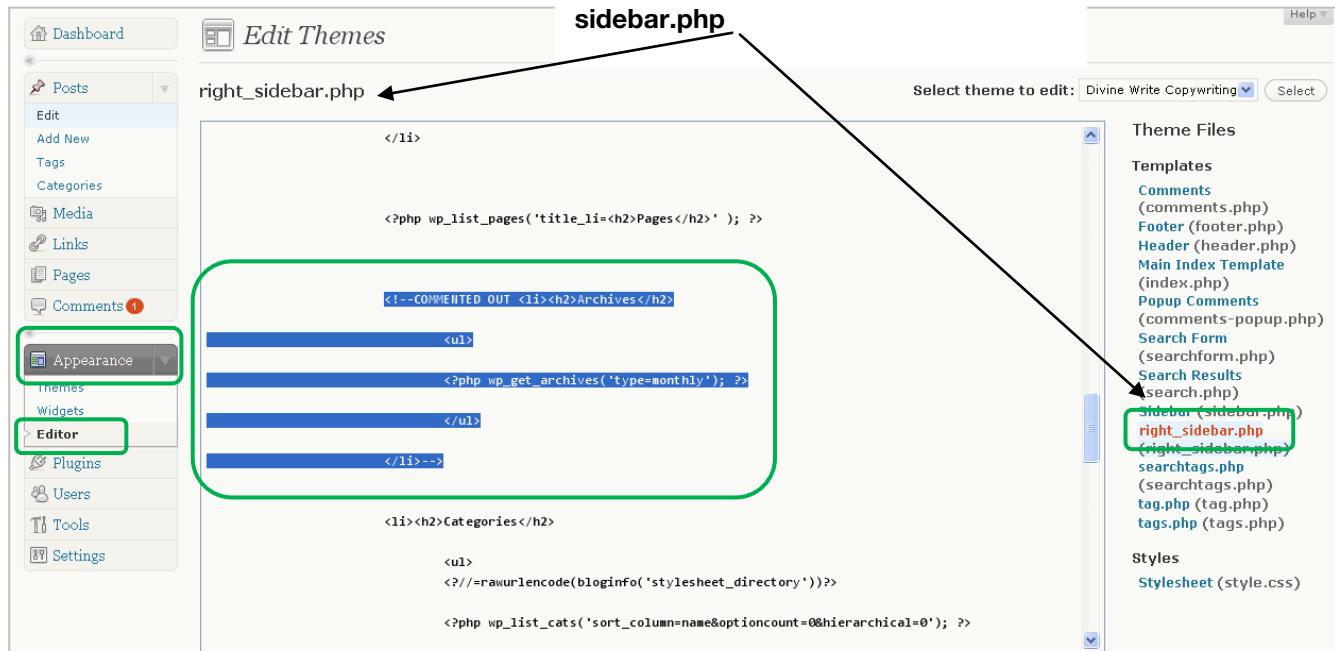


Figure 17 – Remove the Archive links from your right sidebar using the Theme Editor in WordPress

Disable Archive pages

Even with the Archive pages not being indexed, and Archive links removed from your sidebar, it's still possible for people to link to the URLs, thus diluting the PageRank of your main post URL. The simplest way to overcome this is to disable the author and date based archives.

To disable author & date based archives:

1. In WordPress, go to Plugins > Robots Meta
2. Fill in the check boxes as follows

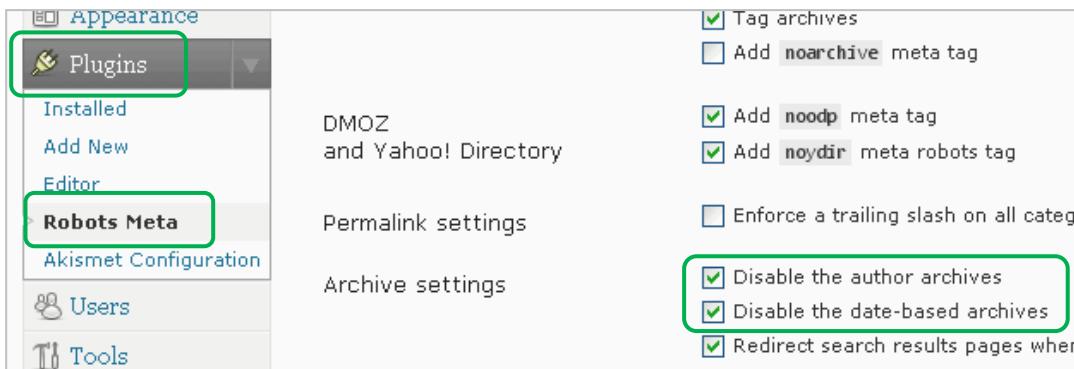


Figure 18 – Disable Archive pages in Meta Robots plugin so that visitors can't link to them

Provide a summary only on your blog's home page and category pages

For best SEO, you want everyone to be linking to the same version of each post, so that it accumulates as much PageRank as possible. If some people link to your home page, others link to your category page and yet others to the main post, your PageRank for that post may be greatly diluted.

To help ensure this doesn't happen, you need to display just a summary on all but the main post. People will naturally link to the full version of your post (the main post), not the summary versions.

To display a summary only on all but the main post:

1. While you're writing your post, position the cursor at the point where you want the summary to end
2. Click the Insert More tag button. A "More" break will then be inserted.

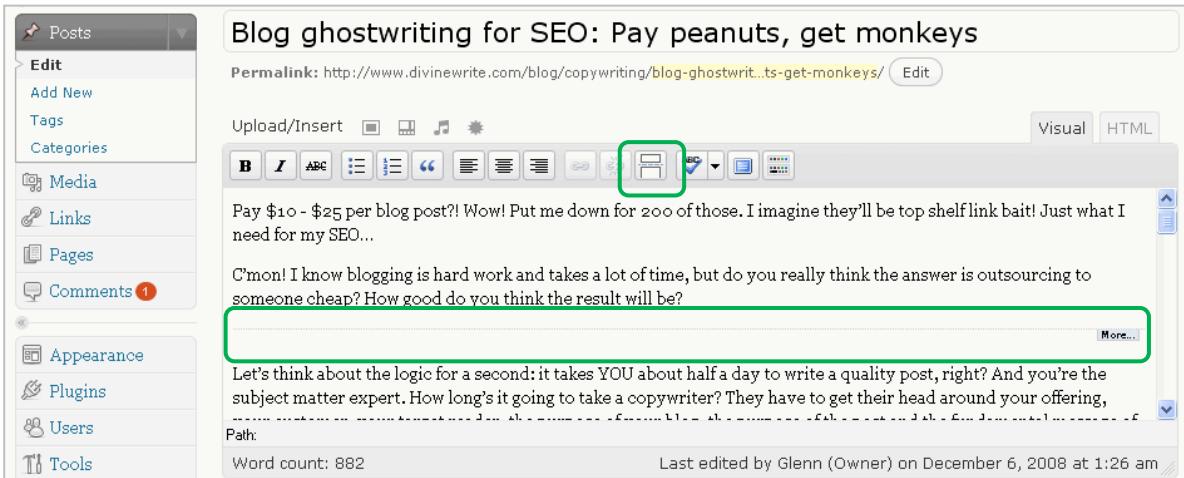


Figure 19 – Display a summary only on all but the main post

Your post will then appear as follows on your blog's home page and on your category pages.



Figure 20 – Summary post on the blog home page

For more information...

- on **formatting the read more... link**, see [Customizing the Read More](#).

Make RSS available, prominent, understandable & compelling

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. A fancy name for a technology that automatically delivers your blog posts to readers who subscribe to your ‘feed’. Many people – particularly other bloggers – use feed readers (like [Google Reader](#) or the [Sage-Too](#) Firefox addon) to draw together blog content from across the Web. So instead of manually visiting each of their favorite blogs each morning, they simply open their feed reader and see what’s new. Their favorite blogs come to them!

RSS helps you retain your audience. And because that audience will consist largely of bloggers, it’s also a good way to generate buzz around your content.

Display an RSS icon

WordPress comes fully equipped to handle RSS, but the default theme doesn’t feature an RSS icon. So you’ll need to add one (usually to sidebar.php).

To add an RSS icon to your sidebar:

1. [Find an RSS icon you like](#) (search [Google images](#) for “RSS icon”)
2. Save it as rss.jpg on your desktop
3. Upload it to your theme’s images folder (blog/wp-content/themes/yourtheme/images)
4. In WordPress, go to Appearance > Editor
5. Select sidebar.php from the list of Theme Files
6. Find the following code.

```
<li>  
<?php include (TEMPLATEPATH . '/searchform.php') ; ?>
```

7. Paste the following code BEFORE the in the above line of code.

```
<a href="<?php bloginfo('rss2_url'); ?>" title="<?php _e('Subscribe to this
blog using RSS'); ?>"> </a>
```

And voila! You should now see your RSS icon above the search field in your right sidebar.

Note: Yours will probably be just



Figure 21 - Add an RSS icon to your sidebar

It's also a good idea to explain somewhere (perhaps in the sidebar, next to the RSS icon) what RSS is, and what its benefits are. Make your explanation compelling; the more subscribers you have, the better.

There are a few different ways readers can subscribe to your blog feed. It depends on their preferred reader. They might, for instance, click on the RSS icon to automatically add the feed to Outlook's reader. Or they might use Google's subscribe bookmark (a web browser plugin for Google Reader). Or they might 'Discover' your feed with a FireFox plugin (like [Sage-Too](#)). The important thing is that you don't have to do anything. (Note that you might consider registering a [FeedBurner](#) account in order to track your subscriber statistics, plus the FeedBurner FeedSmith plugin to ensure all subscribers are tracked through FeedBurner.)

Publish the full text of each post to your feed

Finally, make sure you're publishing the full text of each post to your feed, not just a summary. This reduces your subscribers' workload, so they're more likely to remain subscribers.

To publish the full text of each post to your feed:

1. In WordPress, go to Settings > Reading
2. Make sure 'For each article, show: Full text' is selected

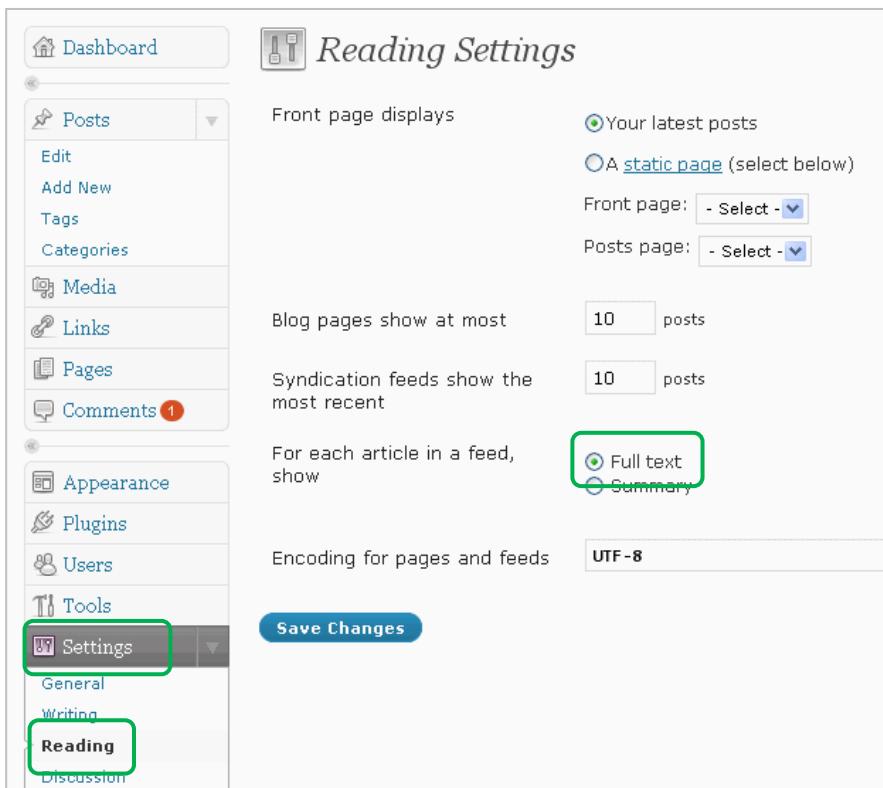


Figure 22 – Publish the full text of every post to your RSS feed

Make commenting easy

You want as many people to comment on your blog posts as possible. [It's great for your SEO](#) (because it indicates that your posts are interesting, helpful and/or topical, and the search engines take this into

consideration), and it's excellent for engagement with your social media community. So you want to make it as easy as possible.

To turn on commenting & allow people to comment without registration or moderation:

1. In WordPress, go to Settings > Discussion
2. Check 'Allow people to post comments on the article'
3. *Uncheck* 'An administrator must approve the comment (regardless of any matches below)' and 'Comment author must have a previously approved comment'. This will ensure that all posts are published without moderation (unless they contain more than two links, as discussed below).
4. *Uncheck* 'Users must be registered and logged in to comment' so that anyone can comment.

Discussion Settings

Default article settings

- Attempt to notify any blogs linked to from the article (slows down posting.)
- Allow link notifications from other blogs (pingbacks and trackbacks.)
- Allow people to post comments on the article

(These settings may be overridden for individual articles.)

Other comment settings

- Comment author must fill out name and e-mail
- Users must be registered and logged in to comment
- Automatically close comments on articles older than 14 days
- Enable threaded (nested) comments 5 levels deep
- Break comments into pages with 50 comments per page and the last pa

Comments should be displayed with the older comments at the top of each page

E-mail me whenever

- Anyone posts a comment
- A comment is held for moderation

Before a comment appears

- An administrator must always approve the comment
- Comment author must have a previously approved comment

Comment Moderation

Hold a comment in the queue if it contains 2 or more links. (A common ch

Figure 23 – Make commenting easy

5. If you haven't done so already, install the [Subscribe To Comments](#) plugin. This plugin automatically inserts a 'Notify me of follow-up comments via e-mail' check box, so that people can elect to receive an email when someone posts a comment after they've posted theirs.



Figure 24 – With the Subscribe to Comments plugin installed, visitors can elect to be notified of new comments

You should also include a prominent 'Leave a comment' link at the end of each post. People know they can leave comments, but it never hurts to prompt them! And make sure you always answer comments and optimize your answers for your keywords.

Control comment spam

Years ago, search spammers realized they could generate backlinks by commenting on other people's blogs and including a link with their comment. To counter this, WordPress makes all links in comments 'nofollow', by default, so they pass on no PageRank. However, many spammers still try comment spam, so you need to do a couple of things to control it:

To control comment spam:

1. Install [Akismet](#). It will catch virtually all spam comment attempts, and store them for you to moderate at your leisure. I've been using it for years, and in all that time, it's only ever missed a couple of spam attempts, and only incorrectly caught a couple of legitimate comments.
2. In WordPress, go to Settings > Discussion
3. Set 'Comment Moderation' to 2 links (i.e. if anyone posts a comment with more than two links, their comment will require moderation). This will catch anything that Akismet misses.

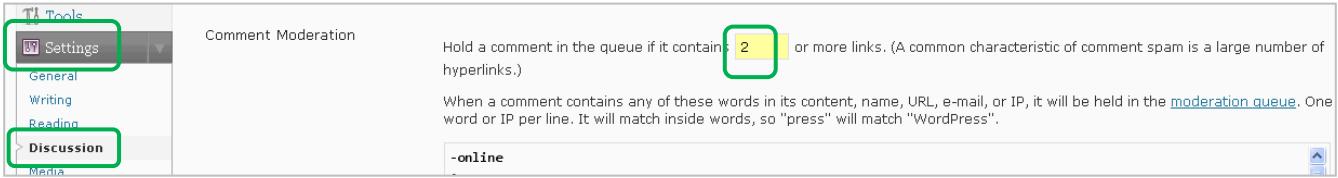


Figure 25 – Control comment spam

Put commenters' photos next to their comments

Integrate [Gravatar](#) (Globally Recognized avatar) photos with your blog comments. Bloggers know that others will more easily associate a quality comment with a face than a name. So if Gravatar's integrated, they'll be more likely to comment. And with Gravatar, the don't have to sign up to do it. They just add their comment, and their photo is automatically added.

To display Gravatars in your blog comments:

1. In WordPress, go to Settings > Discussion
2. Under Avatar Display, select Show Avatars
3. Under Default Avatar, select Gravatar Logo

Add a social bookmarking widget plugin

By adding a social bookmarking widget, you make it easy for readers to bookmark your posts. This is very important, as many of your readers will be other bloggers, and most of them use social bookmarking.

I use the [AddThis](#) plugin for my social bookmarking widget. Once installed, it automatically displays a button with each post that allows readers to choose their favorite social bookmarking service and quickly bookmark your post.

