

Google SEO Secrets

How to Get a Top Ranking
With Search Engine Optimization



THE COMPLETE GUIDE

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Preface

You know the importance today of having a website that is ranked highly in the search engines. If you are not in the top 20 for your category, it is unlikely you will get much traffic from *any* search engine. A number of people never go past the first page in a search result. As such, a top 10 ranking is needed to bring lots of visitors to your site.

Google is undisputedly the most important search engine in the world today. A top 10 listing on Google can bring almost more traffic to your site than the other major search engines combined.

But do you know the rules that Google plays by? Do you know where best to focus your efforts? Do you know what the most important factors are for a top ranking on the Google search engine? There is no book in the currently that is focused solely on Google and how to achieve top rankings on this search engine!

Google SEO Secrets is a comprehensive how-to guide for getting your website ranked highly on Google. Whether you are a beginner or have more advanced knowledge, this guide has something for you. It pulls timely information from a variety of sources into one end-to-end process for you to follow. More importantly, this process has been field-tested and proven to work in getting top rankings on Google.

This guide does assume that you do have a working knowledge of HTML and how websites are put together in general. *Google SEO Secrets* can benefit Web-savvy business decision makers, webmasters, and general Internet marketers. Beginning to intermediate Search Engine Optimization (SEO) specialists will also find this guide to be of use in that the information is all in one place, rather than scattered around.

Because each chapter builds on what came before it, it is recommended that you read this book from beginning to end. To put it all together, there is a step-by-step checklist at the end as well as several Appendices that you will find useful.

The focus of this book is to give you the maximum results using the minimum amount of your money. There are numerous success stories of business people getting top rankings on Google using no pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. As such, this guide only sparsely covers the paid forms of advertising you can do on Google – like Google AdWords™. However, given the potentially long timeframe that SEO results can take for *new* websites in competitive markets, using Google AdWords as a way to drive traffic in the interim can be a smart idea.

In fact, using a targeted AdWords campaign in conjunction with SEO can achieve fantastic results. But that is the subject of another book. If interested, you can visit <http://www.adwordsedge.com> and check out The AdWords Edge, my other book.

While you are going through this book, there is one important thing to remember:

Getting a top ranking is only part of it. Yes, you can receive lots of traffic to your site, but you still need to convert these visitors to satisfied customers. If you do not have a web site with compelling, fresh and useful content, intuitive navigation, a simple ordering system, and a reason to return, all of your efforts will be wasted. Put another way, getting lots of traffic is only half the equation to success on the Web – you still need to make sales. This means making sure you have a professional and easy-to-use web site with products, services, or information that visitors need. This seems obvious, but is often overlooked!

Are you ready for massive amounts of traffic to your site? Are you ready to blow past the competition? Are you committed to success? Will you finish this book and implement Google SEO Secrets? Then let's get started...

Best regards,

Dan Sisson
President, Blue Moose Webworks, Inc.

PART I – Google and Keywords

This section of the book lays the foundation for all your work. You must understand the concepts and perform the tasks discussed here, even if you feel they are basic or you know them.

The first chapter deals with how Google works, while the second chapter discusses the important concept of *keywords* and how they form the basis of your success with Google.

Before we continue, there are a few terms that you should know. These terms are the most often misunderstood by beginners. There are other terms you'll need to know, but let's get through these first.

Rank, ranking: a website's actual position in the free (unpaid) section of a search engine results page for a search term. It is meaningless to speak of website rank without specifying what search word or phrase you are ranked for. When someone says to you "My website is #1 on Google", you need to ask "OK, but for which search term?"

PageRank: Google's patented system for specifying a web page's *importance*, PageRank (PR) is a single, albeit important, factor that influences ranking. Many people confuse a page's rank (what position they are on a search results page) with a page's PageRank (PR) value. They are totally separate.

Keywords: Keywords for those words and phrases that define what a web page is all about. When someone enters a search term or phrase into Google, Google tries to find those web pages that match the search phrase best. Some people confuse keywords with the META "Keywords" tag. They are not the same thing.

Page title: The title of a web page is the text contained between the <TITLE></TITLE> tags at the beginning of an HTML file and is displayed in the top bar of a browser. It is *not* the first heading of a web page or any other large text that may be displayed at the top of a web page. This is an important distinction to know.

On-page factors: SEO factors influencing rank that are associated with elements on YOUR website, such as content, title tags, navigation links and code.

Off-page factors: SEO factors influencing rank that are associated with elements on OTHER websites, primarily links that point to your website.

Chapter 1 - The Importance of Google

So why a special guide just on Google? Aren't there hundreds of search engines out there that need to be worried about? There *are* many other search engines, but Google is the most prominent, most used, and most important of them all.

Google also currently provides search results to other "partner" search engines and directories. This means a # 1 ranking on Google will most likely land you a # 1 ranking on these partner sites as well! I say "likely" because the partner sites tend to blend their results a little bit so the rankings across the partners may not be exact.

Specifically, a # 1 ranking on Google for a specific search term also means a # 1 ranking on AOL, Netscape, Earthlink, CompuServe, Lycos, iWon.com, Go.com and AT&T Worldnet!

With its partners included, Google alone is responsible for powering **over 70%** of all search engine traffic to websites.

Clearly, Google is where you need to focus your website promotion efforts first. After you have applied the techniques discussed, have monitored your results, and then refined your efforts over time, you should start seeing dramatic results. The two other major search engines of importance – Yahoo and MSN Search, look for the same things as Google in terms of ranking sites. So if you get it right for Google, you have also gotten it right in general for the other search engines!

Chapter 2 - How Google Works

This chapter explains those elements of the Google ranking process that will matter most to you. It is not meant to be an exhaustive inside look of how Google ranks pages – only a handful of persons at Google know this closely-guarded information.

Google, like other search engines, uses automated software to read, analyze, compare, and rank your web pages. So you need to know what elements and factors Google cares about, and how important these factors are in relation to each other.

This is an important concept: Google uses automated software that looks at code and text, not human beings. This means the visual elements of your website that may matter to you – like layout, color, animation, Flash, and other graphics, are ignored by Google. The Google search engine is like a blind person reading a book in Braille – anything that is graphical, spatial, or visual in nature is simply not seen.

As such, ***you need to start thinking like the Google search engine.***

So What Is a Ranking?

A ranking on a search engine is a web page's listing and relative placement on a results page (known as a SERP) for a certain search query. As an example, if you type "house plans" into the search box at Google, you will get those listings displayed (10 listings per page by default) that Google deems most relevant to the search phrase *house plans*, sorted in order of relative importance.

The most ***relevant*** and most ***important*** web pages are listed in descending order. For Google, page *relevancy* is dependent on how well a web page "matches" a specific word search. Page *importance* on the other hand is dependent on the *quality* and quantity of links that point to your web page from other websites. The concept of link *quality* is important and will be discussed in a later chapter.

If your site does not appear in the top 20 for your most important keywords (search terms), you might as well forget getting much traffic from Google or from any other search engine. Because many people never go past the first page for a search result, you really need to be in the top 10.

It is debatable how much more traffic a #1 ranking gets compared to say, a #3 or a #10 ranking. Those listings "above the fold" on a page (anything higher than #4 or #3 depending on your monitor size and resolution) do get clicked more than those below

the fold. Above the fold is anything displayed on the page before you have to start scrolling downward.

A recent study provides some interesting numbers on the subject of ranking vs. percentage of clicks for that position. This study tracked the number of times people clicked on a listing on Google for a given search query:

First Page:

1st position: 30%

2nd position: 15%

3rd position: 7%

4th position: 5%

5th position: 4%

6th position: 4%

7th position: 2%

8th position: 2%

9th position: 3%

10th position: 5%

Second Page:

1st position: 6%

2nd position: 4%

3rd position: 2%

4th position and beyond <1%

As you can see, if you aren't on the first two pages, you might as well forget getting clicked. When was the last time you went to the third page of a search query versus just starting a new search query?

When Google Comes Visiting

To be listed in Google's search database (or index), Google visits your site using automated programs called *robots* or *spiders*. Such programs "read" each and every page of your website, starting typically with your home page and then following each link to all other web pages on your site. When a search engine robot or spider visits your site, it is said to *crawl* or *spider* your site.

Important: Google will not add a new web page to its index unless there is at least one other web page in its index that links to that page. So don't fret over submitting your site to Google directly. Instead, you need to get another website to link to your website first.

Website crawls are performed by the main Google spider, called **Googlebot**. The more "popular" your site, the more often it typically is crawled by Google. Highly

ranked sites and sites that update content frequently (like news and blog sites) get crawled daily.

If interested, you can check your server log files for the user-agent "Googlebot". This will tell you when Google crawls your site. You can also check by IP address although this method is not as accurate as Google uses different IP addresses for their robots, which can change over time.

Google updates its main index more or less continuously although major "updates" still happen several times a year. These major updates correspond to major ranking algorithm changes. These updates have all been named – you may have heard about Florida, Bourbon, Allegra or Jagger in the forums.

For new websites, I advise you to make your site live as quickly as possible, even before you are completed. Given that Google prefers sites that are older, it no longer makes sense to wait until every "i" is dotted and "t" is crossed before going live with a new site. Instead, create an overall skeleton of your site, with a reasonably finished Home page and other important pages and make it live. Add new content, or update the content, on at least a monthly basis. Google also prefers sites that add or update content regularly.

This strategy has to do with what is called the **Google Sandbox** or the aging factor. The Sandbox is a set of filters applied to new websites whereby the site cannot rank well (or at all) for any competitive keywords for 6 – 24 months. Also called the *aging delay*. New sites can rank well for very niche, unique keyword phrases, such as their company name, but that's about it. It is for this reason that new sites need to be made live on the Web as soon as possible in order to "start the aging clock".

Important: It is critical that your website is up and running when Google visits you by following a link from another site. If your site is down, your listing on Google may disappear until the next update! The reason is that Google thinks your site doesn't exist and may remove it from the index after a couple of attempts.

How Google Ranks Pages

Google uses a sophisticated and proprietary algorithm for ranking Web sites that uses over 100 different criteria in the calculation, each of which is given a specific weighting which can change over time. Because the algorithm can change, *specific techniques that used to work well may no longer work as well over time*. This is important to remember when your site's ranking seems to change for no apparent reason. For this reason, optimizing your site should not be considered as a one-time task. You should always try, test, and refine your efforts.

The Google algorithm can be broken down into two major groups of factors:

On-page (keyword) factors. Keyword factors involve how, where and when keywords are used. Meaning how well your website is optimized for your most important keywords, and if those same keywords appear in your content and in links. Keyword factors determine **page relevance**.

Off-page (link) factors. These include the quantity and *quality* of links that point to your site. Link factors determine **page importance** and are related to Google PageRank (PR). Links play a VERY important role in getting high rankings, particularly for competitive markets.

Very simply put, Google finds pages in its index that are both *relevant* and *important* to a search for a particular term or phrase, and then lists them in descending order on search results pages.

On-Page Factors and Page Relevance

Keywords are intrinsically related to search terms – words and phrases that people enter into a search engine to find specific information. Most people enter 2 to 5-word phrases in Google to find what they are looking for. Google in turn analyzes all pages in its index and lists the pages which contain those search terms. Each web page usually contains one or two keywords that are repeated more often than others throughout the site. These keywords dictate the “theme” of a website.

In addition, Google analyzes other sites that contain links to your site. Specifically, Google looks to see if the text of a link (the clickable portion) that points to your site also contain those same keywords.

Off-Page Factors and Page Importance

Page importance is all about links - their quantity, quality, and strength, which we will discuss later on. This part of the algorithm includes Google PageRank (PR).

Google looks for links that point to your site from other websites. Google believes a link from website A to website B is a “vote” for the importance of website B. In this way, other websites add votes for your website, which in turn helps increase a pages PageRank value on your site. Each page on your site has a PR value. Usually the PR value is the highest for the home page as most people will link to your home page rather than another page on your site.

The more web pages that link to your site, and the more important in turn those pages are, the more important Google thinks *your* site is and hence the higher your PageRank value. Moreover, it is the quality, as well as the quantity, of links that

matter – not all links are valued the same. Keep in mind that PageRank is but a single (albeit important) factor used in ranking.

Sites that are highly optimized for on-page factors can outrank sites that are less optimized but have higher PageRank.

PageRank value is assigned after comparing every page in the Google index against one another. This is billions and billions of web pages.

Note that PageRank does NOT factor in keywords or phrases used on your site.

Top Things Google Looks For

Although Google looks at over 100 different criteria (which can change in importance over time) for ranking pages, here are the top aspects or elements that are **currently** deemed a “must-do” if you are serious about a top ranking. Other elements will be discussed later on that are also important. The following are listed in approximate order of importance, with the first two items being more important than the others:

1. Keywords used in link text – both on *your* site and especially on *other* websites that point to your site. And the more links you have on other sites that point to your site and that contain your most important keywords, the better, all else being equal.

This is extra important if you are targeting broad, generic or otherwise “competitive” search terms.

2. Keywords used in the title of your Web pages (between the <TITLE> tags).
3. Keywords used in headings (H1, H2) and in the body of your Web pages.
4. The PageRank (PR) of your web pages, which in turn is dependent on the number of links that point to your site from other sites. The importance of these incoming links in turn is dependent on the PageRank of the linking page, which in turn is dependent on the number of incoming links to that page, and so on.
5. Web pages that contain at least 200 words of relevant text content. The more web pages on the site, the better chance of ranking well for a larger number of keyword phrases.
6. How often the content on your site is updated. You should update your site once a month if possible.
7. How fast you are obtaining new links (too many links too fast is a bad thing).

8. How old the site is, how old individual web pages are, and how old links to a site are. In general, the older the site and the older a link is, the better. So don't wait unnecessarily before launching a new site, a new page or obtaining new links to your site.

Put simply, to rank well on Google, you need to optimize your website for your best keywords, get as many important and relevant sites to link to your site as you can, make sure the text of those links contain your best keywords, and don't do anything that looks "excessive", "unnatural", "manipulative" or "spammy" to Google. Keep it looking natural and act as if the search engines didn't exist.

Important: You should also read the Google Patent Papers. In them are additional factors that Google may look at in determining rankings. For more information, see Appendix C for the link.

So let's continue by looking at the foundation of SEO in the next chapter – keyword research, analysis, and selection.

Chapter 3 – Keyword Research & Analysis

This is where your most important efforts begin. ***Do not skip the tasks in this chapter as they form the foundation of your entire effort.*** It is critical that you research and determine the most important and relevant keywords for your website.

Time spent upfront in this endeavor will reap great rewards later. If you fail to complete this important step, your chance for a top ranking is greatly diminished.

So What Are Keywords?

In the context of the Web, a keyword is a term that a person enters into a search engine to find specific information. Most people enter search phrases that consist of between two and five words. Such phrases may be called *search phrases*, *keyword phrases*, *query phrases*, or just *keywords*, but they all mean the same thing.

Your most important keywords are those ***best*** and ***most relevant*** search phrases you want your website to be found for on a search results page in Google. Good keyword phrases are specific and descriptive. It is better to have 100 highly-qualified visitors who find your site listed in Google under a particular search phrase than to have 1,000 visitors who find your site listed under a generic search phrase and then aren't that interested in what you offer once they get to your site.

Important: Your ultimate objective shouldn't be just to get lots of traffic to your site from high rankings (although this is important), but instead should be to get a high sales conversion. Having a #1 listing in Google means nothing unless you can convert visitors to your website into satisfied customers or have them at least take a next desired action like filling out a form.

The more targeted and specific your chosen keywords are, the greater the chance that visitors to your site will find what they are looking for. You want a high "click-to-sales" or high "visitors-to-customers" ratio. As such, you need to start thinking like your customers. Determine what it is that they need, what problems they have, and what solutions you can offer to help them.

So how do you determine which keywords are most important and relevant for your website? There are two main methods, as follows:

1. By using an online keyword tools. The gold standards are KeywordDiscovery (<http://www.keyworddiscovery.com>) and WordTracker (<http://www.wordtracker.com>). Do this first and spend time doing it right.
2. By analyzing your website traffic statistics. Do this later over time to validate the results of method 1 and to find new keywords.

Using Keyword Research Tools

KeywordDiscovery and WordTracker are online keyword research tool that find all possible variations and permutations of search phrases, including synonyms and common misspellings that *people have actually entered into search engines* to find sites similar to yours. In addition, they will tell you *how many people* have actually used that particular search term over time. There are no other programs currently available that offer this much information. There are other tools out there, like the Overture or AdWords Keyword Suggestion tools, but they aren't near as accurate or as robust and are not recommended for this purpose. Indeed, KeywordDiscovery and WordTracker have been the better-kept secrets for increasing relevant, targeted traffic to websites by analyzing the true search habits of people on the Internet.

Until KeywordDiscovery came around, I used WordTracker exclusively. Now I use KeywordDiscovery as my primary keyword tool as it as a larger and more accurate data set than WordTracker, and better export features. However, WordTracker has several unique features not available in KeywordDiscovery. I encourage you to sign up for either one or both. Each costs about \$50 per month, which is a pittance for the wealth of data you will receive. I use both of them on a daily basis.

Before you use KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker, you should first brainstorm and make a list of all possible words and phrases that you think a *customer* may use to find those products, services, or information that you are offering on your site. Don't include industry jargon, acronyms, or buzzwords that only experts in your industry or marketers would know. **Think like your customer.** This is an important distinction to keep in mind.

There simply is no better way to research the best keywords to use for your website. You can also use these tools to estimate beforehand how much traffic you can potentially expect to receive so it is an invaluable tool for general business research.

Step-by-step use of these tools is beyond the scope of this book. I encourage you to read the manuals and become acquainted with the interface and learn how to use these tools effectively. With that said, here are a few pointers I've learned over time.

Pay attention to the word form. See whether the plural form or the singular form of a keyword phrase has a higher Search number. This is important as one form of your word will be more important than another.

Don't get hung up on KEI. Don't focus too much on the KEI value that KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker provides for keywords. KEI by itself is a very general indicator of competition. It's primary value is in identifying some of the "low-hanging" secondary and tertiary search phrases that you should be able to optimize for fairly easily. So if the high-KEI phrase fits your site, you should optimize for it.

Just because a relevant keyword phrase may have a real low KEI number (like 0) doesn't mean you should ignore it, ESPECIALLY if it is has a high Search value. Don't be discouraged by a large number of competing pages, you may have less true competition than you think.

Export your results to Excel. KeywordDiscovery and WordTracker allows you to export your research results to Excel, where you can then easily sort (and resort) the data any number of different ways. I highly encourage you to do this.

Both these tools offer you to store keyword Projects online. I find this feature somewhat limiting and typically don't use them. I'd rather store my data offline on my computer for more advanced manipulation.

Select Overture in Results (WordTracker only). When using WordTracker, I select Google and Overture (bought by Yahoo) in the Competition Search. This is an important feature that WordTracker has. The Overture bid prices are a great indicator of how coveted a given keyword phrase is in the marketplace. Some keyword phrases are so competitive that one can only get traffic from them by going the pay-per-click (PPC) route. The more expensive the keyword in Overture, the more prized it is. By looking at Google and Overture at the same time, it allows you to weigh the Search values against the PPC Bid price for a better determination of the "market value" of a given keyword phrase.

What is your Primary Keyword Phrase?

After using KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker, you should have a great list of keyword phrases. Ideally, you have a single keyword phrase that sticks out from the rest that best represents the category of service, product, or information your website provides. This is your Primary Keyword Phrase and is the one phrase that will be included on all your web pages, particularly on your home page.

In general, this will be your most generic and most competitive phrase, thus it will also be the most difficult to rank well for.

You should also have several other phrases that represent more specific or refined variations to your Primary Keyword Phrase. These phrases will be used on your specific product or service pages.

For example, let's use a website that sells house plans online:

Primary Keyword Phrase: "house plans"
Specific variations: "country house plans"
"luxury house plans"
"Cape Cod house plans"

Notice how the Primary Keyword Phrase is contained within the more specific phrases? This is the ideal situation.

Do not try to go after very broad, generic keywords or single words. Those days are over, won by those that started the SEO game years ago and those that have deep pockets. Realistically, how difficult do you think it would be to get a top ranking for, say "computers", "mortgages", "cars", "travel", or "insurance"? You'd be competing with millions of other web pages and with websites that are eons more established. So you go for the niches for your riches.

What are your Secondary Keyword Phrases?

After using KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker, you should have a list of phrases that do not have as high of a search (traffic) number as your Primary Keyword Phrase but are nonetheless also relevant. These are your Secondary Keyword Phrases that, while also highly relevant to your website or business, are not searched on as frequently as your Primary Keyword Phrase.