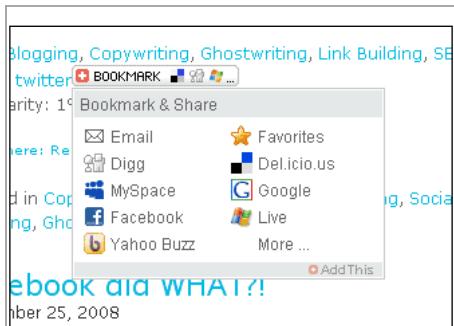


Figure 26 – AddThis social bookmarking widget allows readers to choose their favorite service

Ensure your Title meta tag is search friendly and bookmark friendly

Let's assume your blog's called "Big Billy's Bits & Bobs Blog" and you publish a new post called "Paperclips: How to make a fortune from them". By default, WordPress will generate a Title tag for that post that looks like this:

Big Billy's Bits & Bobs Blog : Paperclips: How to make a fortune from them

Now, as this particular post is about paperclips and moneymaking, the first five words of the Title are irrelevant. And they're not target keywords either (remember, it's best if the keywords are at the start).

What's more, when someone bookmarks the post, the Title automatically becomes the headline of the bookmark. And with those first five words, it's not going to generate much buzz! The person bookmarking would have to manually remove the first five words and the trailing colon and spaces. Sounds easy, I know, but if they're bookmarking 20 posts a day, as many bloggers do, they'll have a very streamlined process. Your cumbersome Title tag would slow them down, and may be enough to make them give up.

To make your Title meta tag search friendly and bookmark friendly:

1. In WordPress, go to Settings > All in One SEO
2. Tick 'Rewrite Titles'

3. Fill out the two Post & Page Title Format fields as follows

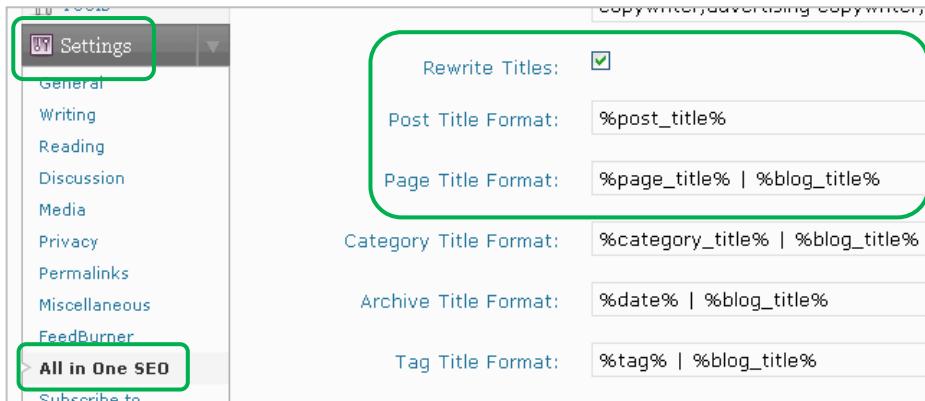


Figure 27 - Make your post's Title meta tag search and social bookmark-friendly, with the All in One SEO Pack plugin

Optimize your post titles (the main heading)

Most WordPress themes handle this automatically, but always check to make sure your post titles are tagged `<h1>` in your code. You can check this by right clicking on your page and selecting View Source. Your post title should look something like this:

```
<h1>Paperclips: How to make a fortune from them</h1>
```

Also try to include at least one target keyword in your post title. (But don't do this if it will significantly undermine the effectiveness of the headline. Remember, your headline has to draw the reader into your post. If it doesn't do that, all your optimization efforts are wasted.)

Make your posts easy to Tweet

Although you already have a social bookmarking widget (AddThis, described above), I'd still recommend adding a dedicated widget for Twitter that displays along with every post.

The [Tweet This plugin](#) for WordPress allows readers to Tweet your posts with a single click. Once installed, you can choose either a large bird button at the top right of your post, or a small 'Tweet This' link at the bottom left. When clicked, it invokes the reader's Twitter home page, with a tweet already written, consisting of a shortened link to your post, and the title of the post. These features are critical to a successful tweet.



The screenshot shows a WordPress post titled "Songwriting that connects – What lyrics can copywriters learn from?" from December 2, 2008. The post content discusses SEO and songwriting. A "Tweet This" button is visible on the right side of the post. A Twitter sidebar is open, showing a tweet from "divinewrite" with 56 retweets. The tweet reads: "www.s8z38.th8.us Songwriting that connects – What lyrics can copywriters learn from?". Below the tweet, there are replies from "divinewrite" and "gleonhard". The sidebar also includes a "Bookmark" button and a "Read it Later - Firefox Extension" link.

Figure 28 – Make it easy for readers to Tweet your post, with the TweetThis plugin

Use the Blogroll to link to related blogs

Bloggers track who's linking to their blog. When you link to them, they usually notice, and may visit your site to see what you're all about. There's even a chance they'll link back to you, just to return the favor. (But don't expect them to. Social media is about adding value about your community. Once you've earned it, people will add you to their blogrolls without any prompting.)

Link to related posts

By linking to related posts, you're simultaneously helping visitors and optimizing your page. Visitors will like you because the related posts are useful. And search engines will like you because you're linking to something relevant, probably with keyword rich anchor text.

The easiest way I've seen to incorporate related posts is to use the [Yet Another Related Posts Plugin \(YARPP\)](#). (This is also the plugin [recommended by Matt Cutts](#), the 'Google Insider').

The only tweak I'd recommend is changing the default 'Related Posts' heading to `<h2>`.

To change the default 'Related Posts' heading to `<h2>`:

1. In WordPress, go to Settings > Related Posts (YARPP)
2. Under Display Options for your website, find the 'Before / after related entries' field
3. In the Before field, change:

```
<p>Related posts:<ol>
```

To:

```
<h2>Related posts:</h2><ol>
```

4. In the After field, change:

```
</ol></p>
```

To:

```
</ol>
```

Your list of related posts will then look something like the following.

PS. What do you think the headline SHOULD have been? Please comment your suggestions.

BOOKMARK

[Tweet This](#)

Related posts:

1. [Google is right to penalize sites that over-optimize internal links \(5.761\)](#) In today's blog post at Search Engine Journal, Ann Smarty...
2. [Copywriting forum launched \(5.673\)](#) It's been a while since my last post. Sorry! But...
3. [US v British/Australian English in Website Copywriting \(5.606\)](#) Which do you use? US or British (Australian) English in...

Posted in: [Copywriting](#), [Facebook](#), [Headlines](#), [Readability](#), [Social Media](#), [Usability](#), [Web Copy](#)

[Edit](#) | [Comments](#)

3 Comments »

1. Hi Glenn

Figure 29 – Include links to related posts, with the YARPP plugin.

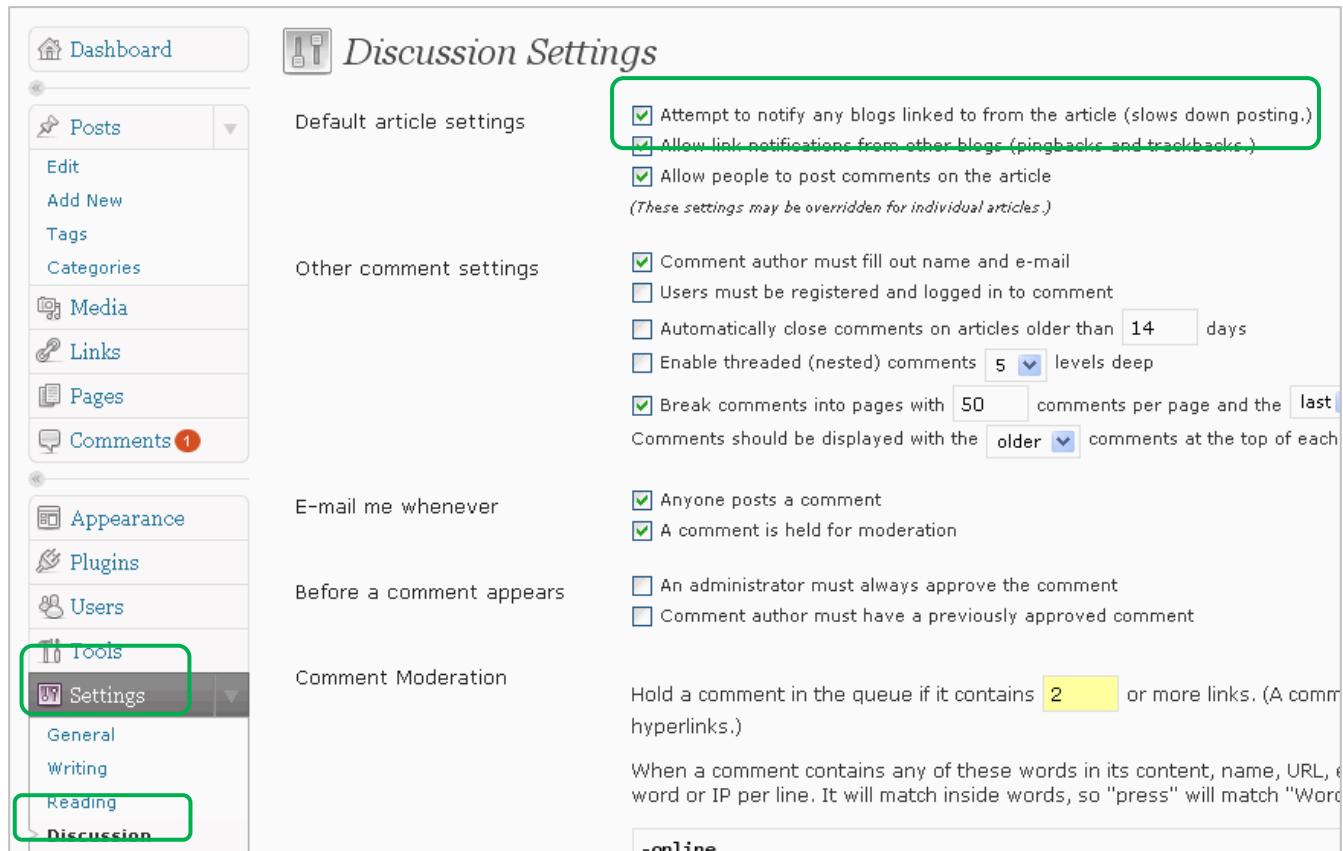
Support pingbacks & trackbacks

A pingback is a notification that another blogger has linked to your post. When you receive a pingback, a snippet of their post will automatically display as a comment on yours, along with a (nofollow) link to their post. Displaying pingbacks in this way encourages more bloggers to link to your posts, and it also increases the perception of buzz around your content (readers will see that bloggers are linking to you). A trackback is much the same as a pingback, except that it takes a bit more work for the other blogger to do. As a result, they're not as popular.

You should also allow WordPress to notify other blogs when you link to them with a Pingback or Trackback.

To support pingbacks & trackbacks:

1. In WordPress, go to Settings > Discussion
2. Tick both 'Attempt to notify any blogs...' and 'Allow link notifications...'

**Figure 30 – Support pingbacks and trackbacks****For more information...**

- on **writing helpful blog posts**, see 'Writing useful, unique blog posts' on p.105.
- on **social bookmarking services and social media optimization**, see 'Generate 'buzz' about your content with Social Media' on p.123.

Add your blog to Google Webmaster Tools

If you've already added your overall site to Google Webmaster Tools, you can ignore this step. If you haven't (or if your blog is your entire site), you should add it now, by following [Google's instructions](#) (for WordPress blogs).

Chapter summary

- Host your own WordPress blog.
- Install the latest version of WordPress.
- Link to related content.
- Optimize your categories for your main keywords.
- Optimize your blog Tags for minor keywords.
- Automate a meaningful, compelling & search friendly Description meta tag.
- Switch to Pretty Permalinks, then redirect your old URLs.
- Eliminate common function words from your URLs.
- Avoid duplicate content issues in your blog.
- Make RSS available, prominent, understandable & compelling.
- Make commenting easy.
- Control comment spam.
- Put peoples' photos next to their comments.
- Add a social bookmarking widget plugin.
- Ensure your Title meta tag is search friendly and bookmark friendly.
- Optimize your post titles (the main heading).
- Make it easy for people to join your social media networks.
- Make your posts easy to Tweet.
- Use the Blogroll to link to related blogs.
- Link to related posts.

- Support pingbacks & trackbacks.
- Add your blog to Google Webmaster Tools.

Step 5

Make sure the search engines know about your site

Submit your site to Google & the other search engines

I'll start this section with one very big caveat: technically, you don't actually need to submit your site to the search engines. After all, their purpose in life is to find websites!

Google actually states,

“...you don't even need to submit your site to Google. Google is a fully automated search engine that uses software known as "spiders" to crawl the web on a regular basis and find sites to add to our index. In fact, the vast majority of sites listed in our results aren't manually submitted for inclusion, but found and added automatically when our spiders crawl the web.” ([Google Information for Webmasters](#))

That said, I'd rather be safe than sorry. Google also admits that it can take quite a while (possibly months) for its bots to find your site. I'm not guaranteeing that submitting your site to Google will speed up this process, but it certainly won't slow it down!

How to submit your site to Google

Don't waste money by paying someone else to submit your site to Google. It's easy, and it's free!

Simply go to <http://www.google.com.au/addurl.html>, enter your URL (domain name) and a few comments or keywords to describe your site. Then click 'Submit'. That's all there is to it. You only have to do it once, and only for your top level page (i.e. Home page).

Google's bots will then come out to start crawling your website... eventually.

IMPORTANT: Once you've submitted your site to Google, there's no need to do it again. Ever. Once is enough.

How to submit your site to other search engines

Studies suggest that the top 11 search engines account for about 90% of web traffic. In other words, if you have the top 11 covered, there's no need to submit to the rest.

However, most of the top 11 didn't actually accept submissions. The only ones that do are Google (described above), [Yahoo](#), and [MSN](#). Here's a list of the available submit pages.

TIP: You should also consider creating an [open format sitemap](#), and submitting this sitemap to the search engines that accept sitemap submissions (e.g. Google and Ask).

For more information...

- on **creating a Google / open format sitemap**, see 'Create an open format / Google sitemap' on p.45.

“But someone offered to submit my site to 75,000 search engines, for just \$100!”

Don't do it! Firstly, there's no need. As mentioned above, the search engines can actually find you on their own. And even if you want to submit your site to them, just to be sure, there are really only three you need to worry about: Google, Yahoo & MSN.

Also, if you take up one of those sorts of offers, you'll be inundated with email spam.

Similarly, don't submit your site to the same search engines thousands for times. This is another form of search engine spamming.

Submit your site to the search engines' local business centers

More and more people are narrowing their searches to the local area. What's more, Google is starting to tailor its search results based on where the searcher is located. So if local search traffic is important to your site, you should definitely register your business with:

- [Google Local Business Center](#) (Google Maps) – Google now displays Google Maps listings as part of its regular search results
- [Microsoft Local Listing Center](#)

- [Yahoo Local](#)

You should also use the geographic targeting tool in [Google Webmaster Tools](#) to tell Google what geographic location your business targets. This won't affect your ranking in the normal results, but it will help ensure your listing displays appropriately for searchers who use Advanced Search.

TIP: The sorts of businesses that are likely to benefit from local search traffic include: restaurants, shop-fronts, cinemas & theater, theme parks, tourist attractions, car rentals, dry cleaners and lawyers.

Submit your products to Google Product Search (if you sell products)

If you're a vendor of products, you should definitely submit your products to [Google Product Search](#). They'll then be directly indexed and served in Google's regular SERPs.

Submit news, images or video

If your site offers news, images or video, you can let Google know:

- **News** – [Submit your site to Google News](#) then Submit a [News Sitemap](#).
- **Images** – Opt in to enhanced image search within [Google Webmaster Tools](#).
- **Video** – Submit your videos to [YouTube](#) or [Google Video](#) (both are owned by Google). (Theoretically, you can submit your videos to other video hosting services without impacting your results.)

Chapter summary

- Submit your domain name to Google as soon as possible.
- Although you don't actually need to submit your site to the other search engines, you may as well submit it to Yahoo and MSN, as they offer free (and simple) submissions.
- Consider creating a Google / open format sitemap.
- Don't pay anyone to submit your website to thousands of search engines, or to the same search engine thousands of times.
- Submit your site to the search engines' local business centers.
- Submit your products to Google Product Search (if you sell products).
- Submit news, images or video.

Step 6

Create great web content

Why is content so important? Well, firstly, your visitors want great content. Without it, they won't stay long, they won't come back, and you're unlikely to convert much of your traffic into revenue.