Using the example above, here are some Secondary Keyword Phrases for "house plans":

Secondary Keyword Phrases: "home plans"
"home designs"
"houseplans"

Secondary Keyword Phrases should also be used on your site, just not as frequently as your Primary Keyword Phrase.

Specialized Keyword Phrases Convert Better

The more specialized or targeted your keyword phrase is, the more targeted your audience, the more qualified the potential traffic, and hence the greater the potential sales conversion rate will be on your site. Do not discount keywords just because KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker shows a low traffic value - singly they may not bring much traffic but collectively they can. A large percentage of search is very targeted and specific using multiple words – this is the vaunted “Long Tail”.

Don't try to rank highly on one-word and even competitive 2-word phrases - instead try 3, 4 and 5-word phrases. These are MUCH easier to rank well for because the majority of your competitors are all chasing the same generic words and aren't thinking about digging deeper. One easy way to get more specific is to put a geographic modifier in the keyword phrase (if applicable to you). If you are a veterinarian in Seattle for example, stop trying to optimize for the competitive “veterinary clinics” phrase and instead try for “Seattle veterinary clinics” since your business is confined to that geographical area anyway.

Put another way, focus on depth, not breadth on your site.

General Keyword Strategy

Now that you have your list of best and most important keyword phrases, here is the general strategy of how to use them on your web pages. Exactly how to optimize your use of keywords on your web pages is the subject of the next section.

The general rule of thumb is that you optimize each page for ideally no more than two different keyword phrases.

Each page should include your Primary Keyword Phrase. Your home page should also contain your best Secondary Keyword Phrase. Each product, service, or content page should also contain the best specific variation to your Primary Keyword Phrase.

Because your home page is *generally* the one that gets the highest ranking, and is linked to most from other sites, you need to place special emphasis on the use of your Primary Keyword Phrase there. Your home page will then link to other pages on your site that contain (and are optimized for) your other, more specific, keyword phrases.

Using the example again for “house plans”, here would be the general strategy:

- **Home page:** optimize for “house plans” (primary phrase) and “home plans” (best secondary phrase).
- **Country House Plans page:** optimize for “country house plans” phrase and any other variations, such as “French country house plans”. Note how these phrases already contain the Primary Keyword phrase within them. This is the ideal situation to achieve.
- **French Country House Plans page:** optimize for “French country house plans” phrase.
- **Contact Us page:** include the phrase “house plans” several times on the page. This page, along with the other “fluff” pages, are not really relevant for any specific keyword phrase. So use your Primary Keyword Phrase here.
- **About Us page:** again, include “house plans” phrase several times on the page for the same reason as the Contact Us page.

This example, while being quite general, nonetheless should give you an idea of how to move forward. Now let’s look at how and where to place keywords on your web site correctly.

PART II - Website Optimization

This section deals with those aspects and elements of your website that should be optimized for Google in order to increase **relevancy**. You want to maximize how relevant your site and pages are to a given search query for a given search phrase.

In addition to optimizing your site for Google, you should also strive to incorporate some best practices into your website design and structure.

Before we begin, make sure you don't overlook the obvious:

Your website must contain high-quality, useful, timely content that people will actually want to read and take a next-step action on.

It is amazing how often this statement is ignored. You should spend more time creating useful and relevant content, and less time on fancy graphics, gratuitous animations, or Flash – especially on your home page. Remember that Google uses automated software to analyze the text on your site. It will ignore graphics and other multimedia elements on your site - and often your customers will too.

Think of SEO as a long-term investment in your site “infrastructure”. Once your site is optimized, it stays optimized and keeps its ranking over time (but not forever – you still need to update your site on a regular basis). This means free traffic over time. Compare that with paid advertising such as Google AdWords or Yahoo Search Marketing (formerly known as Overture) where the minute you stop paying for your ads, your traffic goes away – it is a recurring expense.

As this section builds on the previous chapter, it is highly recommended that you complete the tasks described in the last section.

Chapter 4 - Structuring your Site Correctly

This chapter discusses the general structure of a website – folder structure, file names, domain names and pages, and how content should be crafted on pages.

Structure by Theme and Topic

The general subject or category of your website dictates its *theme*. Loosely stated, the theme of your website is generally your Primary Keyword Phrase.

Ideally, your site *is* only about one major subject or category. If you have more than one major subject for your site, say, for example, you sell baby diapers AND garage door openers, you should strongly consider creating multiple sites, one per subject.

The main idea is to separate content onto different pages by topic (keyword phrase) within your site. Suppose that a site sells *house plans* online and that is the theme of the site (it's Primary Keyword Phrase). This site also sells *country house plans*, *garage plans*, and *duplex plans*, and let's say for this example that each page of the site mentions all three plan types.

However, what is each page's specific topic? The different plan types have been mentioned on multiple pages, so each page contains the keywords *country house plans*, *garage plans*, and *duplex plans*. None of the three plan types would be strongly relevant on any of these pages for Google.

The correct way to structure this site is to have one page that discusses **only** *country house plans*, another page that discusses **only** *garage plans*, and a third page that discusses **only** *duplex plans*. Each page is now strongly relevant for one keyword phrase. No “dilution” occurs in any of the pages, and each page should subsequently fair better in the rankings for its particular keyword phrase. This is important.

Next, you would add links on each page so that *garage plan* pages link **only** to other *garage plan* pages, *duplex plan* pages link **only** to *duplex plan* pages, and so forth. By using the applicable keyword phrase in the *link text* (the clickable part of the link), you can also help strengthen the *importance* of each page. We'll discuss in greater detail later how to link pages correctly between pages.

To properly structure a site that offers different products, services, or content categories, you should split the content onto different pages. You ideally want a single topic, or keyword phrase, applied per page.

Create Some Pages With Content

Websites with lots of pages in general rank better than sites with just a few pages, all other things being equal. It is better to have a 50-page site with short pages than a 5-page site with long, flowing pages. Each page should however contain a minimum of about 200 visible words of text to maximize relevance with Google.

Also, you need pages with *real content* – don't create just a lot of "fluff" pages that are standard fare anyway – About Us page, Contact Us page, Our Mission page, etc.

Keep your web pages simple. Try to avoid gratuitous animations, junk graphics, large imagemaps, JavaScript, or anything else that may get in the way of Google or, more importantly, of your customers getting the message you are trying to convey.

Break up your pages using <H1> and <H2> heads, and include your keywords in these heads. Not only will it help visitors read your pages by providing visual separators, it will give your pages more relevance with Google.

Don't create pages that are identical or nearly so in content. Google may consider them to be duplicates and your or site may be penalized. Pages full of high quality, unique, keyword-rich content are a must. Be careful if you use both HTML and PDF versions of the same content. Google will index both.

To prevent this, create a robots.txt file and place it in the main (root) directory on your server. A robots.txt file specifies which directories and file types to exclude from crawling. If your PDF files are duplicates of your HTML files, put all the PDF files in a different directory and specify that this directory be excluded from crawling. For more information on creating a robots.txt file, see http://www.searchengineworld.com/robots/robots_tutorial.htm.

Here are some standard pages you should consider for your site:

- Home page
- Your main product, service, or content pages (this is the meat of your site)
- FAQ page(s) (Frequently Asked Questions) or Articles pages
- Sitemap page (links to each page on your site)
- About Us page
- Contact Us page
- Related Links page(s) (discussed later)
- Link to Us page (discussed later)
- Testimonials page
- Copyright, Disclaimers, Privacy Policy page
- Ordering page

Don't Nest Your Pages Too Deeply

When Google crawls your site, it typically starts at the home page and then follows each link on the page to all your other pages. Google finds your home page in turn from following a link on another website that points to your site.

Google seems to attach more importance to files that are closer to the root folder on your server - the folder on your Web server where the home page file is located. Some web designers however may create multiple folders and subfolders on the server for ease in maintaining lots of files.

Google may not value pages located in subfolders as strongly as files located in the root folder. In general, Google doesn't like to index pages that are more than about three folder levels deep. Ideally, all pages should live in the same folder as your home page or at most be one level deep.

Don't Bloat Your Pages With Code

Google has a time limit that it sets to crawl sites. If you have a very large site, Google may not have time to crawl all pages during the first pass. This problem can be minimized if you keep the code of your web pages lean and clean.

This also makes your pages download faster, which improves the visitor experience. Studies show that you lose 10% of your visitors for every second it takes your page to load. After about 5 seconds, you might as well forget it – most people will have left your site. Remember there is still a percentage of people who still use dial-up modems – particularly outside of the US. This will not change real soon, despite the hype over broadband.

Try not to have more code than visible content (text) on your page. Frequently web pages are comprised of over 80% JavaScript code and style code (hard-coded font information or inline style blocks). Right-click a web page and then click **View Source** – you will be amazed at the amount of code present. Although Google ignores such code, it still takes time for it to wade through to find your content.

Put your JavaScript code in a separate (.JS) file and link to it from the <HEAD> section of each web page, as follows:

```
<script language="JavaScript" type="text/javascript"
src="YourFile.js"></script>
```

In addition, create a stylesheet file (.CSS) file that contains your font information and link to it also.

```
<link rel="stylesheet" href="YourFile.css">
```

Stay Away From Frames and Flash

No popular websites use frames and neither should you. Yes, they provide some degree of navigational ease and yes there are workarounds but search engines simply cannot properly crawl framed sites. In addition, visitors can't bookmark any interior pages of your site or link to them. There are some that still beat this dead horse but framed sites simply have too many negatives to contend with. Don't do it.

Same goes for sites whose entire home page is a Flash movie. How many times have YOU actually watched a Flash movie when arriving on a home page? If you are like most, you've clicked "Skip Intro" as quickly as possible. We are all busy and to wait for a gratuitous Flash movie to download is downright annoying – especially each and every time we visit the site. The only people who care about Flash are Adobe, the Flash developer that you paid, and the CEO or Marketing Director who enjoys it for the coolness factor. Google can index Flash *somewhat* successfully, but this doesn't mean it's going to boost your page ranking or increase sales.

If you must use Flash, confine it to a small location on your page or provide a link to it. Flash movies that take up the entire web page do have their uses but the home page is not one of them. If you do use Flash on a page, make sure to add the following code:

```
<NOEMBED>My keyword-rich content</NOEMBED>
```

Pay Attention To Your Dynamic Page URLs

Many sites today display content dynamically from a database. Common examples include search engines on a site that return directory pages, product pages, shopping cart pages, or news articles. Some content management software also produces pages with dynamic URLs. All dynamic pages can be identified by the "?" symbol in the URL, such as

<http://www.mysite.com/products.php?id=1&style=a>

Google can crawl and index dynamic pages as long as you don't have more than 2 parameters in the URL (the example above has two parameters separated by the "&" symbol). Even so, Google may not spider your dynamic pages for some time. Spiders do not want to get caught in a loop of trying to index hundreds of thousands of potential pages.