And secondly, great content attracts backlinks. Webmasters will *want* to link to it. And as you now know, backlinks are the single biggest factor you can manipulate to generate a high ranking.

What's more, when webmasters voluntarily link to your content because of its quality, those links tend to:

- come from related sites;
- come from quite a few trusted, important sites (it's quality content, after all);
- point at the page containing your content (which may be quite deep in your page hierarchy), not just your Home page;
- be keyword rich, because webmasters naturally use the anchor text to describe the content of the target page; and
- have varying anchor text, because each webmaster will describe your content differently.

And *whatdyaknow?* These are exactly the sorts of links that the search engines like to see, because they prove you're part of a credible network of related sites. When a search engine sees a link that satisfies most or all of these conditions, it gives it a lot of weight. A handful of links like this is worth hundreds of links from low-ranking / spammy sites, all with the same anchor text.

Link baiting

This process of creating great content to attract links is known as 'link baiting'. The two key components in link baiting are:

1. **lots of great content** - something people will want to link to ('Bait the hook')
2. **social media** - your avenue for letting people know about your great content ('Cast the line')

Of course, your content also needs to be optimized for your target keyword phrases so that the search engines know how to index it.

This chapter discusses how to create great content. The next chapter discusses how to optimize that content (see 'Optimize your web content' on p.111). And the chapter after that discusses how to leverage social media to get people talking about, and linking to your content (see 'Generate 'buzz' about your content with Social Media' on p.123).

Creating great content & lots of it ('Baiting the hook')

Great content can mean virtually anything. Anything that you think your readers would absolutely love to link to. (They'll do this because they want to be useful to their own readers and they'll gain credibility through their association with your site and its content.) It might be any of the following:

- Useful, unique, intriguing, exciting, humorous, controversial or subversive blog posts or videos

- A useful tool that's only available at your site (e.g. a theme, plugin or web application)
- Industry / niche news (e.g. An announcement about a newsworthy event or tool)
- Research results
- Free stuff
- Something entirely different – it all depends on your subject matter and audience, and you're only limited by your imagination, business intuition and industry awareness

For most businesses, great content means useful, unique blogging

While it's true that many forms of content can attract links, the reality is that most companies don't have the skills or resources to produce videos, make the news, develop tools, engage in research, or give away free stuff. Nor are most of those options relevant to their audiences.

What's more, most of us work in fairly ho-hum industries, so it's difficult to make our posts intriguing or exciting. Controversial / subversive is equally as difficult, and far riskier. And humor is very hit-and-miss. It's not always appropriate, it's one of the hardest things to write, and if you get it wrong, you'll alienate customers.

So for most companies, 'great content' boils down to 'useful blogging'.

TIP: Although your corporate copy (Home, About Us, Products, Services, etc.) is integral to SEO, it's not what we mean when we talk about link bait. Part of the appeal of link bait is its rapid rate of update, its topical nature and its informal style. Corporate copy must be compelling and engaging to persuade visitors to act, and it must be optimized, so that the search engines know which searches your site should be listed in. But it's not usually the sort of thing that bloggers would link to. Similarly, we're not talking about articles. Articles and blog posts may seem very similar, at first glance, but blogs are far better for link baiting. There are dedicated, free tools that make writing, optimizing, publishing and sharing your blog posts easy, and most people don't go fishing around on article indexes looking for stuff to link to. They look on blogs. (See " on p.123 for more information on sharing your blog posts and encouraging links back to them.)

Writing useful, unique blog posts

The key to a useful and unique blog is writing about what *you* know and what *you* think. No one else in the world knows exactly what you know, so leverage that uniqueness and expertise.

Why? This [quote from Nick Arnett](#) says it all:

“ This is supply and demand - when people have access to lots of facts, the value of facts drops and the value of point of view about those facts rises. The Internet has created enormous amounts of data, and as a result, value is shifting to viewpoints about the data. The big challenge is figuring out how to organize, filter and prioritize all these points of view for people to get the most value out of them.”

So write stuff that you think your readers won't already know, and will want to know. Or stuff that they may already know, but would be interested in hearing your take on. Things like trade secrets, handy hints, news, products, white papers, instruction manuals, and so on...

And do it often. Partly because this keeps readers engaged, and partly because it keeps the search engine bots coming back more often. Also, as a general rule, search engines equate lots of content with usefulness.

20 types of blog posts

In his book, [ProBlogger: Secrets for Blogging Your Way to a Six-Figure Income](#), leading Australian blogger, Darren Rowse, discusses 20 types of blog posts that are often successful:

1. Instructional
2. Informational
3. Reviews
4. Lists
5. Interviews
6. Case studies
7. Profiles
8. Link posts
9. 'Problem' posts
10. Comparison posts
11. Rants
12. Inspirational
13. Research
14. Collation posts
15. Prediction and review posts
16. Critique posts
17. Debate
18. Hypothetical posts
19. Satirical posts
20. Memes and projects

For a full discussion of each of these types of posts, I recommend you [buy Darren's book](#). He dedicates nearly 5 pages to this discussion, alone.

For more information...

- on **optimizing your blog posts**, i.e. the mechanics of SEO copy, see 'Optimize your web content' on p.111.
- on **writing compelling, engaging copy**, please read [Successful websites don't set out to sell](#), [Web copy – How much is enough?](#), [Writing benefit-driven web copy](#), [Engage your customer – Write about benefits](#) and [Writing helpful help](#).
- on **social bookmarking and Twitter**, see 'What is social media?' on p.124.
- on **hosting and optimizing a WordPress blog**, see 'Host and optimize your own WordPress blog' on p.65.
- on **how to blog successfully**, please visit [ProBlogger](#) – a great blog run by Darren Rowse. Or [buy Darren's book](#), [ProBlogger: Secrets to Blogging Your Way to a Six-Figure Income](#).

Write relatively lengthy posts

While long posts aren't necessarily better than short, you'll probably find yourself writing lengthy posts, simply in an effort to be useful to your readers. So long as they're easily scannable (headings, bullets, numbered lists, etc.), this is absolutely fine. Write as much copy as you need.

What's more, the search engines like to see a lot of content. This is one of the things they consider when assessing the relevance of your site. Their logic: there's a good chance that a site with a lot of copy is going to be helpful and informative. And that's precisely the sort of site they want to include in their SERPs. In [the words of Aaron Wall of SEOBook](#):

 Longer and more authoritative documents are better than breaking articles into many shorter pages."

So aim for around 250-500 words per post, and you'll be right on the money for visitors and search engines, alike.

NOTE: [According to Darren Rowse, at ProBlogger](#):

 ...research shows that longer articles can have a pretty steep drop off rate in readers after the text gets below the ‘fold’ or to the end of the first screen of article.”

However, it’s important to note that it’s not all about traffic. You may get fewer readers, but those you do get will probably perceive your article to be high value, so they’ll be more likely to become loyal readers (and advocates) of your blog.

Write in a style that suits your audience

Whatever your subject matter, write in a style that your audience will be comfortable with. If they’re from the old school, don’t write like I am. Don’t use contractions, don’t end sentences with prepositions, and don’t start sentences with “and” or “but”. But if they’re not old school, just use conversational English. In fact, the more of yourself you include in the post, the more engaging it will be. The key is to make it readable.

Stuck for ideas?

Coming up with new content on a daily – even weekly – basis isn’t easy. And it’s not just the time; it’s also really difficult to keep thinking of new things to talk about. If you’re committed, you’ll find ways around this. Here are three to get you going.

1. **Monitor the ‘Most Popular’ and ‘Up-and-Coming’ pages on some social bookmarking services** (like [Del.icio.us](#) & [StumbleUpon](#) – which has a [downloadable toolbar for Firefox](#)). Also try some niche-specific services. (e.g. [Sphinn](#) is a great Internet related social bookmarking service.)
2. **Check out some news services** (like [Google News](#) & [CNN.com](#)). Also, look for some niche-specific news services (e.g. [InternetNews.com](#) is an Internet related news site.)
3. **Sign up to Twitter.** Twitter conversations cover an amazingly diverse range of topics, including the news. In fact, I find I usually hear the latest news first on Twitter.

4. **Think of all the questions you get asked** by customers and prospects. These questions show you what people are interested in. Once you start thinking about it, you'll probably find there are hundreds of topics you could write. You may even have some of them partly written, already, in your instruction manuals or installation guides, etc.

When you do get a little stuck for ideas, remember how it feels. And when you find someone on a social bookmarking service who consistently bookmarks pages you really like, remember that feeling too. This is exactly how hundreds of thousands of bloggers feel every day. And it's what makes your intelligent, helpful participation in social media so effective. But more on that on p.103 - 'Link baiting'.

Remember to link

Internal links help the search engines figure out what pages you consider important. And external links (links to other sites) can show Google that you're intent on directing visitors to helpful, relevant content. So do both where relevant. And make your link anchor text keyword rich.

Also, when you link to someone else's blog post, quite often, a snippet of your post and a (nofollow) link to your post will be automatically added to their comments. This is known as a 'pingback'. The pingback link doesn't pass on any PageRank, so it's of no direct SEO benefit to you, but it's certainly beneficial in terms of building your social media presence. It lets the original blogger know you linked to him or her, and it puts your name and link in front of that blogger's audience.

Link Bait versus Flagship Content

Some social media practitioners distinguish between 'flagship content' and 'link bait'. For instance, in his ebook, 'Killer Flagship Content', [Chris Garrett](#) (professional blogger, Internet Marketing Consultant, new media industry commentator – and someone I really respect), says:

“First, Flagship Content is stuff you are proud to tell people about. Content that is so compelling it draws visitors like a magnet. A resource that people love to talk about, perfectly tuned to your audience. While you might find truly incredible resources that were created as link bait I think most people would agree a

lot more link bait has been about creating more buzz than is necessarily deserved.

“Secondly Link bait can be very much like attention seeking for the sake of it, just to attract attention and links. Flagship content is about long term value. Providing something truly useful and original that will stand the test of time. A concrete base that you can build your blog upon.”

Now, although I agree that this distinction exists, when I use the term ‘link bait’, I actually mean the same thing Chris means when he says ‘flagship content’. It has to be great content that will stand the test of time and always reflect well on you.

Chapter summary

- Create great content.
- People will want to link to it.
- Leverage social media to generate buzz around your content.
- For most businesses, great content means useful, unique blogging.
- Write relatively lengthy posts.
- Visit social bookmarking & new services if you’re stuck for content ideas.
- Include internal and external links as appropriate.
- Make every post something people will want to link to.

Step 7

Optimize your web content

Search engines don't read like humans. We actually make sense of the individual words and their combinations (phrases, sentences, paragraphs, pages, page hierarchies, etc). We even read between the lines and take all visual design and aural elements into account.

Search engines aren't that sophisticated (even Google – although it's getting there!). In fact, they don't really process meaning at all; they categorize a site's subject matter based on the words that are used most often in the body copy, headings, links, etc.

So content optimization is simply the act of using your target keyword phrases frequently on your site and in the places that matter. ('Target keyword phrases' being the words your target customers are searching for when they're looking for your product or service.)

TIP: When you optimize your website for a particular word, you're essentially telling the search engines to include you in the results when people search for that word. As a rule of thumb, the more frequently you use your keywords, the more relevant you'll be considered by the search engines, and the more likely you are to appear in searches for those words. (How high up the rankings you appear depends mostly on the number of links back to your site there are.)

You also need to optimize your web development and your blogging platform. This chapter deals only with optimization of content.

For more information...

- on **optimizing your web development**, see 'Develop your website right' on p.27.
- on **optimizing your WordPress blog**, see 'Host and optimize your own WordPress blog' on p.65.

Writing SEO copy

The trick to optimizing your copy is using the most important keywords frequently and in the right places, without compromising readability.

But how do you define "frequently?" And what are the right places? What if you want to target a few different keywords? And for that matter, what should the wordcount of your pages be? Below are a few tips that will help you out.

What should the wordcount of a page be?

You'll hear a lot about the importance of a lot of content. While I definitely agree that 'content is king', there's no need to write volumes for every page. I recommend approx:

- 100-150 words for your home page (usability studies show that you should never make your reader scroll down on the Home page)
- 250-400 words for pages lower in your hierarchy (increase word count as you increase your level of detail)
- 300-1000 words for blog posts

Search engines don't count your number of words and strike you off the list if you're too high or too low. They're only interested in your word count insofar as it's an indication of the helpfulness of your website. Typically a helpful website will have a lot of words. (Note that they consider a lot of other factors as well, not just word count.)

How many times should I use a keyword?

You don't want to fill every page up with your keyword. That's called 'keyword stuffing' – a form of search engine spam. More importantly, it reduces readability, so your visitors won't stay for long.

Just try to ensure that on MOST pages, your target keyword phrase appears more frequently than any other single word or phrase (ignoring words like "if" and "the" etc.). The best way to do this is to run your copy through a word cloud generator. I use [Wordle](#). Here's a word cloud generated from the home page of my own website, www.divinewrite.com.



Figure 31 – Word cloud generated from the copy of my home page

As you can see, the words “copywriter” and “copywriting” are very prominent in the cloud. This means I’ve used them more than any other word or phrase.

Don’t worry if the words of your target keyword phrase aren’t the most prominent in the cloud for EVERY page. You should have many other pages of copy on which you’ll be targeting the same phrase(s). So long as they’re very prominent on MOST pages, you should be right.

Forget keyword density

Until recently, I advocated the use of a metric called ‘keyword density’ to assess whether you were using your target phrases often enough. I no longer advocate this measure.

Keyword density is the ratio of the number of times your keyword phrase appears to the number of words on your page, expressed as a percentage. e.g. If your page has 200 words, and your keyword phrase appears 6 times, its density is 3% (6/200 x 100).

The problem with keyword density is that it’s completely arbitrary. Google isn’t looking for a specific density; in fact, it doesn’t measure density at all. Yet people who use keyword density tend to become obsessed with it. They become fixated on achieving a density of 5%, 10% and even higher, without proper regard to the impact this has on the readability of their copy.

Having a high keyword density won’t necessarily help you. In fact, if it’s too high, it may actually impede your rankings, as Google may perceive you as a spammer.

Forget keyword density. Just generate a word cloud from your copy. That will tell you all you need to know.

Increasing the frequency of your keywords without undermining readability

When you actually sit down and try to write some SEO copy, you’ll see that it’s not always easy to include your keywords more often than any other word or phrase. At least to begin with.

The easiest way to do it is to be specific. As you write every sentence, ask yourself, “Could I be more specific?” For example, if you sell cheap second hand computers, don’t just say “our computers” or “our products”; ask yourself if you can get away with saying “our cheap second hand computers”.

Similarly, don’t say things like “with our help”; instead, say “with the help of our cheap second hand computers”. Once you get the hang of it, you’ll find there are many opportunities to replace generic wording with your keyword phrase.

Obviously, there’s a bit of an art to it; sometimes it ends up sounding like you’re repeating your keyword phrase over and over again. If this happens, you may just need to restructure the sentence or paragraph. Always remember: your site reflects the quality of your product or service. If your site is hard to read, people will infer a lot about your offering... Readability is all-important to visitors. And after all, it’s the visitors who buy your product or service, not the search engines.

If you can’t include your keywords frequently enough without impacting readability, don’t panic. You’ll no doubt pick it up on another page. You can have some pages with a high frequency, and some with a low frequency, and still attain a high search ranking. The important thing is that you use your keywords more often than any other single word or phrase.

For more information...

- on **how search engines analyze the text content of a page**, see [The Keyword Density of Non-Sense](#).

Exact string or just all words in the phrase?

If you’re targeting very specific keyword phrases in your copy, you’ll soon discover that it’s quite difficult to do. If you repeat your keyword again and again, your copy can become very unfriendly to readers.

For example, targeting “shoes” is easy; but targeting “blue tennis shoes California” is a lot more difficult. If your web page has 200 words, your keyword phrase will probably have to appear around six times to be more frequent than any other word or phrase. That’s fine if it’s a single word, because there’ll still be 194 words of normal copy left. The keyword won’t be so noticeable to readers. But if there are four words in the keyword phrase (as in “blue tennis shoes California”), there’ll only be 176 words left. That would make the keyword phrase a lot more noticeable.

What’s more, exact keyword phrases can be difficult to incorporate into your copy in a natural way. Try writing a sentence that includes “blue tennis shoes California”, in this exact order...

Fortunately, however, you don’t have to actually target the exact phrase. (It’s better if you do, but you don’t have to.) You can simply target all of the individual words. So instead of repeating the exact phrase “blue tennis shoes California” six times, you’d simply repeat “blue” six times, “tennis” six times, “shoes” six times, and “California” six times. These individual repetitions could appear anywhere on the page. The important thing is that they don’t have to appear next to each other in the exact string “blue tennis shoes California”.