Google will not follow links that contain session IDs embedded in them.

Specifically, Google will not index pages that include "&id=" in the URL string, whether you actually use session ids or not. This means that if you have a dynamic site that generates multiple-parameter URL strings, you should strongly consider changing your server code to use a string other than "id" for generating dynamic URLs. Don't use anything that uses "id" anywhere in the string, including `sessid`, `rid`, `pid`, `idl`, etc.

A simple solution is to create static pages with hard-coded links to your most important dynamic pages whenever possible. You can create a series of sitemap pages just for this purpose. Yes it can be tedious if you have hundreds or thousands of products but it is worth the effort. You want to make it as easy as possible for Google to find all your important pages. This has the added benefit of helping your visitors find a specific product page – be sure and use the product name or keyword in the link text.

URL Rewriting

This more advanced technique involves installing a script on your server that changes a dynamic URL to a static page, whereby each parameter name is translated to a folder name. This method varies by server platform and is something a more experienced webmaster should implement. For the Apache platform, it can be as simple as creating a `.htaccess` file that contains regular expressions. Do a search on Google and you'll find a number of ways to do URL rewriting (also called mod rewrite or server rewriting).

All search engines prefer static pages over dynamic pages. If you have a large site with lots of dynamic pages, you should consider URL rewriting, as dynamic pages can take months longer to be indexed and then ranked in Google. And once indexed, Google will not re-crawl dynamic pages as often as static pages.

Keywords in File Names

Although not an important factor, Google does look to see if keywords are used in file names for your web pages, but the overall influence on your ranking is very minute.

When naming files, separate each word with a hyphen, otherwise Google will not be able to recognize the phrase and will think it is a single word.

As a general rule of thumb, don't use more than two hyphens, it looks spammy and Google may take a closer look at your site for other possible issues.

About Google Sitemaps

Google Sitemaps is a special file that lists all the pages on your site, whether your content has changed, and that you have added a new page. While this is a neat feature, many sites don't need to use it. Keep in mind that Google will find your site and pages by following links.

With that said, some dynamic sites and other websites that have had problems getting their pages indexed (think Flash) may find it helpful. If your website is well-designed with clean internal links and a standard sitemap page, there is no need to use Google Sitemaps.

Bear in mind that once you are signed up for the Google Sitemaps program, you are committed to updating the Sitemap XML file on a regular basis, which can be a sink on your time.

In this regard, it is somewhat of a crutch for webmasters who have a messy or search engine "unfriendly" site and don't want to change their site. It would be time better served to fix your site so that it can be crawled completely by all the search engines and to employ SEO best practices than continually update an XML file. You may be able to get Google to crawl some of your new pages quicker, but that doesn't mean it will rank your pages any faster.

Remember, having a page in their index doesn't equate to that page being ranked. For more information on the Google Sitemaps program, go to <http://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps/docs/en/about.html>.

Chapter 5 - Optimizing Your Web Pages

Now that you know how to structure your site, you next need to *optimize* your web page content for Google. Put another way, this chapter discusses those aspects and elements of web pages that determine *relevancy* in Google.

Keyword Factors Used in the Algorithm

The following factors play a part in the portion of the Google algorithm that determines page relevancy. Google looks at the following keyword factors and assigns a relevancy score for each page of your site. The factors are listed in approximate order of importance, however, like all factors in the Google algorithm, this is subject to change.

Keyword Proximity

Google looks at individual words that make up phrases. Keyword proximity is a measure of word order and closeness. The closer all words in a keyword phrase are together, and in the correct order, the better.

Obviously, exact matches score the best. As an example, say someone does a search on “*country house plans*”. Google will assign a higher score if your page contains “*country house plans*” than if it contains “*country and farm house plans*”. For the latter, all three words are contained on the page, so the page would receive some score, but since this is an inexact match (there are words in between “country and “house”), the page score would be lower than for the exact match of *country house plans*.

Keyword Placement

This measures where on the page keywords are located. Google looks for keywords in the page title, in headings, in body text, in links, in image ALT text and in drop-down boxes.

Keyword Prominence

A measure of how early or high up on a page the keywords are found. Having keywords in the first heading and in the first paragraph (first 20 words or so) on a page are best.

Keyword Density

Also known as *keyword weight*, the number of times a keyword is used on a page divided by the total number of words on the page. There is some confusion over

keyword density. Part of this stems from the fact that different software programs look at different parts of the page and calculate this differently.

There doesn't seem to be an ideal density value for Google. Just don't spam. In other words, don't fill your pages up needlessly with your keywords - not only will customers think your site is amateurish, but Google may penalize you

Keyword density used to be more important in the past for search engines, and you may still find books that stress the importance of this factor. *For Google, it is not important so don't get hung up on it.*

Keyword Format

A measure of whether keywords are **bolded** or *italicized* on the page. The best place to do this is in the first paragraph of the page. This isn't a real important factor, but every little bit helps.

How and Where to Use Keywords

Don't try to use all of your keywords on the home page - rather focus only on your Primary Keyword Phrase and your best Secondary Keyword. Use your product or service pages to focus on the more specific keyword.

You will likely want to use the plural form of your keywords. However, you need to verify this using KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker as sometimes the singular form of a word is searched on more often.

Google treats hyphenated words as two words: "house-plans" is the same as "house plans" on Google. However, words connected by an underscore or slash, such as "house_plans" and "house/plans" are treated as a single word "houseplans" currently.

Google is not case-sensitive, so HOUSE PLANS, House Plans, house plans, and HoUsE pLaNs are all treated the same.

The Importance of Title Text

There is one place on a web page where your keywords **MUST** be present, and that is in the page title, which is everything between the <TITLE> tags in the <HEAD> section of a page. The page title (not to be confused with the heading for a page) is what is displayed in the title bar of your browser, and is also what is displayed when you bookmark a page or add it to your browser Favorites.

Correct use of keywords in the title of every page of your website is important to Google – particularly for the home page. If you do nothing else to optimize your site, do this!

The "Keywords" META tag is ignored by Google. Concentrate your efforts on the title for each page, making sure they contain the best keywords for the content of each page.

The title shouldn't consist of much more than about 9 words or 60 characters, with your keywords used toward the beginning of the title. Since Google is looking for relevant keywords in the title, this means you should NOT include your company name in the title unless your company name is so well known as to be a keyword in it's own right with instant name recognition – like Disney, Nike, or Yahoo. If you must include your company name in the title, put it at the end. *In addition, each page title should be unique – don't duplicate titles on pages.*

Improper or nonexistent use of titles in web pages keep more websites out of top rankings on Google than any other factor except for a lack of quality links from other websites that point to your site.

The following table shows both the improper and proper use of titles for a website that sells *house plans*. You undoubtedly have seen numerous websites that use "Home" as the title of their home page. Google may think these sites are about homes!

Web page	Improper Title	Proper Title
Home page	"Home"	"Unique house plans, home plans & home designs"
Contact page	"Contact us"	"Contact us for questions about our house plans"
About page	"About us"	"We are all about house plans"
Links page	"Links"	"Links to more information about house plans"

As you can see, you should use relevant keywords in every title of every page of your site. Most people get this wrong. Do a search for "Welcome to", "Home", "Home page", "Untitled Document", or "index.html" and you'll see what I mean about incorrect use of TITLE text.

Writing Compelling Title Text

You have undoubtedly seen any number of spammy-looking titles that are “optimized” in the hopes of getting better rankings. Keyword after keyword stuffed in the TITLE, separated (or not) by commas.

Realize that your page title acts like a billboard and is what people click on in a search results page. So you should differentiate your title from that of your competitors by writing “smarter” page titles.

Here’s an example of what I mean:

Ho-hum title:

House plans, home plans, home floor plans, home design plans, plans

Compelling title:

Unique home & house plans: dream homes start with great floor plans

Notice that both contain multiple keywords but which one would you rather click on?

Come up with a set of different titles for each of your important pages and rotate among them to see what ranks better over time.

Best Practices for Creating Titles

Here are some best practices you should follow for creating titles on pages:

- Each page should have a unique title.
- Try to include your Primary Keyword Phrase in every title of every page.
- Begin the title of your home page with your Primary Keyword Phrase, followed by your best Secondary Keyword Phrases.
- Use more specific variations to your Primary Keyword Phrase on your specific product, service, or content pages.
- If you must include your company name, put it at the end of the title.
- Use the best form, plural or singular, for your keywords based on what KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker says is searched on more often.
- Don’t overdo it – don’t repeat your keywords more than two times in the title.
- Make sure the <TITLE> tag is the first element in the <HEAD> section of your page – this makes it easier to find by Google.

META "Description" Tag Text

Google doesn't factor in META tag text in ranking a page, but you should still strive to fill in this META tag on your web pages:

```
<META NAME="Description" CONTENT="Your best sales pitch here">
```

Google uses the first 160 characters or so (about 25 words) of your META "Description" tag to populate what is displayed under your listing on a search results page.

If no META Description tag content is found, Google uses the description from the DMOZ directory. If you don't have a DMOZ directory listing, it uses semi-random snippets from your page that contains the search term queried for. This can lead to some really awful-sounding descriptions, as rarely does anyone write anything compelling in the META Description tag.

So take your best shot and come up with your best sales pitch in 25 words or less to put in your META Description tag. Something that would actually compel someone to click on YOUR listing. Descriptions that do well include a call to action ("visit us today"), phone number ("call xxx-xxxx for more information"), geographic term if applicable ("located in Seattle"), discounts, specials, prices, anything that will draw the eye and make them click. Basic direct marketing 101 pitch.

Note: If you want your META Description text to be used, it must include the exact phrase that was queried.

About Word Stemming

Google uses word stemming. Word stemming allows all forms of the word – singular, plural, verb form as well as similar words and synonyms to be returned for a given search query. This can work both for and against a site depending on which form of a word a page is primarily optimized for. So if someone types in "house plans", not only will pages that are optimized for that phrase be returned, but so will pages that contain all variations of that phrase, for example:

house plan
house planning
house planner

Conversely, a page that optimized for “house plans” will also be returned whenever a searcher types in any variation of that phrase. Using the same example, typing in any of the phrases below would also return a page optimized for “house plans”:

house plan
house planning
house planner

Word stemming is a helpful feature for searchers, since it saves them from having to think of many variations of a word. Word stemming can help as well as hurt your ranking for a given page as not only does it increase the number of words that you can rank well for (even if you do not include a given form of the word anywhere on a page) but it can also increase the amount of sites (competition) returned for a given search query.

When you enter a search query in google, put a plus “+” sign in front of the word for which you want to disable stemming for. For example:

house +plans

Would disable stemming on “plans” and thus only return pages for “house plans” and pages that contain variations on the “plan” word.

Pay attention to stemming for your keywords – particularly to what the “root” word is and what Google considers to be a match for that word when optimizing pages over time.

About Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI)

Also known as Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA), this technology allows Google to analyze and quantify related keywords within the larger set of content on a web page. Think word synonyms, different word endings, etc. Lots has been speculated about the extent that latent semantic indexing influences ranking.

It is a complex technology, particularly in how it may be implemented. The effect of LSI on your rankings is not well understood, but it means your page may rank better for a related keyword, one that may not even be on the page, than your primary keyword!

Use Keywords in the Following Places

The following are places where keywords should be used on your web pages. The first four items are more important, with Google giving weight to keywords found in the title and link anchor text more than any of the other locations.

- **Title:** <TITLE>**keywords**</TITLE>. Keywords should appear as first or second word in the title.

- **Link (anchor) text:** `<A HREF>keywords`. The clickable portion of links.
- **Headings:** `<H1>keywords</H1>`, `<H2>keywords</H2>`, etc. Use a stylesheet (CSS file) to control the size of heading text to make it blend in better.
- **First paragraph of page** (first 20 words): `<BODY><P>keywords</P>` Bold and/or italicize keywords also.
- **Last paragraph of page:** `<P>keywords </P></BODY>`
- **Drop-down boxes:** `<FORM><OPTION>keywords</OPTION></FORM>`
- **URLs:** ``
- **Folder & file names:** `keywords/keywords.html`, `keywords.gif`
- **Image ALT text:** `` for graphical links

Some people abuse H1 tags by wrapping them around entire pages of content or by using multiple H1 tags on a page.

This is a bad idea and borders on spam – the H1 tag should be used as a page headline. It is perfectly legitimate to reduce the size of H1 text using a style sheet but that's about it. As a result, Google may be discounting H1 so it may carry less weight for ranking moving forward.

The same can be said about image ALT text – some people put entire paragraphs of content in them for each image on a page. It is perfectly legitimate to put keywords relating to the image but that's it. Similarly, image ALT text now carries less weight than before. Images that are clickable (wrapped in a HREF link tag) do not appear to have a discounting - yet.

Proper Internal Link Structure

Besides the title of a page, Google places special importance on the use of keywords in the text of links. This means you need to structure your links correctly.

Ideally, you should only use text links on your site as opposed to graphical "button" links. Google looks for keywords contained in link anchor text – the clickable portion of the link. Google cannot see graphics-based links – all it has to go on is the ALT attribute for image tags, which doesn't carry as much weight.

Keywords in link text should match keywords found on the page that the link points to – especially in the title of the page.

Here is an example of the ideal link structure for Google. Of primary importance is the use of keywords in link anchor text (text between the <A HREF> tags). Note also the use of keywords in the actual name of the graphics file.

Text-Based (Ideal) Link Structure:

```
<A HREF="your-keywords.html">your keywords</A>
```

If you must use graphics-based links on your web pages, be sure and fill in the ALT text attribute of the image tag as follows:

Graphics Link Structure:

```
<A HREF="your-keywords.html">  
<IMG SRC="your-keywords.gif" ALT="your keywords" BORDER="0"></A>
```

What Google Ignores

Google ignores the following elements on your web pages. Due to their abuse and misuse, META tags are a thing of the past with Google!

- Information in the <META name= "Keywords"> tag
- Information in all other META tags (see META "Description" tag caveat)
- Information within the <!--Comments --> tag
- Information within the <STYLE>
- Information within <SCRIPT> tags (JavaScript and other client-side code)
- Duplicate links to the same page (only counted once)
- Links that point to the same page they are on
- Any graphics or multimedia (menu buttons, photos, animations, Flash)
- Stop words ("a", "the", "is", etc), single letters and numbers, punctuation.

Chapter 6 – Linking Your Pages Together

Before we continue, it is time to introduce the concept of Google PageRank (PR). PageRank is discussed in more detail later, but is introduced here in order to understand why it matters how you link pages on your website together.

PageRank is a numeric value that Google places on how *important* a page is on the Web. PageRank is determined by how many incoming links there are that point to a page. Incoming links are links that point to a page from another page. Such links may be located on pages on the same website (internal links) or on pages on different websites (external links). External links are valued more than internal links.

Google figures that when one page links to another page, it is in effect “casting a vote” for the other page. The more incoming links (votes) there are for a page, the more important the page is to Google.

Note: Some obsess over the importance of PageRank to the near exclusion of everything else. As such, PageRank and its importance is truly over-hyped.

Proper linking between pages of your website, if done right, will help retain the total PageRank of your *site* and will also distribute your site’s overall PageRank value to your most important *pages*. Your site’s total “PR” value is simply the sum of the PR values of all the individual web pages. But keep in mind that PR is calculated and usually referred to on a per-page basis.

Internal links serve to *share* or distribute PageRank among all pages of your site. Links on your site that point to other websites can *decrease* PR from those pages that contain outbound links (and hence your site’s total available PR), while links from other sites can *increase* your site’s total PageRank.

The more internal links there are between pages of your site, the more evenly distributed the PageRank becomes in your site. Let’s see why this is important.

Structuring Your Internal Links

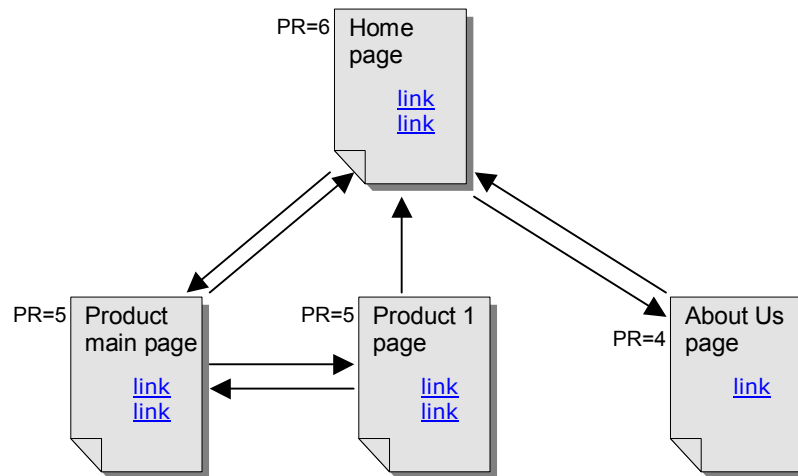
There are two main types of internal linking – hierarchical and mesh.

Hierarchical linking

Hierarchical linking is where one or more pages on your site (such as the home page) are considered more important than other pages. Important pages are linked

to from all other pages in the site, but not all pages cross-link between each other. This concentrates PageRank on your most important pages.

Most sites should use a hierarchical linking structure, whereby the home page and the most important product, service, or content pages are linked to more often than other pages are. In this way, you can increase the chance that your most important page is ranked the highest on Google for your most important keyword phrase. The following figure illustrates this concept.



Hierarchical linking – only important page(s) get links from every other page

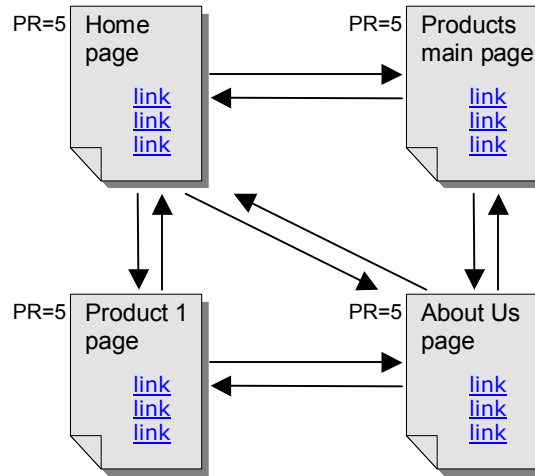
The home page typically has the highest PR value as this is the page most often linked to, both externally and internally. This may not be ideal if your home page is nothing but a splash page or contains little content. In this case, you should redesign your home page to include more content and make it more relevant to Google (and to your visitors). If this is not possible, you should re-link internally to your most important keyword-relevant content page(s).

In the preceding figure, the About Us page is only linked to from a single page. This is because the About Us page is not nearly as the other pages. So why funnel precious PR value to it – instead flow PR value out of the page back to the home page.

Mesh linking

Mesh linking is where all pages are considered equally important (to theme, topic, and keywords). This is the simplest linking method in that each page on the site links to every other page on the site. Most sites use mesh linking by default without

thinking about it by virtue of having the same menu navigation bar on each page that contains the same links. This evenly distributes PageRank among all pages in the site, which is not ideal. The following figure illustrates this concept.



Mesh linking – each page links to every other page

In this example, note that each page links to the lesser important About Us page. So why funnel precious PR value to it? Use hierarchical linking whenever possible!

Best Practices for Internal Linking

The following are best practices for linking the pages of your site together:

- 1. Use text-based links if possible and use the proper link structure.**
- 2. Use keywords in your link text for every link.**

Part of the ranking algorithm includes checking the text of a link against text on the linked-to page. Use your keywords in link text.

Don't use "Click here" or "Home" as the text of a link, as these are not relevant.

3. Link from your home (or sitemap) page to every other page on your site.

If your Web site is relatively small (less than 10 pages or so), your home page can effectively function as your sitemap page. If you have a larger site, this becomes unwieldy and you then need a separate sitemap page. Add some content to your sitemap page - it should not consist of just links.

A sitemap page functions as an “index” to your site and is invaluable for the following reasons:

- Helps Google find and crawl other pages on your site quickly
- Helps your customers find what they need quickly
- Helps distribute your site’s PageRank to other important pages

Tip: Because your home page likely has the highest PageRank in your site, you should NOT put any outgoing links on this page. Ideally, the only page you should have outgoing links on is your Related Links page. This will minimize the small amount of PageRank “leakage” from that page. This concept will be discussed later.