Using this approach, you can more easily achieve the density you’re after without sacrificing readability.

I will qualify this: when someone searches for “blue tennis shoes California”, all things being equal, a website that targets the exact string “blue tennis shoes California” will rank higher than a website that targets just the individual words. But when are all things ever equal?

As always, the important thing to remember is that human visitors are more important than search engines, and that keyword frequency is not the be-all-and-end-all of SEO.

What if I want to target more than one keyword phrase?

If you’re targeting quite specific keyword phrases in your copy, you’ll find it difficult to aggressively target more than two keyword phrases per page. You can target a few extras (maybe related words), but only incidentally.

For example, let's say you want your tennis clothing page to rank well when a customer searches for the following phrases.

- “blue tennis shoes California”
- “green tennis skirts West Coast”
- “purple tennis hats”
- “fastest tennis shoes world”

Let's also assume 400 words per page.

Now, if you try to optimize your web copy for *all* of these phrases, you'll find that it becomes very difficult to read. You'd need to include all of the words from each of the above phrases around 10 times. That would mean approx half of the copy on your page would be keywords!

The best way around this is to create additional pages. Have a cluster of pages for “blue tennis shoes California”, another cluster of pages for “green tennis skirts West Coast”, another for “purple tennis hats”, etc. This way, only around 10% of your copy will be dedicated to keywords. This results in much more readable, natural-looking pages.

And in the above example, it would also result in a much more logically structured site; a well structured site typically wouldn't discuss all of the above items on the same page.

For more information...

- on **clustering**, see 'Structure your site around keywords' on p.39.

Where should I use my keywords?

When identifying your site's subject matter, search engines try to act human. If humans tend to pay close attention to particular parts of a page (e.g. headings), the search engines will do the same. The logic is that they assume your keywords are more likely to appear in those places. So try to include your keywords in:

- text links
- headings (using `<h1>`, `<h2>` & `<h3>` heading tags in your HTML)
- the words closer to the top of the page
- bold tags
- bulleted and numbered lists
- domain names & URLs

Using keywords in text links

Because the anchor text (the visible text) of a link is usually a good indication of the content of the target page, search engines place a great deal of emphasis on it when indexing your page. So when you're linking to other pages on your site (or, for that matter, to other websites), ensure you make your anchor text keyword-rich.

But don't overlook your visitors. They use anchor text to decide whether that content will be useful to them, thus whether they should click through. If you have to decide between visitor and search engine, choose visitor.

IMPORTANT: I used to advocate using your keywords in unmarked internal links (i.e. links that look just like the rest of the text on the page – no underline, no different color). I'm not so sure this is a good idea any more, though. It's a little too like using hidden links (which is spamming). However, because I'm not 100% convinced it's spam, I've included a discussion of how to do it below. You can ignore it or use it at your own risk!

For more information...

- on **search engine spam**, see 'DON'T use spamming techniques' on p.61.

Using unmarked links

To create an unmarked link, first include the following in your CSS file (you only have to do this once):

```
<style type="text/css">  
!--  
a {text-decoration: none;}  
-->  
</style>
```

Then format the HTML of each link as follows:

As well as providing blue tennis shoes to top ranking players in California, we sell stylish and functional green tennis skirts to the entire West Coast.

Using keywords in headings

Like human visitors, search engines rely on headings to ‘scan’ your site. This means headings play a big part in how the search engines will index your site, and you should try to make them keyword rich.

In fact, think about inserting extra headings just for this purpose. Generally this will also help the readability of your site because it will help customers scan read.

For example, if you have a page detailing the benefits of purple tennis hats, you could break it up into logical sections with the following headings.

- Stylish purple tennis hats
- Tennis hats – purple and practical
- Comfort comes first with purple tennis hats

However, when writing your headings, try to make them a little different from your Title tag, as there is speculation that this may cause penalties.

Also, it’s important that you instruct your web developer to tag these headings with the appropriate level heading style (i.e. `<h1>`, `<h2>`, `<h3>`).

And finally, try to include your keywords close to the start of each heading. But don’t do this if it stops your headlines from being engaging and compelling.

Using keywords at the start of the page

Many SEO experts believe that the search engines see words at the start of a page as more representative of what your site is about than words at the end (i.e. prominence). So it’s a good idea to make sure you use your keywords toward the start of each page. (See also ‘Position your content toward the top of your HTML code’ on p.32.)

Bolding keywords

The jury's out on whether bolding your keywords is worthwhile for SEO. My personal opinion is that bolding should be used to help visitors scan your page. If keywords aid this cause, use them; if they hinder it, don't. In practice you'll probably find that your keywords will make it into those bold sections quite a bit. After all, they're key to your subject matter, so it's logical that they'll occasionally help readers who scan.

Using keywords in bulleted and numbered lists

Although it's logical, there's no hard evidence (that I know of) supporting the claim that search engines pay particular attention to the words you use in bulleted and numbered lists. Once again, my recommendation is to use lists for scannability. If your keywords happen to end up there, all the better. If not, no big deal.

Using keywords in domain names and URLs

Once again, the jury's out. Some people argue that having a domain name that includes your keyword is useful, while others argue that it's only useful if it's an exact match. Some say it's a good idea to separate keywords with hyphens, others say hyphens raise trust issues. And some say it's completely irrelevant! In any case, most of the time, you won't have much say in domain names and URLs.

Chapter summary

- Optimization means using your target keyword phrases frequently on your site and in the places that matter.
- Aim for 100-1000 words per page.
- Try to use your keyword more frequently than any other word or phrase. Generate a word cloud from your copy to assess whether you have achieved this.
- Don't undermine readability.
- Target one keyword per page (unless there is very little competition for your keywords).
- Don't get too hung up on keyword frequency – use it as a guide, not a rule.

- If you need to target more than one keyword, create a new page for each.
- Use keywords in links and headings.
- Don't use unmarked links.
- Try to use keywords more often at the start of the page than at the end.
- Structure your site around your keywords.
- Ensure bots can traverse your entire site via text links.

Step 8

Generate 'buzz' about your content with Social Media

So you've baited the hook (with a helpful, regularly updated, well written blog). And you've optimized your content. Now you have to cast the line. This is where social media optimization comes in.

Social media optimization is about getting your content noticed by people who'll link to it. This process is typically referred to as creating 'buzz'.

In practice, the people most likely to link to your content are other bloggers. In order to keep their network of readers coming back, most bloggers update their blogs on a daily basis, so they're always hungry for something interesting to talk about. And when they talk about it, they naturally link to it.

The trick to social media optimization is getting your content to appear prominently in the 'places' bloggers go for inspiration. As social media content creators themselves, it's not surprising that they turn to social media for ideas. So to get their eyes on your content, you need a good understanding of social media, and you need to participate.

What is social media?

Social media is the umbrella term given to 'places' on the Internet where most – if not all – of the content is created by users, not webmasters. Social media services include the likes of:

Blogs	Video sharing	Wikis
Message boards	Picture sharing	User Groups
Forums	Podcasts	Virtual Worlds
Social networks	Vidcasts	

Because of the un-owned, unfettered nature of social media services, millions of people worldwide use them to express themselves, connect, communicate and share. To have conversations.

And because those conversations occur on what is intrinsically a broadcast platform (the World Wide Web), they are, by definition, one-to-many conversations.

This is the real power of social media. It combines the power of conversation between connected individuals with the power of broadcast.

TIP: 75% of Americans use Social Media ([Forrester Research, cited on AdWeek](#)), and 93% of them believe every company should have a Social Media presence. [Cone](#)

Uses of social media

People use social media to share in all sorts of ways, but for SEO, the two key uses are:

1. **Communication** – 'Broadcasting' updates to everyone in your network, e.g. "I just read a great article at [www.domain.com/article.html...](#)"; and

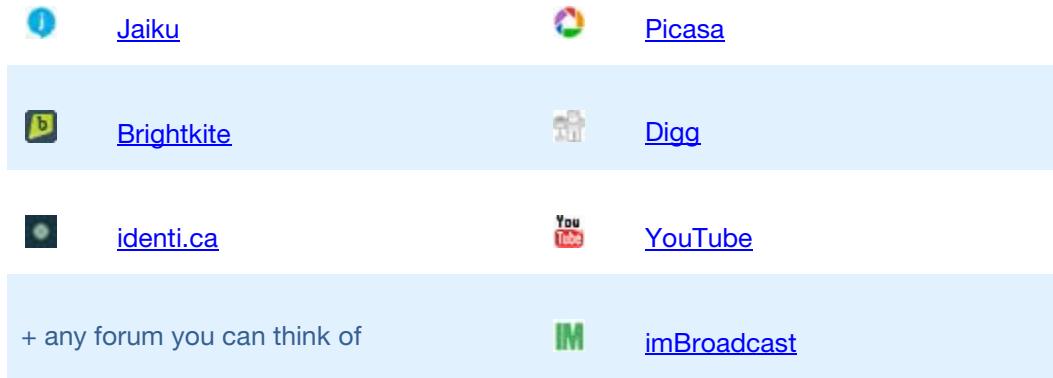
2. **Bookmarking** – Saving links to your favorite content and sharing those links with everyone in your network, many of whom will bookmark it too. Importantly, many bloggers see a bookmark as a vote for their favorite content in an effort to get it listed on the 'Most Popular' page.

NOTE: This distinction is more a reflection of how we use social media for SEO, than it is of the social media services themselves. In practice, they're used in much more sophisticated and subtle ways than this.

List of social media services

Here's a list of some of the more popular social media services.

Communication	Bookmarking
 Twitter	 StumbleUpon
 Plurk	 Sphinn
 MySpace	 Reddit
 FaceBook	 Del.icio.us
 LinkedIn	 Mixx
 Plaxo	 Technorati
 LivingMemory	 SlideShare
 Squidoo	 Flickr
 Bebo	 PhotoBucket



For more information...

- on the **multitude of available social media services**, see [How to Leverage Web 2.0 & Social Media Sites to Market Your Brand & Control Your Message](#) at SEOmoz, [The 2008 Social Network Analysis Report - Geographic - Demographic and Traffic Data Revealed](#) at Ignite Social Media, and [The Conversation Prism](#) by Brian Solis and JESS3. Also take a look at [UserNameCheck](#).

Social media networks and communities

In the sense that the people who use social media services are interconnected, they form a network. But the term 'network' doesn't even begin to convey the strength of those connections, the richness of the relationships they facilitate, and the meaning attributed to the network by its members.

While 'network' may adequately describe what you'd see if you mapped the interactions from a distance, it doesn't really describe what it is, at all. What it is, is a community. A naturally evolved, continuously evolving community, with its own culture, dialect, rules, agendas, leaders and prejudices.

Having said that, I use the terms almost interchangeably throughout this book. Partly because sometimes I talk about the physical interconnectedness (in which case I use 'network') and sometimes I talk about the entity created by that interconnectedness (in which case I use 'community'). And I'm sure there are times when I've just slipped up and used the wrong term!

How to leverage social media for SEO

In any human community, conversation is powerful. In social media it's *all*-powerful, because it's the foundation of the community. In social media, there's no physical interaction, so without conversation, there's nothing. And that's the key to social media for SEO. If your content is viewed as trustworthy and high quality, word spreads quickly. And because the word is spread by people who are, themselves, trusted, the trust they invest in your content, and their high opinion of it, spreads simultaneously.

Of course, it's not just a question of writing great content and hoping the right social media communities will find it. There's way too much content on the Web for that to happen. To make it happen, you actually have to *make it happen*.

Following is my recommendation for starting out in social media with a view to improving your search engine ranking.

Start a blog

Most social media users are bloggers, so the social media model works best with blog content. (See 'Host and optimize your own WordPress blog' on p.65 and " on p.105 for more info on blogging.)

Post lots of helpful, interesting content on your blog

See 'Creating great content & lots of it ('Baiting the hook')' on p.103 for more info.

Join Twitter and StumbleUpon

[Twitter](#) is a 'Communication' social media service and [StumbleUpon](#) is a 'Bookmarking' service. They're the easiest services to use and deliver the most value.



Connect with like-minded people

Try to find people who you can learn from, people who would be interested in what you have to say, and people who might learn from you. This is the starting point of your community. It will generally consist of both prospective customers and influencers (e.g. reputable competitors and related companies). To find these people on Twitter, use [Twitter Search](#) or 'Follow' [@MrTweet](#) to get recommendations on thought leaders in your field. Once you find someone interesting, Follow them. On StumbleUpon, search for interesting, relevant content, and check out its reviews to see who else liked it. If you like what they say, Subscribe to their Favorites.



Form relationships & contribute

Form relationships with individuals on Twitter by contributing. Answer questions, offer advice, link to helpful third party content, be an accessible point of contact for your customers, and reveal your personality (human-ness). This is probably the single-most important factor early on in your Twitter career. You have to rack up brownie points.



Read, bookmark & comment on other people's content

Spend some time each day browsing StumbleUpon content. You can do this by [downloading the StumbleUpon Firefox toolbar](#) and clicking Stumble for a random pick from your category picks or subscriptions. Or you can browse the StumbleUpon home page to see the most popular page. When you find something you like, be sure to give it the 'ThumbsUp,' and preferably a comment. People – particularly the author – will see your comments and will often check out your profile and your site.



Announce your content

When you've written some really good content, and you think your Twitter followers will benefit from it, announce it and include a link.



People will visit your site to read it

If people like you (or at least find you interesting), they'll visit your site to check out the content you announced.



People will add comments

If your content is great quality, it will provoke discussion. People will add comments partly for the sake of the discussion, and partly for the sake of elevating their own social media networking presence. And Google loves a good discussion. Comments indicate relevance and topicality – exactly what Google wants in its SERPs. So the more comments you generate, the better your ranking.



People will talk about your content

Because bloggers are always hungry for new post ideas, if your post is great, they'll bounce off it with a post of their own. They'll also discuss your post on Twitter (e.g. "Just read this great post on..."), in forums, and in countless other places where people connect.



People will link to your content

And usually when someone blogs about your post, they'll link to it. If only to show their readers what they're talking about. Importantly, because these links are voluntary, they'll be guaranteed to come from relevant sites, with varying – and generally keyword rich – anchor text. What's more, they'll be linking to pages that are relatively deep within your site structure; they won't just be linking to your home page. These are exactly the kind of links that the search engines like to see. Natural links that prove your site has depth. (Of course, all of this discussion and linking also drives high quality traffic to your site.)



People will bookmark – or vote for – your content

If they like your content, people will vote for it using their own social bookmarking service. Your post will then be listed on the 'Most Recent' page, which is highly trafficked by other bloggers in search of something to talk about. (More discussion, more links, more bookmarks. It's a cycle.)



Your post will become more popular in StumbleUpon

This is where it gets good! As your post gets more votes, it works its way up the StumbleUpon's rankings. This means it gets more views, which means more discussion, more links and more bookmarks! Great content is viral. (And let's not forget: throughout this whole process, you're getting a lot of very high quality traffic to your site, too. Potentially thousands, daily.)



More people will join your StumbleUpon network

Some will just want fast, easy, automatic access to all future content you bookmark. Others will join in the hopes that you'll bookmark their content. Regardless of their motives, though, once they're in your network, they'll be far more likely to bookmark and link to your content – partly because they'll see more of it, and partly because they're part of your community. They respect you, and probably feel inclined to promote you (either to do you a favor, or to boost their own credibility by sharing quality content with their own network). And once again, when they bookmark it, it's promoted across their network.



More people will follow you on Twitter

They'll see the quality of your content, they'll be just as keen to see your 140 character tweets on Twitter as they are to read your 500 word blog posts. This, in turn, gives you a larger audience, which means more people hear your content announcements.



People will promote you because it benefits them

Remember, millions of people are in social media for the same reasons you are: to promote their business and increase their search ranking. And just as you actively participate in order to enhance your network status, so, too, do they. It's not like traditional advertising, where the only incentive to promote the advertiser is money. In social media, when you promote someone else's content, you both win. It's kinda like cross-pollination.



Join a few more social media services

Now that you're familiar with how to use social media, join a few more services to extend your reach and increase your brand awareness. By now, you'll have a feel for what's likely to work for you and what isn't.



You'll become an influencer

Over time, people in your community come to trust you, implicitly. They'll see that you're committed to the community, and they'll start looking to you for advice, and recommending you to others. You'll develop a following of your own. In other words, you'll become an influencer. When this happens, more people will visit your site when you announce content, and more people will see, and respond to, your bookmarked content. And they'll all arrive ready to approve of it. So they'll be easier to please and harder to displease, and, therefore, more likely to link to, bookmark and discuss your content.



Ask your network to bookmark your content

Now that you have some credibility and authority, and somewhat of a loyal following, you can start to call in favors. Asking people to bookmark (aka vote for) your content is one such favor. Twitter is great for these sorts of requests. So long as you don't do it too often, and you're appreciative when people agree, this approach can work well. (And, of course, this feeds back into the almost self-perpetuating cycle described above.)



You'll become an opinion / thought leader

When this happens, you've hit the big-time. You'll have thousands of followers – maybe even tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands – spread across multiple social media services. And they'll all trust you, so they'll believe virtually everything you say, almost without question. When you announce or bookmark new content, they'll flock to it. They'll expect it to be good, so they're virtually guaranteed to approve of it. They'll be keen to do you the favor or linking to it, bookmarking it and discussing it. They may even do so simply to get in your good graces. (Remember, it's all visible.) And they'll be impatient to link to it, because they'll want to be the first to do so (in their quest to become a thought leader, just like you). So impatient, in fact, that they may not even read your content in its entirety before linking to it. In other words, your popularity and your brand have become almost a viral phenomenon. You'll hardly have to lift a finger to keep the momentum going. For examples of this, take a look at the social media and search engine presence of [the world's 100 most popular Twitter users](#).

IMPORTANT: Even though social media services allow you to link back to your site (e.g. in your profile, comments & updates), they're usually nofollow. This means they're of no value to your ranking; the search bots won't follow the link through to your site and no PageRank will be passed on. So don't go throwing your link around every chance you get. It won't benefit your SEO and it'll just give you a reputation as a spammer.

20 Tips for successful community building

Ok. So now that you know the skeletal logic of using social media for SEO, here's some meat to put on the bones.

Social media spaces are very personal. With genuine communities. And people in those communities value them very highly, take them very seriously and are very protective of them. Entry into a social media community isn't a right; it's something you have to earn. Sure, you may be allowed to join, but you won't be considered a true member until you've earned your stripes, until you've shown that you value the community as much as they do, that you take it seriously, and that you're just as protective of it.

So, although your ultimate objective is to get people to link to your site, you have to be very careful how you go about achieving that objective. Don't go into any social media community thinking you can treat its members like an advertising audience, or like recipients of reciprocal linking email requests. On the whole, they don't appreciate promotion, and they won't link to you just because you ask.

Social media culture is one of giving, not selling. If you ignore this, you'll simply be intruding on everyone's personal space. They'll feel the same as you do when you get a telesales call at home during dinner.

Furthermore, most social media community members are bloggers. And they won't link to your website without a very good reason. Their blog content – even if it's corporate – is a lot different from corporate promotional

content. It's much, *much* more personal – bloggers express themselves, they don't just try to sell. This is the key ingredient in blogging. It's what makes blogs so powerful and what gives them such longevity. People connect with people.

When a blogger links to something, they're telling the world that they, as a person, value that content (unless, of course, they're criticizing the content). If they link to crap, they'll undermine their own credibility and very quickly develop a bad reputation, and people will quickly stop reading. Without personal authenticity, a blog is nothing.

And a word of warning: if you ignore the culture of your chosen social media space, you risk a lot more than exclusion. Because social media spaces are so personal, people gossip and bitch. And because the networks are so extensive and interconnected, word travels fast. It takes just a few hours for virtually every social network in the world to learn of a serious social media misdemeanor. But it takes months – maybe even years – to live it down.

Here are some tips for avoiding the pitfalls and making an effective start in social media.

1. **Know what joining a network means** – On some services, like FaceBook and LinkedIn, you need permission to join someone's network. That's because as soon as you join, you're privy to everything they share, and you can see their entire network (and vice versa). On other services, like Twitter, you don't need permission to join anyone's network because it's only a one-way opt-in. You see everything they share, but they see nothing you share, unless they connect back to you. Yet others, like StumbleUpon and Delicious, allow you to see what anyone has shared without joining. Joining their network simply makes it easier for you to access their bookmarks.
2. **Find, join and observe the right people** – Look for people who'll be interested in what you have to say. In the beginning, it's probably best to look for your industry's 'celebrities' – the thought and opinion leaders. People with big networks already. Even if they're your competitors. As mentioned above, social media is about giving, and, surprisingly enough, this applies equally to interactions between competitors. (Well... to some extent.) Your competitors may not share their trade secrets with

you, but they certainly won't resent you connecting with them. If nothing else, it boosts their status, and helps them keep an eye on you!

By joining the networks of industry 'celebs', you'll get a good idea of how they interact. They obviously know how it's done. Also, you'll avoid the temptation to prematurely interact with potential customers. As these are the people who'll ultimately be buying from you, you really want to know how they expect to be treated before you start connecting.

Some services like LinkedIn, FaceBook and MySpace also feature member-created groups. There's one for just about every topic imaginable. Find groups that are relevant to your business, join them and get involved in their discussions. This is a good way to find relevant people to connect with. (But don't just go connecting with people 'willy-nilly'. Make sure you observe them for a while, and you're comfortable being associated with them.)

3. **Understand and observe local etiquette** – [Darren Rowse](#) (blogger extraordinaire and social media master) advises people to treat every Social Media space like a foreign country. Learn the language, the customs, the etiquette. Perhaps even find a local guide. By doing this, you won't unknowingly offend anyone or make a fool of yourself!
4. **Learn the lingo** – Each social media space has its own lingo. Abbreviations, shortcuts, labels, acronyms, tags, etc. E.g. Many Twitterers call each other "tweeps" (short for Twitter peeps), say "pr0n" instead of "porn" and shorten words as per an SMS.
5. **Don't be afraid to ask** – Asking for advice shows you're human. It proves you're willing to expose your vulnerabilities. It also proves you want to learn to do things the right way. So it gets you big brownie points! So long as you don't dominate everyone's time and you listen to their answers.
6. **Listen** – Although much of what you read in any social media space may seem like a time-waster, most of it still has some value – especially for a newbie. Even if the content is irrelevant to you, it shows you how other people are interacting, what they're talking about, what's acceptable discussion, and how they're talking. And, of course, listening's a sign of respect, just as it is in the real world.

7. **Help** – Every chance you get. The more you help, the more you prove yourself, the more trust you'll get, and the more backlinks you'll generate. In fact, whenever you're participating in social media, you have to take off your sales/PR/SEO hat and put on your community hat. In other words, you must always put the needs of your community ahead of your own. To begin with, as a rule of thumb, make every contribution helpful (or a question). Answer questions if you know the answer. Consider writing some guest posts for other bloggers. Only start asking favors through your social media networks once you've earned the right to do so.
8. **Put your heart into it** – If your heart's not in it, people will sense it. They'll feel that everything you do is a thinly veiled promotion.
9. **Be transparent** – Be up-front about why you're there. And on the odd occasion when you do actually promote yourself, don't be sneaky about it. Be open, clear and succinct. People will respect your transparency and you won't be wasting everyone's time (including your own).
10. **Be yourself** – If you spend all your time worrying whether people in your social media community are going to like what you say – or how you say it – it's possible that you'll develop a big following, but it won't be a true community. You'll only ever build a community if you're true to yourself. In fact, that's really what people in social media communities really want. People. They're there to engage with you as a person, not a figure-head, not a PR practitioner, not a spin-doctor. People connect with people.
11. **Be human** – Let your personality shine through. There are millions of people on social media platforms. But only one you. Leverage that uniqueness. Here's a great [blog post on leveraging your personality for social media success](#), by Brian Carter (quite a popular Twitterer, with nearly 4,000 followers). Even if you don't follow every suggestion to the letter, it'll help you understand what others are familiar with and what you're comfortable with.
12. **Be patient** – Generating backlinks through social media takes time and a lot of hard work. Unfortunately, however, Google pretty much ignores most methods that don't.

13. **Comment** – Commenting on other people's blogs and bookmarks is an excellent practice (assuming, of course, they're relevant). It not only shows your willingness to contribute, it also boosts the search rank of the site you're commenting on, and builds buzz around the blog post. What's more, it extends your profile within the network. The more people see your comments, the more familiar they become with you, and the more they'll click through to see your own content. TIP: Commenting on other blogs is a particularly useful way to establish your domain authority, without diluting the specificity of your own blog. For instance, my blog is about copywriting and SEO copywriting (with a few light writing posts thrown in for entertainment). This is what people expect from my blog. If I talk too much about straight SEO, people might be put off because they're there to read about copywriting. So I try to comment on other blogs or write guest posts when I have something to express that's just straight SEO. This means my visitors get what they expect, the search engines see mostly copywriting discussed on my site, and I still get to establish my credibility in straight SEO circles (among people who might otherwise not have encountered me).
14. **Link** – Links are the ultimate currency on the Internet. Link to someone without expecting anything in return, and you earn big brownie points. In fact, many people will link back to you just because of your good will. You can link to them from within your blog post or you can set up a link to them in your blogroll (the list of your favorite blogs in the right sidebar). Note that when you link to someone else's blog post from within the body of yours, quite often, a snippet of your post and a (nofollow) link to it will be automatically added to their comments. This is known as a 'pingback'. The pingback link doesn't pass on any PageRank, so it's of no direct SEO benefit, but it's certainly beneficial in terms of building your social media presence. It lets the original blogger know you linked to him or her, and it puts your name and link in front of that blogger's audience.
15. **Be the first to bookmark other people's content** – It won't take you long to realize that bookmarking can be somewhat of a race. If you're the first to bookmark something interesting, engaging or just incredibly newsworthy, many people who come across it will make an effort to 'follow the trail' back to the original bookmarker: you. Once there, there's a good chance they'll:
 - a. click through to your site and have a look around. And with such good content on your site, they won't be able to resist linking to it; and/or

b. join your social bookmarking network and keep a close eye on all your future bookmarks. The important thing to realize here is that there are hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of bloggers out there who are so hungry for interesting stuff to talk about that they look really hard for inspiration. They trawl the social bookmarking services (as I advised you to do if you're lost for something to blog about – see p.108) and if they find someone who consistently gives them what they're after, they'll pay close attention to them.

16. Go slow – Start with just a couple of social media services. Because social media participation is very time-consuming, you need to be very focused in your approach. Be aware of how much time (or how many human resources) you can throw at it, and don't bite off more than you can chew. That means you need to choose just a couple of social media services – at least to begin with: one 'Communication' (e.g. Twitter) and one 'Bookmarking' (e.g. StumbleUpon). Communication so you engage intimately with your network, and Bookmarking so your networks can easily access and promote your content. Dedicate a couple of days to signing up to a few of the major / relevant services. Play with them, read about them, and get a feel for what they have to offer you. Do you like the way they work? Do you 'get it' (bearing in mind that each will take a little research and experimentation)? Once you've had your head in the space for a while, you'll soon figure out what you like and don't like.

17. Work to US time – Even if most of your customers are from elsewhere, most social media traffic is in the US. So always consider the timing of your social media activities. For instance, if you're making an important announcement on Twitter, or bookmarking a post, check the time in America first. (Rand Fishkin of SEOmoz recommends doing these sorts of things during America's business day and Europe's evening.) You can get a [world time addon for Firefox](#) that makes this easy.

18. Be thought-provoking early in the week – That's when people are freshest and most likely to think about your content. Later in the week, they're tired and thinking about the weekend.

19. Use a photo avatar – People don't want to see your logo or your favorite cartoon character. They want to see a photo of your face. (And not some blurry, obscured one, either.) TIPS: 1) When uploading your avatar to Twitter, use a .png file. Gifs tend to hang. And upload something bigger than the thumbnail they display by default. When people view your profile, they can enlarge your photo, and if yours is only

thumbnail-sized, it'll end up grainy. 2) Register with [Gravatar](#) and upload your photo. Many blogs these days automatically display your Gravatar photo next to your comments. People are far more likely to associate intelligent comments with a face than a name.

20. **Save time** – Using social media can take a lot of time. I recommend you take advantage of as many tools as make sense to you. To start with, use Firefox as your web browser. It's faster than Internet Explorer and has a host of addons that make your day to day work much easier. Some of my favorites include:

- [Shareaholic](#) – Bookmark pages directly from your browser toolbar. Supports most popular bookmarking services.
- [Twitthat](#) – Tweet about what you're reading with a single click. Includes a shortened link and the title of the page you're reading.
- [FoxClocks](#) – Displays world times in your browser's status bar. You'll undoubtedly have people from all around the world in your network.
- [StumbleUpon toolbar](#) – One-click thumbs up, thumbs down and stumble.
- [GButts](#) – All your Google services accessible from one button in your browser toolbar. Great for monitoring traffic (Google Analytics).
- [Search Status](#) – Highlights nofollow links on screen as you browse. Does a lot more too, but this is very handy as it tells you which links pass on juice and which don't.

For more information...

- on **leveraging specific social media services**, see [Social Media Optimization Strategies](#) at SEOmoz (USD \$29). It's a quality analysis of the major social media services. Although it was written in 2007, most of its content is still relevant today.

How long will it take to generate a lot of links?

A long time!

It's impossible to say how much time you'll need to spend building links, but you can be sure it'll be a while. You just have to keep at it until you have achieved a high ranking. Even then, you'll still need to dedicate some ongoing time to the task, otherwise your ranking will drop.

How many links will I need to get a top ranking?

Lots! Depending on how much competition you're facing for keywords, and where the links are coming from, even 100 inbound links may not make much of a difference. So don't expect anything to happen too quickly. But if you're dedicated, and you're prepared to work hard at your blogging and your social media optimization (and your other link building methods), you'll definitely see results within six to 12 months.

Chapter summary

- Use social media to get people talking about, and linking to, your content.
- Social media is all about community.
- Be authentic, transparent, helpful.
- Listen & help.
- Learn the culture and etiquette of any social media service you use.
- Be patient – social media optimization requires long-term commitment and delivers benefits slowly.

Step 9

Use other link building methods too

The best backlinks are those that come naturally as a result of great content. But they're not the *only* links you should consider. There are many possible ways to generate links. Some are dubious (like auto-generation software, and sites set up by webmasters simply to host links to their other sites) and I won't be discussing them here. Others, like those discussed below, are legitimate.

- Look for natural link partners (p.142.)
- Submit your site to some directories (p.143.)
- Check where your competitors' links are coming from (p.144.)
- Syndicate content (p.145.)
- Leverage 404 links (p.152.)
- 'Legal' link buying (p.153.)
- Check out <http://wiep.net/>

Each of these methods is discussed in greater detail below.

I call these 'other' link building methods because they're not really core methods; they're more things you'd do to supplement your core methods. They're unlikely to deliver big results, and some won't be for everyone.

Look for natural link partners

Probably the most well known method of generating links is to look for link partners. This is done in a variety of ways:

- ask customers to link to your site (possibly in return for a link to theirs)
- ask strategic partners and suppliers to link to your site (possibly in return for a link to theirs)
- look for relevant high ranking sites and ask them to link to you (possibly in return for a link to theirs)
- buy SEO software that locates high ranking sites and automatically emails their owners asking them to link to you (possibly in return for a link to theirs)

TIP: If you decide to manually look for link partners, one way of assessing a site's importance is to look at their Google PageRank (PR). PR is how Google scores importance. It gives all sites a mark out of 10. Any site with a PR of 4 or above is generally considered a worthy link partner. By downloading the Google Toolbar (from <http://toolbar.google.com>), you can view the PR of any site you visit.

A note on reciprocal linking

Reciprocal linking is link swapping – “If you link to me, I’ll link to you.” Although it sounds convenient (particularly if you can automate it), it’s normally only useful if the site you’re linking to is very relevant (e.g. supplier and partner links) and you don’t email your request. This is because:

1. In 2005, Google made a big change to its algorithms. This change, called ‘Jagger’, effectively neutralized all but the most relevant reciprocal links.
2. Webmasters of high ranking sites receive many emailed reciprocal link requests each day (not to mention hundreds of other SPAM emails). They’re normally automated, irrelevant and from sites with low PR, so most are deleted.

3. Even if you offer a reciprocal link, most webmasters of high PR sites won't be interested because it's extra work. What's more, they won't want to obscure the purpose of their site with hundreds of links. (Relevant or not, they don't want to look like a directory to their customers.)

Submit your site to some directories

Another potentially useful method of generating links is to submit your site to local and industry web directories. Some of these are very good (such as DMOZ and Yahoo, discussed on p.144.), but most are of questionable value. There are several reasons for this:

- **Most directories are unrelated** to the subject material of your website (and remember, ideal links come from related websites).
- **Many directories will charge** you annually for a listing (it's only worth paying if the website is related and has a high PR).
- **Search engines don't pay them much attention.** Most directories contain thousands of links. Every page can have hundreds of links to other sites. As mentioned above, it's best if your link appears on a page with few (if any) links to other pages. In fact, [Google has hinted](#) that it might discount directory links altogether:

 There's always the chance that we'll discount directory links in the future."