4. Link from every “non-relevant” page back to your home page ONLY.

Non-relevant pages are defined here as those pages that are not keyword-rich and do not likely contain the information that a visitor to your site is looking for while searching on Google. You do not want these pages to receive as much PageRank as your more important pages. Examples of non-relevant pages that should ONLY link back to the Home page include the following:

- “Copyright” page
- “Privacy Policy” Page
- “Disclaimers” Page
- “About Us” page
- “Contact Us” page
- Order form, shopping cart pages
- “Link to Us” page
- “Testimonials” page

This helps return and concentrate PageRank back to your Home page. Remember, you want to maximize PageRank for your most important pages.

5. Link from your “Related Links” page to every other page on your site.

This page contains outgoing links that point to other websites and will “leak” PageRank from this page (but not from any other pages). Since PageRank “voting power” is shared evenly among all links on a page, having many links that point back to your own page will minimize this effect.

As a rule of thumb, try to keep all links going to other sites on a single page – your “Related Links” page. (If you have more than 100 links on a page, consider splitting them up into multiple pages).

6. Link ONLY between pages that are related by keyword.

This helps distribute PageRank among pages that are related by keyword phrase. These pages are likely important to your customers, which means you should concentrate PageRank on these. These pages should also contain a link back to the Home page.

7. Ensure every page links to at least one other page.

This will help Google crawl your site faster and help your customers navigate through your site better. Pages with a link to them but without a link on them are called *orphan pages*.

8. Use Absolute URLs to Link to Your Home Page

When linking back to your home page from other pages on your site, always use the absolute URL instead of a relative URL or file path. For example, always use:

http://www.yourdomain.com (note the www)

instead of:

index.html (or whatever the file name of your Home page is)

or

http://www.yourdomain.com/index.html

to link back to your Home page. I would also use absolute URLs for any subdomain, subdirectory and other main "category" pages you might have on your site. Google has had problems assigning an accurate PageRank value to a page if it uses inconsistent or differing link URL forms to it.

9. Use “Bread Crumb” Link Navigation

Effective link navigation between your pages can provide keyword-rich internal links *and* assist your visitors in determining exactly where they are on your site. A popular technique called “bread crumbs” can be used for this. For example, if this book were in HTML format on the Web, I could insert a series of links at the top of each page.

For this particular page, the bread crumb links would be:

[Optimizing Your Website](#) > [Linking Your Pages Correctly](#) > [Best Practices For Internal Linking](#)

Note how this can increase both content and provide keyword-rich links.

10. Use the “NOFOLLOW” Attribute Link

The `rel="NOFOLLOW"` attribute in a link has been used on blog and forum sites to block the Google spider from following a link to its target page, and hence blocking the passing of PageRank. This is in an effort to reduce link spamming.

You can use the NOFOLLOW attribute to your advantage on your site to channel PageRank to your most important pages. Here's the syntax:

```
<A HREF="yourpageURL" rel="NOFOLLOW">
```

Chapter 7 – Domains and Subdomains

The following are not required to get a top ranking but rather are ideas that may be explored further.

Multiple Domains – Is it Worth It?

If your site contains more than one major subject – like *baby diapers* and *garage door openers*, you should consider splitting your site into multiple sites, one site per subject. This case is largely a no-brainer.

If you have a site that has several related, but distinct groups of products or services, the case is not so clear-cut. You may be better off spending your time expanding the size of your main site and organizing it better.

Should you decide to create more than one site for your business, keep the following points in mind:

- Don't copy your main site onto a separate domain and duplicate pages in order to get more incoming links. Google can detect this and your site may get penalized (or even dropped from their index).
- Use different hosting companies for each site. The reason being is that Google may consider multiple similar sites on the same server that are cross-linked together as potential duplicate sites. The important consideration here is to have each site hosted on a different **Class C block**.

A Class C block is that number shown in the third position of an IP address. For example, for 255.137.xxx.255, xxx represents the Class C block. This number needs to be different for all your websites and the easiest way to guarantee this is to use separate Web hosting companies for each site.

It is not advised that you create multiple "mini" sites to help increase your traffic or number of incoming links. This was a popular technique a couple of years ago but has largely fallen out of favor due to abuse. There are people reportedly that do well at these but I am skeptical. Many mini-sites are junk one-page sites with little content (or with duplicate content) in the hopes of creating lots of links to boost PageRank. Google will catch on and you will be sorry you did this.

Create multiple sites only if there is a strong, compelling reason to do so.

Domain Pointing and Subdomains

Given that you can register domain names so cheaply, it may make sense to register your top keyword phrases as domain names, and then use domain pointers (also known as domain aliases or domain forwarding) to redirect visitors from your “pointer” domains to your main domain.

For example, if your main website is at *www.houseplans.com*, you may want to register the following domains: *www.houseplan.com*, *www.house-plans.com*, *www.unique-house-plans.com*, and *www.homeplans.com*, and set it up to have each one of these forward visitors to your main website. In this way, you can capture visitors who may type in variations of your main domain and singular vs. plural forms.

Another technique is the use of *subdomains*, also known as *prefix* domains or *third-level* domains. For example - *http://keyword.domain.com*.

Google currently treats a subdomain as an entirely different domain name. On your server, each subdomain is redirected to a different folder on your website. For example, *www.keyword.mydomain.com* could point to *www.my-main-domain.com/keyword/*. This is an excellent strategy if your site is comprised of related but distinct groups of topics.

Contact your webmaster for setting this up as it varies from one server platform to the next.

Changing Domain Names

Think carefully if you are changing domain names at an established site solely for the purpose of change. Google will see your new domain as a brand-new site, even if you have kept all the file names the same. That means all your old incoming links will point to the old domain. I recommend keeping your old domain name unless you have a real compelling reason to change it.

If you must change domain names, the way to do it properly is to keep your old domain active and insert a **Permanent 301 Redirect** script on that server to instruct browsers and search engines that the site on the old domain have been replaced by a new domain. This will also transfer PageRank from your old domain to your new domain.

Ask your Webmaster to do this as it is a little complex and varies by server (Linux/Apache vs. Windows/IIS).

Domain Registration and Domain Age

Google now looks at the length of time a domain is registered for. Legitimate domains are more likely to be paid for several years in advance, while shady domains are rarely registered for more than a year in advance, since the owner knows they are likely to be penalized anyway. I recommend you sign up or renew a domain for at least 2 years, preferably more. Legitimate businesses are in it for the long haul anyway.

Google may also take into account the rate at which Whois information and DNS Nameserver is changed for a given domain. Domains that frequently change their hosting servers and registered owners may be flagged as possible spam domains.

Lastly, Google appears to give more weight to older domains (and hence older sites) when ranking sites, all other things being equal.

Domain and Subdomain Naming

When a keyword is contained in a domain name or a subdomain, there is a good chance that the keyword is pretty relevant to the content of the site. A website with a keyword in the domain name may rank every so slightly higher than another website that doesn't use keywords in the domain (all other things being equal).

Given a choice between two listings in the search results, an online searcher will likely choose the listing containing the keyword in the domain name over the listing that contains unmemorable or is spammy-sounding.

Other tips to consider:

1. The shorter the domain name, the better.
2. Go from specific to generic: houseplans.com is better than planshouse.com
3. Don't use more than one hyphen if you can help it - no more than two hyphens ever in a domain name.
4. Don't be cute and use the TLD in the domain name, like www.reallygood.info.

PART III - Effective Link-Building

This section deals with those aspects of your SEO efforts that increase page *importance*. You want to maximize how important your website is with Google.

Before we begin, don't overlook the obvious: **Your website must contain high-quality, useful, timely content that people will actually want to link to.** Spend more time creating useful and relevant content, and less time on fancy graphics, gratuitous animations, or Flash.

As this section builds on the previous section, it is recommended that you first read PART II - Website Optimization.

Link-building is a tedious, long-term strategy. It takes time and effort to get links placed on another site, more time for the search engines to find the links, and more time for them to include those links in the ranking algorithm. So be patient.

Chapter 8 – Why You Need Links

If your site has no incoming links from other websites, your site will not be included in the Google index. You **MUST** have at least one incoming link from another website if you are going to show up in Google at all!

Obtaining links from other websites is a time-consuming process. However, without other sites that link to your site, you will likely not rank well on Google for your keywords. ***More businesses fail to achieve satisfactory rankings in Google because of an insufficient number of quality links than any other reason.*** Your objective is to obtain the highest number of “high-quality” links as possible from other sites.

Having lots of links is also important for “diversifying” where your traffic comes from – it is not wise to place all your traffic eggs in one Google basket. By growing and maintaining an active link exchange effort, your traffic risk can be decreased.

Link-building also makes you immune to tweaks in search engine algorithms. Links are forever. Each link individually won't drive much traffic to your site, but hundreds of links in the aggregate will over time. Traffic you receive from links on many different sites may eclipse traffic you obtain from Google in the long term.

Off-Page Link Factors Used in the Algorithm

Off-page link factors include that portion of the Google algorithm that determines page **importance**, which in turn is primarily dependent on PageRank (PR), which is about the *quantity* and *strength* of links that point to your site.

The concept of link quality is also an important factor, and is not part of the PageRank calculation. Link quality is determined by *keyword factors*.

PageRank Factor

When one page links to another, it “casts a vote” for that page in the form of a PageRank value. The more links you have that point to your site the better, as this increases the PageRank of the page being linked to. The number of links that point to a site is also called its ***link popularity***.

Link Quality Factor

Google returns the most relevant results for a given search query. One way Google does so is by analyzing keywords on pages of *other websites that link to your site*. What other sites “say” about your site on their page is important. This means that the *quality* of links may be as important as the *quantity* of links to your site.

You may have hundreds of pages linking to your site, but if the text of those links doesn’t match your keywords, or if the linking page content is not related to your site, those links by themselves may not add any appreciable PageRank boost.

If only the quantity of links to a site were important, every site on the Web would link indiscriminately with every other site and the site with the largest number of incoming links would be #1 for any word. This clearly is not the case.

Specifically, the quality of a link that points to your site is determined by the following:

1. Text of the link – does it contain your keywords? (This very important)
2. Text of other links on the same page – do they also contain, or are similar to, your keywords?
3. Is the link contained in a paragraph on the page, surrounded by related text. Such “inline” links are weighted more than links that are listed on a page without any other text, such as in the footer of a page or a Sponsored Links section.
4. Title of the linking page – does it contain, or is it related to, your keywords?

Linking-Building is About Visitors

The primary value of obtaining incoming links should be to diversify and increase your qualified traffic sources. The secondary value should be to increase PageRank to boost site ranking.

By implementing an effective linking strategy you attract more qualified visitors, you learn more about your industry, you build business relationships, and you become a valued member of the online community. These benefits can bring much long-term reward. As such, link building should be thought more as “business building”.

Chapter 9 - All About PageRank

This chapter deals largely with theory. However, because of the misunderstanding of Google PageRank (PR), it is important that you understand how PR works under the hood and what role it plays in influencing rankings.

Many people obsess and over-hype the importance PageRank and therefore introduce worry and confusion that is not warranted.

There are PR = 8 sites that you cannot find in Google unless you search for them by company name, while there are PR = 4 sites that are in the top 2 or 3 search results for relevant keyword phrases.

PageRank vs. Search Result Ranking

People tend to confuse PageRank with their page's ranking for a certain search result for a certain keyword. PR is just *one* factor that is used to determine your page's actual rank on a search results page for a given search query.

It is not uncommon to see a page with a lower PageRank that is positioned higher on a search results page than a page with a higher PageRank. This shows that PageRank is *not* the most important factor in Google's ranking algorithm. A properly keyword-optimized page with a lower PageRank can outrank a non-optimized page with a higher PageRank.

This is a common scenario for large corporate sites. The corporate site may have a high PageRank as a result of the large number of other business partner sites that link to it, but they may end up being outranked due to their lack of keyword optimization for their pages.

Toolbar PageRank vs. Actual PageRank

The Google Toolbar allows you to see a crude *approximation* of PageRank value for any page in its index. Download and install the Google Toolbar at <http://toolbar.google.com/>.

Most people don't realize that the PageRank values shown in the Google Toolbar are *not* the actual PageRank values that Google uses to rank web pages. The Google Toolbar is divided up into 10 equal **linear** ranges from 0 - 10. These linear divisions correspond to a **logarithmic** scale that Google uses. The actual scale is estimated to be between log base 5 and log base 10. The public Toolbar PR value is however what people talk and agonize about.

The Toolbar PageRank value only indicates that a page is in a certain range of the overall scale. One PR=5 page could be just above the PR=5 division and another PR=5 page could be just below the PR=6 division, which is a vast gulf.

Although the exact logarithmic base used for PageRank is a secret, the following table should give you an idea of how different Toolbar PR is from actual PR.

<u>Toolbar PR (linear)</u>	<u>Actual PR (log base 5)</u>	<u>Actual PR (log base 10)</u>
0	0.15	0.15
0 - 1	0.15 - 1	0.15 - 1
1 - 2	1 - 5	1 - 10
2 - 3	5 - 25	10 - 100
3 - 4	25 - 125	100 - 1,000
4 - 5	125 - 625	1,000 - 10,000
5 - 6	625 - 3,125	10,000 - 100,000
6 - 7	3,125 - 15,625	100,000 - 1,000,000
7 - 8	15,625 - 78,125	1,000,000 - 10,000,000
8 - 9	78,125 - 390,625	10,000,000 - 100,000,000
9 - 10	390,625 +	100,000,000 +

This means that moving a page from a PR = 6 to a PR = 7 is *much* harder than moving from a PR = 4 to a PR = 5.

Although PageRank is assigned per page, your site is a collection of web pages under a domain that you control and hence your site has a total PR value too.

PR as viewed using the Toolbar can be pretty inaccurate. Sometimes home pages for sites will suddenly show a PR = 0 (no green bar) when indeed the page does have a PR value. Appending /index.html to the URL (or whatever the filename is for the home page) in your browser restores the proper value displayed in the Toolbar.

Also, new web pages that the Toolbar displays a PR value for may not have any “real” PageRank of their own yet. Rather, the new page is “assigned” a PR value 1 point below an indexed page on the site, but this is an “estimate” PageRank that exists only in the Toolbar.

My suggestion is to simply ignore that little green bar. It never was that accurate to begin with and it’s just gotten worse over time. It really doesn’t have much bearing on how well you are ranking.

Increasing PageRank

Each page of your website has a PR value, and as such you can simply add up the individual PR values of each page to arrive at the total PR that your site has (bear in mind however that when someone speaks of PR, it applies to a page). How you structure your internal links can influence what the PR value of a page will be, as will links pointing to a page on your site. Although *page* PR value is important, you should really be trying to increase your total *site* PR value.

The actual PR value of each page indexed by Google is in constant flux. On the Web new pages are added, old pages are removed, more links are created – all of which over time slowly degrade the “value” of your links.

As the number of web pages in the Google index increases, so does the total PageRank value of the entire Web, and so does the high end of the overall scale used. This is kind of like the top student setting the “curve” for an exam. The top-ranking site (or handful of sites in actuality) gets the maximum, perfect PageRank score of 10 in the Google Toolbar) and everyone else is scaled down accordingly. As a result, some web pages may drop in PageRank value for no apparent reason. If a page's actual PR value was just above a division on the scale, the addition of new pages to the Web may cause the dividing line to move up the scale slightly and the page would end up just below the new division.

As such, you should always strive to obtain more links that point to your site, otherwise your site can naturally start slipping in rankings due to this “raising of the bar” of PageRank across the Web.

Decreasing PageRank

The amount of PageRank value a link forward on to your site is diluted by the presence of other links on the same page. This is where link *strength* comes into play.

The greater the number of other links on a page, the weaker the strength of each individual link. The strength of that “vote” is divided equally among all other links on the page.

Which means, all other things being equal, if someone has a link to your site on their page with 100 other links, you may not get any appreciable value from that link in the overall calculation, unless the page has a very high PageRank.

The PageRank Equation

Here is the official PageRank equation. It is calculated by solving an equation that includes each of the billions of web pages in the Google index:

$$PR_{(\text{your page})} = 0.15 + 0.85 [(PR_{(\text{page A})} / \text{total links}_{(\text{page A})}) + (PR_{(\text{page B})} / \text{total links}_{(\text{page B})}) + \dots]$$

A couple of observations to note about the PR equation:

- PR is based on individual web pages – not on a website as a whole.
- The PR of each page that links to your site in turn is dependent on the PR of the pages that link to it, and so on iteratively.
- A link's *value* (amount of PageRank or “voting power” forwarded to the linked-to page) is at most only 85% of the linking page's PageRank value, and this value is diluted (decreased) by the number of other links on that page.
- PR has nothing to do with keywords or text in links - it is purely dependent on link quantity and link strength, as discussed previously.

Some may incorrectly conclude that a link from a page with a PR = 4 and with only a few outgoing links is worth a more than a link from a page with a PR = 6 with 100 outgoing links because for the latter, the “voting power” or value is divided up among 99 other links.

However, you must remember the *logarithmic* nature of actual PageRank. A link from a PR = 6 page with lots of outbound links may indeed be worth more than a link from a PR = 4 page that has only a few outbound links.

The Evolution of PageRank

Pagerank used to be a simple weighting factor for all links regardless of the topic of the page that contained the link. This led to a small industry that focused around buying and selling high-PageRank links. However, when anyone can achieve high rankings by simply buying enough links from any website, or trading links with any unrelated website, Pagerank loses its value as a factor in ranking websites accurately.

As such, Google has done some tweaking of how it analyzes the value of links. Links are now scored differently and some links may not count as much as they used to.

PageRank as the defining metric for links is becoming less important and the other variations listed below are becoming more important.

Topic-Sensitive PageRank

Topic-sensitive PageRank computes link value based only on incoming links from pages that are returned from a given search result set that matches the search query (whether the result set is 100 or 10,000 pages is not known).

This means that a flower site only gets links counted from other sites that are related to flowers and gardening - not from sites that are about mortgage loans for example.

By using Topic-sensitive PageRank, Google hopes to filter out irrelevant links that have skewed the value of PageRank in the past.

LocalRank

A variation of PageRank whereby links from sites that share the same Class C blocks are worth less than links from a variety of different IP addresses, which are generally different servers owned by different businesses.

As you may recall, a Class C block is that number shown in the third position of an IP address. For example, for 255.137.xxx.255, xxx represents the Class C block.

This attempts to deal with the problem of different sites owned by the same company that cross-link to each other. Put another way, Google wants to see incoming links that are from different business entities, not different sites owned by the same person.

TrustRank and the Sandbox

A variation of PageRank whereby links from site that are "trusted" by Google carry more weight than other links. This also related to the **Google Sandbox**. As you recall, the Google Sandbox is a series of filters applied to new sites that cause them not to rank well or rank at all for anything but very niche, unique keyword phrases, such as their company name.

TrustRank says that new websites either have to reach a certain age (say 6 - 18 months) OR obtain relevant, quality links from authoritative "highly-trusted" sites to escape the Sandbox. However, links from highly-trusted sites can be very difficult for new sites to get. For this reason, most new sites must be of sufficient age AND the links that point to new sites need also to be of sufficient age and at least "moderately trusted" before a new site can rank well.

The TrustRank threshold that new sites need to overcome to escape the Sandbox varies by keyword and industry. Gambling and pill sites have a much harder time breaking free from the Sandbox filters than say baby blanket sites.

Chapter 10 – Managing a Link-Building Campaign

Managing a link-building campaign is a time-consuming, ongoing process that you need to budget time and money for. Link-building is really just a form of advertising your site and should be managed accordingly.

There are two main classes of links, one-way and reciprocal:

One-way links. These include links in search directories, ezines, blogs, news sites and any other site that doesn't request that you link back to that site. Google currently values one-way links more than two-way (reciprocal) links.

Reciprocal (two-way links). These are links where a site links to you in exchange for you linking back to that site. Reciprocal linking has been abused in the past by everyone madly linking to each other, regardless of whether it made any sense from a visitor or business standpoint. As such, reciprocal links are not valued as much by Google. It still is an important method of obtaining links however when done right.

The primary, most-effective means of obtaining links to your website include the following, in order of priority:

1. Submitting your site to search directories, both general and industry-specific.
2. Publishing articles and other content to feature in ezines, articles sites and blogs.
3. Writing online press releases for the News search engines, like Google News.
4. Reciprocal linking, where you link to a site and that site links back to you.

Reciprocal linking should come last. You need to generate some PageRank first before most sites will consider linking with you. PR = 4 on your home page is usually the cutoff people look for. So get some listings in the search directories first.

Tip: Don't worry about whether you should spend more time getting a few links from pages with high PageRank or whether to get lots of links from pages with low PageRank. Today's site with a low PageRank can be tomorrow's site with a high PageRank, and even vice versa.