- **Most directories are not very good.** Directories are about money; they either charge you to add a listing or they sell advertising space (or both). They can be a great income source for their owners, and this makes them a very inviting business idea. As a result, thousands of new directories are popping up every year, and very few of them are any good.

One caveat on my comment about most directories being of questionable value: a listing in your local business directories can contribute to your ranking in geographically specific searches (e.g. a search for a local florist). It's not so much the backlink that counts here, as the fact that you're in the directory to begin with.

DMOZ & Yahoo Directories

Two directories that are actually useful are:

- **DMOZ Open Directory Project** (<http://www.dmoz.com/add.html>) – “...the largest, most comprehensive human-edited directory of the Web.” DMOZ does not charge for submissions. NOTE: This is the same as the Google Directory.
- **Yahoo Directory** (<https://ecom.yahoo.com/dir/submit/intro/>) – Yahoo charges for listings (at the time of writing, the fee was USD\$299 per year).

The search engines regularly crawl these directories in search of new links, and they value them quite highly (largely because the directories are human-edited).

Check where your competitors' links are coming from

Next, check who is linking to your high ranking competitors. This method takes a long time, but you'll be surprised where some of their links come from.

To check on the links of your competitors:

1. Go to Google and search for your keyword.
2. Make a note of the top five competitors who appear (write down their domain name).
3. Log in to [Yahoo Site Explorer](#).
4. Add each of these competitor's sites to your list of sites ('My Sites').
5. Click Explore for one of the competitor sites.

6. Click Inlinks.
7. In the Show Inlinks dropdown box, select Except from this domain (so you won't see where your competitor has linked to their own site).
8. A long list of results will display, showing you the site that's linking to your competitor and a link to the page on that site which contains the backlink.
9. Visit each linking page. (TIP: Use Shift + Mouse-Click to open the page in a separate window, so you don't lose your search results page if you close the window instead of clicking Back.)
10. Try to think of a way to get a link to your website on the same page (TIP: Unless they're very relevant, and you think you have a pretty compelling reason why they should link to you, avoid sending them an email. Webmasters receive a lot of SPAM and your email will likely go unnoticed. Try calling them instead.)

Repeat steps 5 through 10 for each of your top five ranking competitors.

Syndicate your content

Content syndication means writing helpful articles (and to a lesser extent, press releases) and letting other webmasters publish them on their sites for free – on the proviso that they link back to your site. This method is also known as 'article PR', 'article submission', 'article marketing' and 'article distribution'.

How content syndication works

1. You're an expert in your field so you possess knowledge that other people want.
2. You write a helpful article – sharing your hard-earned knowledge and expertise, without compromising your income stream or intellectual property. (See 'Writing useful, unique blog posts' on p.105 for some tips. The key concepts of this topic apply equally to article writing.)

3. You submit your article to recognized and highly trafficked ‘article directories’ on the Web. Places like [EzineArticles](#). (See [ArticlePR.com](#) for a good list of article directories to submit to. This site also features a [list of ghostwriters](#) who can write your articles for you, if you don’t have the time or writing prowess to write them yourself.)
4. Webmasters and bloggers gather content from these sites for free.
5. The only condition is that they must include the author bio at the end of the article, which includes a functioning link to your site (NOT a nofollow link).
6. If 300 people publish your article, you get 300 links back to your site.

Benefits of content syndication

- Webmasters and bloggers are always hungry for quality content, and many don’t have the time or skills to write it themselves, nor the budget to pay someone else to write it. So helpful, well written articles are snapped up by hundreds of thousands – maybe millions – of webmasters and bloggers from all around the world, in virtually every industry. This means you can generate links quite quickly.
- Assuming you write quality, helpful articles, they’ll often be published on reputable, credible sites. Relevant sites with an established search presence, themselves. Furthermore, you get to optimize the page on which the link appears – because it’s your article! Often you’ll even get to choose the anchor text of the backlinks in the article’s author bio, so you can optimize them too. This means the backlinks in your bio pass on PageRank.
- Readers of your article will see that you know what you’re talking about, so you convey credibility. And because you’re published, they’ll see you as an authority.
- You’ll find web traffic and requests for quotes increase after every article.

- When you submit a site to an article directory, it's published on a page of its own on that site, complete with author bio and PageRank-passing backlink. (Note, however, that many of those links have likely been devalued recently.)
- Your articles remain in the article directories indefinitely. This means your content continues to be syndicated for a long time. Potentially indefinitely. I'm still seeing years old content of mine being newly syndicated.

IMPORTANT: Despite what you may have heard (e.g. point 5 of [Five Link Building Strategies That Work](#)), backlinks from syndicated content ARE still valuable. The claim is that they are discounted because of the duplicate content filter. This is not true. The duplicate content filter affects merely what version of your article is shown in the SERPs. The backlink passes PageRank, either way. Indeed, Matt Cutts – the ‘Google Insider’ – has [confirmed this](#): “if you do syndicate content, make sure that you include a link to the original content. That will help ensure that the original content has more PageRank.” However, it does appear that some links from syndicated articles have been devalued. (See ‘The variable value of backlinks from syndicated content’ on p.148 for more information.)

Limitations of content syndication

Nonetheless, there are a few problems with content syndication:

- Because they're free, your articles will end up on a lot of spammy sites. Spamy sites are those that exist purely to accommodate Google ads. They're full of keyword rich content written by someone else – and obtained for free. In other words, their owners hope to earn something for nothing. They're certainly of no value to visitors. If a high proportion of your site's backlinks come from spammy sites, you may be penalized, particularly if your site is relatively new. And even if you're not penalized, many of those links will be pretty much worthless, because the host site will have no PageRank. So although content syndication generates a lot of links relatively quickly, the relative value of each link is a lot lower than it is for links generated through, say, link baiting. (See ‘Link baiting’ on p.103 for more information)

on link baiting.) The best way to avoid penalization / low value backlinks is to write high quality articles. This will increase the proportion of high quality sites that will re-publish them.

- The duplicate content filter can be a problem. In Google's words: "If duplicate pages are detected, one version will be returned in the SERPs to ensure variety for searchers." Let's say you write an article, publish it on your site, then submit it to EzineArticles.com. Then someone searches for a phrase that you might expect your article to rank for. Because EzineArticles.com is such a high-ranking site, its version of your article might appear in the SERPs instead of the version on your website. If you've used that same content in a blog post, this could be a problem, because you want your blog post to appear in the SERPs (in order to generate more buzz). So you should always publish the content on your blog a few days or a week before syndicating it, and you should always link back to your blog post from your author bio. If you find this doesn't work, and your content is consistently ranking on other people's sites, I'd advise you to cease syndication altogether. (If you're not using your syndicated content in your blog, then it's not such a big deal if your version of the article appears in the SERPs. Your primary objective is to get the backlinks. And you'll still get them, regardless of which version of your article appears in the SERPs.)
- The anchor text of backlinks from syndicated content doesn't vary much, so the links won't be as valuable as links derived from link baiting.
- Because of the tendency for syndicated content to appear on spammy sites, and because of the high volume of low quality articles being distributed, Google appears to have devalued backlinks from *some* syndicated content.

The variable value of backlinks from syndicated content

Until 2008, my high ranking was built almost exclusively on article syndication. (Certainly I made no conscious attempt to engage in any other link building activities.) And despite widespread discussion about devalued backlinks from some syndicated content, I've suffered no significant drop in rankings. But still, I believe it has happened.

Broadly speaking, I think that backlinks from articles syndicated on spammy sites have been devalued, but backlinks from reputable, credible sites with an established search presence have not. Here's my logic:

- It makes sense. Spamy sites tend to use articles (good quality and bad) without regard to visitors. Quality sites tend to use only quality articles, and only when they are likely to be of value to visitors. So it makes sense to devalue links from the former and not from the latter.
- A Google spokesperson recently advised: "If you're thinking of boosting your reputation and getting to be well-known, I might not start as the very first thing with an article directory. Sometimes it's nice to get to be known a little better before jumping in and submitting a ton of articles as the first thing." (Sourced from a [transcript of a WebProNews interview with Matt Cutts](#), Maile Ohye and other Google representatives.) Although this person is actually talking about the quality of the article directory, a broad hint like this is about as close as Google ever comes to revealing the inner workings of its algorithm.
- The general consensus in the SEO community is that backlinks from syndicated content have been devalued.
- My articles are all high quality, and many of them are published on sites that Google recognizes as credible. These links are key to my ranking. Although I have thousands of backlinks, it's these quality links that are most valuable. Now if ALL backlinks from syndicated articles were devalued, my ranking would have dropped, despite seven years of domain authority. So either backlinks have not been devalued, or only backlinks from articles syndicated on spammy sites have been devalued. Given points 1, 2 & 3 above, I'm inclined to think that the latter is the most likely explanation.

My advice?

Use content syndication to supplement your link baiting. They make a perfect match, anyway. Write and publish your blog posts, then distribute them to the article directories a couple of days to a week later. And don't spend too much time trying to distribute to all the article directories in the world. Just choose the best ones – those with the best Alexa traffic rank and those that cater specifically to your niche. The others get very

little traffic, and you can be guaranteed the backlink from your article on the article directory site, itself, won't be worth the time you spent submitting the article.

What's more, if you find your content syndication is undermining your link baiting (because of duplicate content issues), abandon content syndication.

For more information...

- on **link baiting**, see 'Link baiting' on p.103.

Content syndication FAQs

Q) What should I write about?

A) The same sorts of things you'd write about in your blog. (See 'Writing useful, unique blog posts' on p.105.)

Q) How long should my article be?

A) The same length as a blog post. (See 'Write relatively lengthy posts' on p.107.)

Q) How often should I submit?

A) Whenever you write an article.

Q) What kind of writing should I use?

A) The same style as you'd use for a blog post. (See 'Write in a style that suits your audience' on p.108.)

Q) Should I focus on keywords?

A) Yes! Optimize your articles just as you optimize your website. If possible, turn a few keywords into links back to a relevant page on your site. And always try to include keywords in the headline and byline of your article.

Q) Do I need to vary the byline?

A) Preferably. The search engines prefer varied anchor text in links back to your site, because that's how naturally generated links look.

Q) Should I always link to my home page or should I also link to other pages?

A) Link back to the most relevant page. This makes the most sense to visitors, and will be the most beneficial from a search perspective because that page will tend to contain the same keywords as the article. My earlier suggestion to link back to the original article in your bio actually has another benefit. These links are considered 'deep links' – because the articles are nested relatively deep within your site structure. These are exactly the kind of links that the search engines like to see, because they suggest your site has good quality content right down through its hierarchy.

Q) Where should I submit my article?

A) Visit www.articlepr.com and find the ones that are most applicable to your industry and offer the most subscribers. However, if you're using content syndication only to supplement your other link building strategies, I'd recommend you stick to just the most popular and relevant 5-10 article directories and the most popular and relevant 5-10 distribution lists.

Q) How long does it take to submit a single article?

A) It all depends on how many sites you submit it to. It can take 1-3 days to submit a single article to 300-odd submission sites and distribution lists. But if you're only submitting to the top 5-10 article directories and the top 5-10 distribution lists, it should only take you a couple of hours.

Q) Who will publish my article?

A) There are hundreds of thousands (maybe even millions) of companies publishing blogs, online newsletters, ezines and article pages. No matter what your industry, you're bound to find quite a few who are interested in what you have to say. Note, however, that your article will also be published by a lot of search engine spammers.

Q) How will I know when my article has been published?

A) Set up a Google Alert (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) that notifies you when your URL has been published on a web page. You can also set up an alert for a specific phrase from within your article – something unique that's unlikely to be used anywhere else. Whenever you receive an alert, you can visit the page to make sure the article is unchanged and the link back to your site is functioning (and it's tagged as a 'follow' link).

Q) Will the publisher change my article?

A) No, generally not. Changing articles is just extra work. I've had my articles published thousands of times, and don't recall a single instance of an article being changed without my permission.

Q) Should I post my article on my website?

A) Yes. In fact, ideally, you'll be drawing your articles from your blog posts.

Q) Will my reputation suffer if my article appears on a dubious site?

A) No. People recognize spammy sites for what they are; they know the articles they contain are written by someone totally unrelated.

Q) Do links from dubious sites adversely affect my ranking?

A) The short answer is no. In Google's words: "In general, you don't have to worry about bad links like that which point to your site that aren't under your control." (Quoted from [Google Answers Some Tricky Questions](#) at WebProNews)

Leveraging 404 links

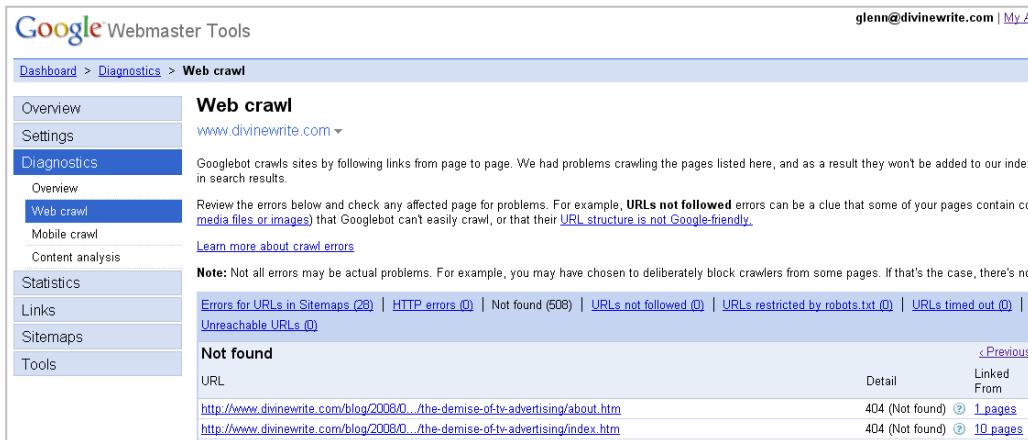
Google Webmaster Tools tracks all links that point to a page on your site that no longer exists. These links are called '404 links'. These links are wasted PageRank, so you should add a 301 redirect for each.

To identify your site's 404 links:

1. Log in to [Google Webmaster Tools](#)
2. Go to Diagnostics > Web crawl
3. Click Not found, and you'll see a list of the URLs

4. These URLs are the non-existent pages that the incoming links are pointing to
5. [Create a 301 redirect](#) for each of these URLs

TIP: If the URLs point to a post on your WordPress blog, you can redirect using the Redirect plugin for WordPress. (See 'To redirect URLs' on p.74 on redirecting for WordPress blogs.)



The screenshot shows the Google Webmaster Tools interface. The left sidebar has a 'Diagnostics' section with 'Web crawl' selected. The main content area shows a 'Web crawl' report for 'www.divinewrite.com'. It includes a note about Googlebot crawling and a link to 'Learn more about crawl errors'. Below this, a 'Note' section states that errors may be actual problems. A 'Not found' section lists two URLs: 'http://www.divinewrite.com/blog/2008/0.../the-demise-of-tv-advertising/about.htm' and 'http://www.divinewrite.com/blog/2008/0.../the-demise-of-tv-advertising/index.htm'. Both URLs are 404 (Not found) and linked from 10 pages. There are also links to 'Errors for URLs in Sitemaps (28)', 'HTTP errors (0)', 'Not found (508)', 'URLs not followed (0)', 'URLs restricted by robots.txt (0)', and 'URLs timed out (0)'.

Figure 32 – Get free links by redirecting 404 links

‘Legal’ link buying

Rand Fishkin, head-honcho over at SEOmoz, wrote a [great blog post in November 2008 about how to ‘legally’ buy links](#). I won’t attempt to re-hash it all here. You’ll be far better of hearing it straight from the horse’s mouth!

[Wiep Knol](#) advocates another interesting (if slightly predatory tactic): monitoring for bankruptcies and acquiring their sites. These sites may already have an established online presence (i.e. established PageRank and no risk of Sandbox), and if relevant, could provide some valuable backlinks. (Alternatively they could, as Rand suggests, be rolled into your own site with 301 redirects.) Slide eight of [his slideshow from SMX London 2008](#) includes tips for finding these bankruptcies.

Chapter summary

- Use link ‘generation’ methods only to supplement your natural link ‘baiting’.
- Look for natural link partners.
- Submit your site to some directories.
- Check where your competitors’ links are coming from.
- Syndicate content (but cease if it undermines your link baiting strategy).
- Leverage 404 links.
- Investigate ‘legal’ link buying.
- Don’t use auto-link-generation software.
- Don’t set up websites simply to host links to your main site.
- ONLY use content of the highest quality for content syndication.
- Add your site to DMOZ & Yahoo Directories.
- Submit your site to local and industry directories (but don’t spend too much time on it).
- Look for link partners (but don’t spend too much time on it).
- Link generation takes a long time no matter how you do it.

Step 10

Monitor your progress

It's very important that you monitor your progress. Keep an eye on how many links you're generating, where they're coming from, and the bottom-line impact on your ranking.

But remember, as I warned you at the start of this book, it all takes time. (See 'How long will it take for SEO to increase my ranking?' on p.17 for more info.)

Monitor whether your pages have been crawled & indexed

The simplest way to see how many pages a search engine has indexed is to go to that search engine and type, "site:www.domainname.com" (without the quotes). The number of search results is an indication of how many pages are indexed.

If you're after something a bit more specific and/or you want crawl details too, you can:

- Use [Google Webmaster Tools](#) to see what pages Google's bots have crawled and indexed, and whether they encountered any problems along the way.

- Use your host-supplied webstats package to see when a bot crawled your site, and which bot it was. (Google Analytics doesn't report bot activity.) Scan your reports for a hostname something like "crawl-66-249-72-248.googlebot.com" (which is a Googlebot name) or llf320032.crawl.yahoo.net (which is, you guessed it, a Yahoo bot name). The other search engines will all be fairly easy to see. Most have "spider" or "crawl" or "bot" or something else fairly obvious in their name.
- If your host doesn't offer a stats package or the one they do supply doesn't reveal bot activity, ask them to give you access to your site's logfile.

Monitor how many links you're generating & who's linking

It's important to monitor how many links you're generating because you can cross-reference that information against improvements in ranking to estimate how much effort your SEO push is going to take.

You can monitor how many backlinks you currently have using a variety of tools. Below is a range of options – from simple and fast to complex and expensive:

- Search Google for "www.yourdomainname.com" (FREE). Google will display all the pages it can find that contain "www.yourdomainname.com". Normally this indicates a link to your site, most which will be 'follow' links. This is the quickest and easiest way to check, but it's not the best for analysis.
- Use [Google Webmaster Tools](#) (FREE). Go to Links > Pages with external links. This will itemize which pages are actually the target of backlinks, and will tell you how many links each page has, plus a total for all pages.
- Use [LinkDiagnosis](#) (FREE). This tool takes a while to run, but it's worth the wait. For serious backlink checking, this is definitely my pick. It reports a lot of information about each link (including the PageRank of the linking site, the anchor text used, whether the link is nofollow), your most popular pages, and the most popular anchor text. It doesn't report the actual total number of links, because if it

encounters a site-wide link, it only counts it as one link (which is pretty much what the search engines do anyway).

- Or, if you're really serious, you could subscribe for a SEOmoz membership (USD \$79 per month) and get full access to [Linkscape](#). Amongst its reports is a detailed list of URLs linking to your page or domain, ordered by their relative importance. It also provides complete lists of anchor text used by those links, including distribution of terms and relative popularity.

TIP: You'll notice that each of these tools return different figures. Don't worry about this. Just pick a tool and stick with it – this way you're always comparing apples with apples.

You should also keep track of new backlinks as they happen. This will give you some idea of what material is generating buzz for whom, which will help you plan your future link bait. The easiest way to track who's linking to your site is to set up a Google Alert for your URL at <http://www.google.com/alerts>.

Monitor your blog's popularity

By registering with [FeedBurner](#), and installing the FeedBurner FeedSmith plugin on your WordPress blog, you can see how many people have subscribed to your blog's RSS feed, its traffic, traffic sources, pages visited and links clicked.

This will tell you how successfully your social media optimization campaign is progressing.

Monitor your ranking

Obviously you should be monitoring your ranking to ensure that your hard work is not wasted (and to adapt your SEO and link generation strategy as needed).

The best rank-checking software I've seen is, without doubt, [SEOBook's Rank Checker](#). With it, you can:

- check the ranking of numerous domains for numerous keywords
- see your actual ranking (assuming you rank somewhere in the first 20 pages) without trawling through search results manually
- see your true ranking on Google.com even if you're searching from outside the US (if you manually search Google.com, you'll still get localized results)
- check your ranking on Yahoo.com and Live.com
- automatically check your ranking on local versions of Google and Yahoo (like .com.au)
- ignore Google's personalized results
- export your results to CSV
- save your check and come back and run it again at any time

You'll need Firefox to run it (it's actually a plugin for Firefox), but you should already be using Firefox instead of Internet Explorer anyway! It's much better!

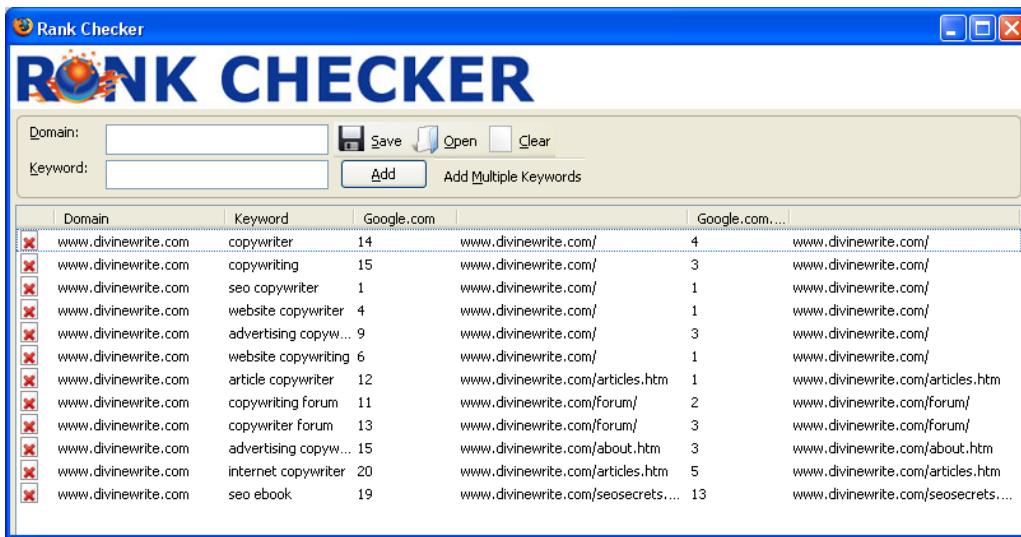


Figure 33 - Monitor your ranking on Google.com and your local Google

Monitor site traffic and conversions

A high search engine ranking is worth nothing if it doesn't deliver a lot of well qualified traffic and ultimately lead to conversions. So you should definitely be analyzing your site traffic (try Google Analytics) and you should have processes in place to track where your prospects are coming from, and the percentage of search-driven prospects you convert.

This is, however, outside the scope of this document (and outside the realm of my expertise). If you need help with analytics, I recommend you contact Nathan Stewart at [Alkemi International](#):

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Melbourne, Australia
nstewart@alkemi.com.au

Chapter summary

- It takes quite a while to improve your ranking.
- Monitor whether your pages have been crawled & indexed.
- Monitor how many links you have and cross-reference that information against improvements in ranking to estimate how much effort your SEO push is going to take.
- Monitor who is linking to your site to more accurately adapt future link generation tactics.
- Monitor your blog's popularity.
- Monitor your ranking and adapt your SEO and link generation strategy as needed.
- Monitor site traffic and conversions.

Engaging an SEO company

Generating links takes a long time and involves a lot of work. Like any other form of promotion, it requires investment - either in time or money. If you decide to pay an SEO company, always ask them exactly what they'll be doing. Ask them what keywords they'll be targeting, and how they'll target them.

There are no secret methods, so if they can't or won't tell you, DO NOT engage them. If they tell you but you are unable to completely understand, DO NOT engage them. (There are no link generation methods that are too complex for the layperson to understand when explained properly.)

Also, always be clear in your own mind about exactly what you're paying for. Remember that there are two parts to obtaining a high ranking: optimizing your site, and building links back to your site. Always get your SEO company to explain exactly which part(s) they will do for you, and how they plan to do it.

Lies told by unscrupulous SEO companies

I'm ashamed to say it, but many SEOs are just plain dishonest. They know that Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is an utter mystery to most of their customers, and that nobody outside of Google really, truly knows Google's ranking rules. So they lie. And they get away with it.

Lie 1 – “We have a deal with Google.” Untrue. No SEO provider is in bed with Google. That would totally undermine the relevance of Google’s results. The truth is, we’re all on the outside, looking in. Doing our best to unravel the complex mathematical mystery that is Google’s ranking algorithm.

Lie 2 – Timeframe guarantees. Google’s rankings are automatically determined using incredibly complex mathematical algorithms. They’re Google’s single most valuable asset, and they’re devised by the world’s biggest math brains. SEO providers that offer timeframe guarantees are suggesting that they’re: a) privy to Google’s most valuable business secret; and/or b) smarter than all of the world’s biggest math brains combined. The truth is that although good SEO providers have a very good understanding of what tactics result in a high ranking, they derive this understanding through trial-and-error only, and they don’t know 100% how long things will take. Alternatively, they’re planning to rank you for very obscure, meaningless keyword phrases like, “red brochure book printing in Jamaica”, instead of your actual target keyword phrases. Or they might be planning to provide a high ranking on a rent-only basis. They generate links to a domain of their own, then pass the value of these links on to your site. This does NOT result in a permanent increase in the ranking of your site. These companies charge a monthly fee, and so long as you pay the fee, your site may rank well. But as soon as you stop paying their fee, your site’s ranking will drop.

Lie 3 – Unlimited keywords. This one defies logic. To optimize your site for a keyword or keyword phrase, you just use it more often than any other word or phrase. But because your site has only a finite number of words, there’s a limit to the number of keywords you can target.

Lie 4 – Displaying logos for big-name clients. I heard of an SEO company that claimed a major bank as a client, when all they had ever done for that bank was Pay-Per-Click advertising – not SEO – for a single keyword, once, long ago. So always be sure to ask exactly what your SEO provider has done for each client it claims. And if you’re still in doubt, ask for references.

Lie 5 – Submitting your site to thousands of search engines, over and over. This won’t get you a high ranking. In fact, I’m amazed this one’s still going around. The truth is, you usually don’t have to submit your site at all.

Lie 6 – Spend a lot on Google AdWords, and you'll automatically get a high ranking. Absolute rubbish!

Although Google (and most of the other search engines) offer PPC ads, those ads are absolutely independent of your site's natural ranking. Google's success relies on its ability to deliver relevant results. The moment it took money in return for natural search ranking, its reputation for relevance would be justifiably ruined. It'll never happen.

The moral to the story is: always be vigilant.

Chapter summary

- Be vigilant when hiring an SEO company.

The future of SEO

Search engines are all about serving valuable results to their users. But because they're not human, they can't actually *assess* value. They can only *deduce* it.

For the most part, they do this by looking for signs of what humans like. If a site's useful, people will tend to link to it, and it's likely to stick around for a while and deliver consistent subject matter, year after year. So the main signals today are backlinks, anchor text, site age and domain authority.

Of course these signals aren't perfect indicators. For a start, they're indirect, so they're still open to interpretation and error. Even worse – they're vulnerable to manipulation. SEOs and search spammers are continually finding ways to amp up the signal.

So where do the search engines go from here? How do they improve? What signal could they possibly begin to factor in that would give them a more accurate indication of value?

Visitor behavior

The future of SEO is all about visitor behavior. How better to learn the value of a site than to ask its visitors?

I don't mean actually "ask"; I'm not suggesting a survey, or anything like that. No, what the search engines will do – what some have already started doing – is collect information about your site's 'stickiness' and conversion rates, and factor this data into their rankings. They'll consider:

- How many people visit your site
- How those people arrive
- How long they stay
- How often they come back
- How many pages they visit
- What pages they spend the longest on
- Whether they comment
- Whether they subscribe to your blog feed
- What pages they bookmark
- What keywords they use in their bookmarks
- Who they share their bookmarks with (and who *those* people share *their* bookmarks with)

Let's face it. If the search engines had access to all of this data, it wouldn't just be logical for them to use it to determine their rankings. It'd be crazy of them *not* to!

So what does Google already know about your visitors' behavior?

A lot! Take a look at the following Google capabilities.

Service	How it works
Google SERPs	Google records all click-thrus, so it has some very useful traffic stats.
Google SearchWiki	SearchWiki is a personalized, customizable version of Google. All Google Account holders see it instead of Google whenever they're logged in. They can 'promote' results they like, remove results they don't, and comment about specific pages, and Google records their input.

Service	How it works
Google Toolbar	When added to a user's web browser, the Google Toolbar can track site visits. So Google can sometimes tell when a user visits your site.
iGoogle	Users set iGoogle as their browser's home page, and use it as a personalized hub in day-to-day work and web use. It includes their Gmail and a Google search facility. Google tracks what sites they visit, including yours.
Google Web History	By default, when someone is logged into their Google Account, Google tracks all their searches and site visits. So it can tell approximately how many account holders visit your site.
Google Bookmarks	Visitors to your site use Google Bookmarks to save pages they want to come back to, and to tag them with Labels to make them easier to find.
Google Desktop	Google Desktop is a utility for searching a user's computer file system. It can also record their web history, so Google can tell approximately how many Google Desktop users visit your site.
Google FriendConnect	FriendConnect is a social media networking service that you can integrate into your website. Google can see all FriendConnect interactions, and also stores data about all members of your network, including participation rates, relative influence and input.

Service	How it works
Google AdSense	When you run AdSense on your site, Google records impressions and Click-thrus. This gives it another traffic metric for your site, plus an indirect indicator of relevance (the more closely aligned your content is to your keywords, the higher the click-thru rate should be).
Google Reader	Google Reader is one of the most popular content aggregators. Users use it to draw together and read blog feeds from multiple sites. Google records who subscribes to your blog, how long they subscribe for, what blog posts they read, what links in those posts they click, etc. This tells Google how good your content is.
FeedBurner	FeedBurner is the world's most popular blog feed management utility. Webmasters use it to track subscriptions to their feeds and visitor stats. So does Google. It tracks no. of subscriptions, duration of each subscription, backlinks, visits, links clicked, traffic sources, etc.
Gmail	Many people use Gmail as their primary email application. Google records when a user clicks on a link within an email and visits your site. So Google gets an indication of your site's trustworthiness and also some traffic details.

Service	How it works
Google Analytics	Google Analytics reports on traffic from all sources, not just Google search and Google ads. It's incredibly comprehensive and even encompasses conversion metrics. Google Analytics is free and is already widely used. Of all the visitor tracking tools at Google's disposal, this is the most useful.

Table 2 - What information about your site can Google track with its existing services?

* Some of this data is only available to Google if the user is logged in to their Google Account. But remember, most of the services above are only usable if the user is logged in.

What could Google deduce from this data?

By combining the data from all of these services, Google has a very deep, broad and comprehensive dataset from which to draw conclusions. Eventually it'll use this data to determine how relevant, engaging and important your content is, how loyal your visitors are, and how much they trust you. And it'll rank you accordingly.

Here's how it'll work

Google will:

1. continue to crawl your site for keywords, to see what *you* say your content's about;
2. look at the keywords your visitors use when bookmarking pages, to see what *they* say your content's about;
3. continue to look at the anchor text in backlinks, to see what *other webmasters* say your content's about;
4. use 1 2 & 3 above to index you appropriately;
5. assume that people who stick to your site are interested in your content;

6. continue to assume that backlinks are an indication that your site is important; and
7. rank you high if you have a lot of sticky traffic, high conversion rates & a credible backlink profile.

In fact, it's already started

This isn't crystal ball stuff. It's already started happening. Just ask [Google Product Manager, Cedric Dupont](#):

“ We're always looking at user data as a signal.”

Or ask [Yahoo's VP of Product Management, Tim Mayer](#):

“ We use signals from those [Del.icio.us social bookmarking] pages to increase diversity.” (Yahoo owns Del.icio.us.)

Some SEOs have even started [reporting bounce rate-influenced rank changes](#).

And it won't be long before SearchWiki data is thrown into the mix. Google's not currently using that data as a signal, but they're

“ ...not closing any doors.” ([Google Product Manager Cedric Dupont](#))

In fact, it might be closer than we think: according to Google's Marissa Mayer, if “thousands of people” removed a result from their SearchWiki results, it might make sense to remove the page from everyone's results. (Sourced from [Search Engine Land Blog](#).)

And let's not forget Microsoft. [They're working on 'BrowseRank.'](#) a new method which lets “...Users Vote for Page Importance.” In essence, it's PageRank, but based on user behavior data.

When will it really take off?

I know I said it's already started, but it's not yet happening in earnest. Obviously not everyone uses all of these services and some people opt out of data tracking. Nor do the tools and services capture the same rich

information from all users. So there are still big gaps in Google's dataset. Undoubtedly, Google is still trying to figure out the best ways to make use of all the data, too.

But even though tracking is optional in most of these services, in most cases, opting out isn't intuitive, your opt-in status isn't clear, and users are actively encouraged to opt in. (Often the full feature-set is not enabled until the user has opted in.)

So uptake is happening pretty quickly...

My prediction (for what it's worth) is that visitor factors will be important within two years and they'll be more important than backlinks within five.

But what about backlinks?

They'll be devalued, but not discounted. After all, they still can be a good indication of the importance of your site. And let's not forget their traffic benefits. Genuine buzz will never depreciate.

Other developments

Of course, new visitor signals are just one aspect of future SEO. (I covered it in detail because it's the one that's most relevant to anyone optimizing their site for a higher ranking.) There are a few other significant impending developments.

Personalization

Personalized search is simply search that 'learns' from your search and surf habits, and tailors search results accordingly. (In the future, it'll even factor in things like [user language preferences and the 'populations' or groups the user's a part of](#).)

A few of the search engines offer variations on personalized search, but Google's is the most noteworthy. Partly because Google has the largest search share, and partly because Google Personalization is very sticky (kinda defaults to on and isn't easy to turn off).

Because personalized search has the power to deliver very relevant results to searchers, and because it's quite... 'assertive'... it's definitely going to affect the results that most users see. But this won't really change *how* you should be optimizing, it just reinforces the importance of:

- **Optimization** – because you'll have fewer chances to get your site in front of target customers. Once personalization kicks in around your target keywords, their results will be determined more by what *they* do than by what *you* do.
- **Quality content** – you want your visitors to really engage with your site so it becomes a part of their personalized search experience.

Personalization is also important because it's the carrot that Google dangles in order to get users to surrender more information about themselves. And as discussed on p.168 ('In fact, it's already started'), this information is already feeding back into Google's algorithms.

Local search

As discussed on p.29 ('Choose the right web host'), Google already shows different search results to different people, based on where they're searching from. At the moment, Google decides whether your site will be included in a local search by looking at things like the location of your web host, the keywords on your site, and your listing in [Google Local Business Center](#).

But as all of these things are fairly easy to manipulate, it's likely that the geographic spread of your link profile will soon impact your ranking across different regions. Let me rephrase in English: If you have lots of backlinks from US sites, it's likely that your site is relevant to US audiences, so it'll probably rank well in searches by Americans, and not so well in searches by, say, Australians.

Local search optimization will become more important as more people adopt Internet-enabled mobile phones (see ‘Mobile search’ on p.172) and as Google refines its ability to detect and appropriately serve intent in searches. Again, in English: A shopping type query will likely return local results, whereas a research based query won’t.

Universal Search

Universal Search is a fancy term for the way Google now crawls online videos, audio, images, maps, products and news items, and includes them in the regular search results. (Previously, you had to search on these things separately.)

Don’t get me wrong; I’m not diminishing it when I call it “fancy.” Google’s ability to ‘read’ a video, and skip to the section relevant to a search query, is amazing. So, too, is its ability to spider soundtracks and convert them to text. And when a video or maps result appears on a SERPs page, it really stands out, and may well attract more click-thrus.

But, unlike Bruce Clay, I don’t believe that [Universal Search will turn SEO on its ear](#). It’s certainly a useful addition, and caters nicely to people who respond better to visuals than text. But it’s no replacement for quality, useful, unique, *scannable* copy, nor does it indicate that a site is any more useful. ([Read more about this in my blog](#).)

Nonetheless, you should start thinking about how you can leverage video, audio, images, maps, products and news.

For more information...

- on **submitting your products to Google**, see ‘Submit your products to Google Product Search (if you sell products)’ on p.100.
- on **submitting news, images & video to Google**, see ‘Submit news, images or video’ on p.100.

Mobile search

With the introduction of Internet-aware mobile devices, mobile search is already happening. Because most mobile searches are for local retail and entertainment, if you're offering products or services in these verticals, you'll need to:

- optimize for local search (see 'Submit your site to the search engines' local business centers' on p.99 and 'Choose the right web host' on p.29');
- submit your products to [Google Product Search](#) (if relevant); and
- create a mobile website and [submit to Google](#).

For more information...

- on **creating a mobile website**, see [Adding a mobile site to Google](#) and [Mobile Search Ranking Factors \(Clue - One Normal SEO Factor is Missing\)](#).

What does it all mean?

In a [Q&A over at Search Engine Land](#), Johanna Wright, Director of Product Management at Google, said of Google SearchWiki: "It lets you add your personal touch to our algorithms." Although she was referring to only one of the products discussed above, her comment was relevant to all. And it was very telling...

All things considered, it appears Google is on its way toward a ranking system that's much harder to manipulate, because it's based on how people actually interact with a site. Ranking would no longer be simply a matter of getting backlinks on trusted sites. You'd need to repeatedly attract lots of visitors, get them to stick around and eventually convert them.

Fortunately, if you've followed the steps outlined in this book, you'll be well positioned to do exactly that. You'll be generating traffic through your social media optimization and retaining that traffic with great content. You'll even be converting because you're a trusted, respected person in a community, not just a faceless vendor or service provider.

Conclusion

Search Engine Optimization is not a black art; it's a science. There are defined rules and proven methodologies. And although there's a lot more to it than can be contained in a book of this size, you shouldn't need any more than what you've just read to obtain a high ranking in the search engines.

But there's no denying that it's hard work and takes a long time. Whatever you do, don't rush into it. Make sure you understand the fundamentals, then take some time to plan your approach.

In other words, SEO strategy must be part of your marketing plan alongside traditional promotional activities such as print, radio, and TV. Just as importantly, it must be part of your marketing *budget*. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that the search engines are free advertising. They're not! Companies like Google and Yahoo may not accept payment for a high ranking, but that doesn't mean it comes for free. Someone has to do the work to get you there. Whether you spend the time to do it yourself, or you engage an expert to do it for you, SEO requires a serious investment.

But the spoils are well worth it. I know, from personal experience.

Earn money promoting this book

[Join my Affiliate Program](#) and earn 50% of every sale you generate.

Glossary

AdWords

See 'Sponsored Links'.

algorithm

A complex mathematical formula used by search engines to assess the relevance and importance of websites and rank them accordingly in their search results. These algorithms are kept tightly under wraps as they're the key to the objectivity of search engines (i.e. the algorithm ensures relevant results, and relevant results bring more users, which in turn brings more advertising revenue).

anchor text

The part of a text link that is visible to the reader.

article PR

See 'content syndication'.

article distribution lists

User groups (e.g. Yahoo, MSN, Google, Smartgroups, and Topica groups) which accept email submissions of articles in text format, and then distribute these articles via email to all of the members of the group. See also 'content syndication'.

article directories

Websites which act as repositories of free reprint articles. Authors visit these sites to submit their articles free of charge, and webmasters visit to find articles to use on their websites free of charge. Article submission sites generate revenue by selling advertising space on their websites. See also '*content syndication*'.

backlink

A text link to your website from another website. See also '*link*'.

bot

Search engines find pages on the World Wide Web by sending out 'bots' that make their way from page to page and site to site by following text links. These bots send back information which the search engines then use to index each site to ensure it displays in the most appropriate searches.

buzz

When lots of people in one or more social media services link to, bookmark and/or discuss your content.

canonicalization

See '*URL canonicalization*'.

cluster

A group of pages targeting the same (or similar) keyword phrase.

content syndication

The distribution of free reprint articles to article directories and article distribution lists in order to increase your website's search engine ranking. Content syndication for SEO is the exchange of content for backlinks.

copy

The words used on your website.

copywriter

A professional writer who specializes in the writing of advertising copy (compelling, engaging words promoting a particular product or service). See also 'SEO copywriter' and 'web copywriter'.

crawl

Search engine 'bots' (aka 'spiders' or 'robots') make their way across your website gathering data to send back for analysis. This process is called 'crawling'. Bots make their way from page to page and site to site by following text links. To a bot, a text link is like a door.

domain name

The virtual address of your website (normally something like www.yourbusinessname.com). This is what people will click on or type in their browser's address bar, when they want to visit your site. It is also what you use as the address in any text links back to your site.

duplicate content filter

In order to deliver variety to searchers, the search engines try to identify duplicate pages and only display one version in the SERPs. They do this using a duplicate content filter. There's no such thing as a duplicate content penalty.

ezine

An online magazine. Most publishers of ezines are desperate for content and gladly publish well written, helpful articles and give you full credit as author, including a link to your website.

Flash

A technology used to create animated web pages (and page elements).

free reprint article

An article written by you and made freely available to other webmasters to publish on their websites. See also 'content syndication'.

Google

The search engine with the greatest share of searchers.

Google AdWords

See 'Sponsored Links'.

Google PageRank

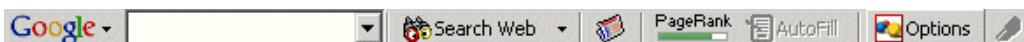
How Google scores a website's importance. It gives all sites a mark out of 10. By downloading the Google Toolbar (from <http://toolbar.google.com>), you can view the PR of any site you visit. (Note, however, that the PageRank you see through the toolbar is very unreliable.)

Google sitemap

An optional XML file that resides in your site's root directory and lists all of the public pages on your site, and a whole bunch of data for each, including when it was last updated, how often you update it, and how important you consider it. The search engines 'read' this sitemap to learn about your site's content. (Also known as an open format sitemap.)

Google Toolbar

A free tool you can download. It becomes part of your browser toolbar. Its most useful features are its PageRank display (which allows you to view the PR of any site you visit) and its AutoFill function (when you're filling out an online form, you can click AutoFill, and it enters all the standard information automatically, including Name, Address, Zip code/Postcode, Phone Number, Email Address, Business Name, Credit Card Number (password protected), etc.) Once you've downloaded and installed the toolbar, you may need to set up how you'd like it to look and work by clicking Options (setup is very easy). NOTE: Google does record some information (mostly regarding sites visited).



HTML

HTML (HyperText Markup Language) is the coding language used to create much of the information on the World Wide Web. Web browsers read the HTML code and display the page that code describes.

internal link

A link from one page of your website to another page of your website.

Internet

An interconnected network of computers around the world.

JavaScript

A programming language used to create dynamic website pages (e.g. interactivity).

keyword

A word which your customers search for and which you use frequently on your site in order to be relevant to those searches. This use is known as targeting a keyword. Most websites actually target 'keyword phrases' because single keywords are too generic and very difficult to rank for.

keyword density

An outdated measure of the frequency of your keyword in relation to the total wordcount of the page. So if your page has 200 words, and your keyword phrase appears 6 times, its density is 3%. Forget keyword density. All you need to know is whether you've used your keyword phrase more often than any other single word or phrase. You can use a word cloud to asses this (e.g. [Wordle](#)).

keyword phrase

A phrase which your customers search for and which you use frequently on your site in order to be relevant to those searches.

link

A word or image on a web page which the reader can click to visit another page. There are normally visual cues to indicate to the reader that the word or image is a link.

link architecture

Using text links to connect a series of pages (i.e. page 1 connects to page 2, page 2 connects to page 3, page 3 connects to page 4, and so on). Search engine bots use text links to jump from page to page as they gather information. The way you link impacts how your pages are indexed and ranked. (See 'Optimize your internal link architecture' on p.40. for further information.)

link equity

If you link to a particular page on your site again and again, and from high level pages, you increase its link equity. Essentially it's a relative measure of how important each page is to your overall message and business model.

link partner

A webmaster who is willing to put a link to your website on their website. Quite often link partners engage in reciprocal linking.

link popularity

The number of links pointing to your website. Link popularity is one of the most important factors in a high search engine ranking.

link text

See 'anchor text'.

local search

The tailoring of search results to an individual searcher's needs based on their geographic location.

meta tag

A short note within the header of the HTML of your web page which describes some aspect of that page. These meta tags are read by the search engines and used to help assess the relevance of a site to a particular search.

mobile search

The use of search engines through mobile devices (like mobile phones).

natural search results

The ‘real’ search results. The results that most users are looking for and which take up most of the window. For most searches, the search engine displays a long list of links to sites with content which is related to the word you searched for. These results are ranked according to how relevant and important they are.

open format sitemap

See ‘*Google sitemap*’.

GSiteCrawler also handles self-hosted WordPress blogs and phpBB forums.

Once you’ve uploaded your Google sitemap, sign in to your Google Webmaster Tools account, and submit (or re-submit) it. Google will ask you to verify your ownership of the site by placing an HTML file with a particular name in the root directory, or by adding a line of code to one of your files.

organic search results

See ‘*natural search results*’.

PPC (Pay-Per-Click advertising)

See ‘*Sponsored Links*’.

PageRank

See ‘*Google PageRank*’.

personalization

The tailoring of search engine results to the individual searcher based on their search and surf habits, location, etc.

rank

Your position in the natural search results that display when someone uses a search engine to search for a word related to your site’s subject matter.

reciprocal link

A mutual agreement between two webmasters to exchange links.

robot

See 'bot'.

robots.txt file

A file which is used to inform the search engine bots which pages on a site should not be indexed. This file sits in your site's root directory on the web server.

Sandbox

Many SEO experts believe that Google 'sandboxes' new websites. Whenever it detects a new website, it withholds its rightful ranking for a period while it determines whether your site is a genuine, credible, long term site. Likewise, if Google detects a sudden increase (i.e. many hundreds or thousands) in the number of links back to your site, it may sandbox them for a period (or in fact penalize you by lowering your ranking or blacklisting your site altogether).

SEO

Search Engine Optimization. The art of making your website relevant and important so that it ranks high in the search results for a particular word.

SEO copywriter

A 'copywriter' who is not only proficient in web copy, but also experienced in writing copy that is optimized for search engines (and will therefore help you rank higher).

SERPs

Short for Search Engine Results Pages. i.e. The natural/organic search results.

search engine

A search engine is an online tool which allows you to search for web pages that contain a particular word or phrase. The most well known search engines are Google, Yahoo and MSN.

site map

A single page which contains a list of text links to every page on a site. See also 'Google sitemap'.

social media

Social media services are 'places' on the Internet where people connect, communicate and share. Where communities, ideas and followings evolve organically. Where most – if not all – of the content is created by users, not webmasters. They include the likes of FaceBook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, StumbleUpon, Digg, YouTube, and so on.

social media optimization

Leveraging social media networks to generate buzz about, and links to, your content.

SPAM

Generally refers to unwanted and un-requested email sent en-masse to private email addresses. Also refers to a range of techniques intended to make a website appear more helpful and relevant than it really is, in order to be ranked high in the search engines (search engines spam).

spider

See 'bot'.

Sponsored Links

Paid advertising which displays alongside the natural search results. Customers can click on an ad to visit the advertiser's website. This is how the search engines make their money. Advertisers set their ads up to display whenever someone searches for a word which is related to their product or service. These ads look similar to the natural search results, but are normally labeled "Sponsored Links", and normally take up a smaller portion of the window. These ads work on a Pay-Per-Click (PPC) basis (i.e. the advertiser only pays the search engine when someone clicks on their ad).

submit

You can submit your domain name to the search engines so that their bots will crawl your site. You can also

submit your site to directories (e.g. local business directories), and you can submit articles to ‘article directories’ in order to have them syndicated.

text link

A word on a web page which the reader can click to visit another page. Text links are normally blue and underlined. In the code, they look like this: Product Catalog. Text links are what bots use to jump from page to page and website to website.

Universal Search

Google now crawls online videos, audio, images, maps, products and news items, and includes them in the regular search results. (Previously, you had to search on these things separately.) This combined search capability is known as Universal Search.

URL

Uniform Resource Locator. The address of a particular page published on the Internet. Normally in the form <http://www.yourbusinessname.com/AWebPage.htm>.

URL canonicalization

Canonicalization is a fancy (and ridiculous) word for the process a search engine uses to pick the best URL to display in the SERPs when there are several choices (usually related to home pages). E.g. It’s how a search engine distinguishes between <http://www.yourdomain.com>, <http://www.yourdomain.com/index.html> and <http://yourdomain.com>.

web copy

Copy written specifically for web pages.

web copywriter

A ‘copywriter’ who understands the unique requirements of writing for an online medium.

webmaster

A person responsible for the management of a particular website (updating content, updating technologies, uploading files, managing spam & security, etc.).

wordcount

The number of words on a particular web page.

World Wide Web (WWW)

The vast array of interlinked documents published on the Internet.

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