How To Rate Sites For Linking

Not all sites and the links you may obtain from them are equally important. Some links are free, some charge a one-time listing fee while others charge monthly or annually. Especially for the sites that charge money, here are some criteria you can use to help make the decision whether to pursue a link:

1. Make sure the site allows you to use the exact anchor text you want for your link so that it can contain your most important keywords.
2. Make sure the link use a simple HREF code format. Javascript-based links or links that redirect to another page are worthless. Also, links that display funny tracking characters in the URL are worthless. Do a View Source on the page your link will be placed on and check for the following:
 1. That no redirection is used on the link (won't pass PageRank).
 2. That Javascript isn't used to code the link (Google won't see the link).
 3. That the rel=NOFOLLOW attribute is not used (Google won't follow the link).
 4. That the META robots tag for the page doesn't contain "NOINDEX" (page won't be indexed).
3. Use the tool at <http://www.marketleap.com> to determine how many backlinks (incoming links) the site has. This is an important indicator for how important Google deems a link will be. A link from a page with many inbound links can be as important as the PR value of that page.
4. Check the PageRank of the actual page your link will be listed on - not the PageRank of the home page, which can be vastly different.
5. The Alexa Traffic rating of the site. This provides a rough indication of the traffic the sites receives. Lower numbers are better. Note that the Alexa rating can be manipulated so take this with a grain of salt. It is better than nothing however.
6. Is the linking page in the index of Google? A link from any page not indexed by Google is worthless. Copy and paste a section of unique text from the page in the search box of Google and see if the page appears for the search.
7. Are links displayed in the cached version of the page? If not, the page probably uses some trick to keep search engines from seeing outgoing links.
8. Content on the page your link will be placed on as well as the anchor text of other links on the page. Are all the links in the same general category or does the page contain tons of links in every conceivable category and lots of spammy ads?

Link Analysis and Management Tools

Although you can manage a linking campaign by hand, there are two software programs that can make your job MUCH easier – SEO Elite and Arelis. SEO Elite allows you to see the actual linking structure of any website (such as your competitors), including seeing what the link text is on sites, which sites are *authorities*, PageRank and Alexa ranking, all in one interface. It also helps you track and manage who you linked to, if they linked back to you, and so forth. It is a comprehensive link research, analysis and tracking tool. Arelis on the other hand is primarily used to track and manage reciprocal linking partners.

About SEO Elite

SEO Elite is a powerful tool that allows you to reverse-engineer the linking structure of any website – including your competition. Some of the more important features that SEO Elite has that make it a must-have tool include:

- Shows you the incoming and outgoing links for each page on a site.
- Tells you what the link text is for each incoming link as well as the page title of the linking page.
- Tells you the Google PageRank for each page.
- Shows you the Alexa rating for the site
- Allows you to look up the domain record for a site for the email address.

All results can be sorted, so that you can tell at a glance which sites are authorities – that is, which have the most links that point to them. You can also tell at a glance what your link text is for all sites that link to you.

In a nutshell, SEO Elite allows you to quickly determine which sites you should target. If a site links to your competitor's site, they will likely link to your site as well. It also shows you the internal linking structure of a site. Best of all, you can save and export your results to a spreadsheet.

I prefer SEO Elite over Arelis because it does almost everything that Arelis does plus has all the functionality of another tool called OptiLink that I used to use, all in one convenient interface.

I highly recommend SEO Elite. For more info, go to <http://www.seoelite.com>. Download the trial version, read the online manual, and try it out.

About Arelis

Arelis is a program that helps you find quality linking partners, and tracks and manages who you have linked to. It searches for sites based on keywords you enter and returns a list of matching sites.

What's nice about Arelis is that you can click and preview each site in the interface. It also allows you to look up the domain record (similar to SEO Elite) in order to get the email address of the site owner. Arelis also shows you the link text for all links, and has columns for you to check whether you link to the site and whether the site links back to you.

Arelis has a number of sample email templates that you can modify and then send out to prospective site owners. Although not recommended, Arelis also builds Link pages for you automatically.

When using Arelis to generate your Links page, make sure you modify the page to make it look like a page on your site and not one of the cookie-cutter template layouts.

For more information on Arelis, see <http://www.axandra.com>. I encourage you to download the trial version, read the online manual, try it out and learn it thoroughly.

The General Link-Building Process

The general process for setting up and managing a link-building campaign is as follows. There is an expanded process that applies to reciprocal linking campaigns that will be discussed later. I recommend you use tools such as SEO Elite or Arelis to help you out, but you can do this manually too.

1. Do a search of your most important keywords on Google. Look at the top 30 results. These sites are either your competition or are complementary sites to yours. Also look at sites that are listed in the ODP and in Yahoo in the same market as your business.
2. Determine which sites link to you now. You can use SEO Elite or Arelis, or you can use the Yahoo backlink command as follows: Go to <http://www.yahoo.com> and type the following in the **Search the Web** box:

```
linkdomain:www.YourDomain -site:www.YourDomain
```

3. Similarly, determine which sites link to your competitors. Since these sites are linking to your competitors, they should link to you as well.
4. Visit each site on the list to see if you want a link from that site. Pare down the list as needed to leave only on-topic sites.
5. Create a system for managing your ongoing efforts. You can use a spreadsheet that lists each site, who you have already contacted, whether they have added a link to your site, whether you have added a link to them on your site, etc. You can use Arelis for this purpose or you can create a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel.
- 6.

Systematically manage, track and expand your efforts. Get in the habit of spending at least one hour per week looking for new link partnerships. Your goal is to find new targeted traffic in as many different relevant locations as possible.

Chapter 11 - Submitting Your Site to Directories

Submitting your site to search directories should be your step in link-building. Many have an inexpensive one-time, lifetime listing cost. This is money well-spent and is the best way to get PageRank to new sites quickly. Although directories provide less traffic compared to search engines, the quality of that traffic can be better targeted as you are listed on a specific category.

Search directories contain listings that are ordered under categories and sub-categories. Site listings are placed into directories by people – unlike search engines, which use automated programs to return ranked pages. Also unlike search engines, search directories can alter the title and description of your site listing to better “fit” into their categories as their editors deem fit.

Always submit your site manually. Do NOT use software or an online service that submits your site to multiple search directories automatically. This is particularly important for the larger directories, which ignore submissions from automated programs. You want to control how and where your site is submitted.

Note: Google has blocked some websites and directories from being able to pass PageRank. Such pages may still show PR value in the Google Toolbar however.

Submitting Your Site to the ODP

Due to its importance, a listing on the ODP (also known as DMOZ) is considered quite important. The ODP provides directory listings not only to Google, but also for the directories at AOL, Lycos, Teoma, AskJeeves, Netscape, AltaVista, HotBot and a host of smaller, specialized directories.

It can take several months (if ever) to show up in the ODP as the ODP is staffed by volunteers who are overwhelmed with work. As such, you should focus on getting listed in the ODP as soon as possible after your site is complete.

You can increase your chances for a listing if you can find a topic or category page that is not oversaturated already with listings. Also, consider signing up to be an Editor for a particular topic, this is a sure-fire way to get your listing added.

An ODP editor will review your submission. If applicable, submit your website to the ODP twice – once for the appropriate topic-related page and once for any location-specific page if your business is regional. However, submit only once per page, otherwise you will get shuffled to the end of the queue.

Tip: If you are interested in seeing where your website is ranked solely on PageRank alone, go to the Google Directory at <http://directory.google.com>. It is based on ODP data and displays all sites in the ODP in order of PageRank alone.

Submitting to The Yahoo Directory

Yahoo charges \$299 a year for all business sites (\$599 for adult sites), but is worth it if you can afford it. Non-business and non-profit sites can still get listed for free. Editors at Yahoo will review your site first, and are known to change your title and description as they see fit. Not much you can do about it – same if you mess up and want to change your listing.

Bear in mind your \$299 is no guarantee that your site will be listed, it is merely the fee for having your site *reviewed* and *considered* for a listing.

Getting listed on Yahoo can be a bit of a challenge as they have exacting editorial standards. You want your site to be 100% complete before a Yahoo editor looks at it.

You must follow the review submission guidelines for Yahoo *precisely*. For more information, see <http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/busexpress.html>.

Submitting to Second-Tier Directories

You also should be submit your site to second-tier directories. Here is a list of some important secondary search directories you should submit your site to:

About.com: <http://www.about.com>. You need to email the "Guide" of the topic first. Click on the Guide's photo in the upper left of the page and then scroll down until you see a "Suggest a Site" link. It can be difficult to get in but is worth it

Business.com - <https://secure.business.com/registration/newlisting.jsp>
Business.com charges \$199 per year and is an excellent directory for B2B listings.

Small Business Directory - <http://sbd.bcentral.com/>
This is Microsoft's bCentral service for \$49 per year. Gets you several listings.

Gimpsy - <http://www.gimpsy.com/>

GoGuides - <http://www.goguides.org/>

Joeant - <http://www.joeant.com/>

Best of the Web - <http://www.botw.org/>

ExactSeek - <http://www.exactseek.com/>

WoW Directory - <http://www.wowdirectory.com/>

Skaffe - <http://www.skaffe.com/>
Abilogic – <http://www.abilogic.com>
Anthony Parsons – <http://www.anthonyparsons.com>
Greenstalk – <http://www.greenstalk.com>
InCrawler – <http://www.incrawler.com>
Info-listings – <http://www.info-listings.com>
Seoma – <http://www.seoma.net>
Sitesnoop – <http://www.sitesnoop.com>
Sublime – <http://www.complete-directory.com>
World Site Index – <http://www.worldsiteindex.com>
Yeandi – <http://www.yeandi.com>

For a larger list of both paid and free search directories to consider, see <http://www.strongestlinks.com/directories.php>. The problem with most free directories is that they take months to list you, if they add your site at all. So I generally don't recommend wasting your time with the free directories.

Submitting to Local and IYP Directories

I don't care if you work out of your home office and use a 3x5 mailbox down the block as your business address, you should get your website listed in the local and Internet Yellow Page (IYP) directories.

The Google search results are getting more crowded with Google Local listings appearing above the other search listings. Google Local and Yahoo Local search results are predominately influenced by listings in Switchboard and Verizon SuperPages so you should strive to get listings in these.

Here are the top ones to submit your site to:

Yahoo Local

To add your business listing to Yahoo Local, go to <http://local.yahoo.com> and then click **Add/Edit a Business** at the bottom of the page.

Google Local

If you advertise with Yellow Pages, you should already be in Google Local. If not, read the information at http://local.google.com/help/faq_local.html and then send an email with the required information to local-listings@google.com.

AOL Yellow Pages

Go to <http://yp.aol.com> for a listing.

Verizon SuperPages

Go to http://www.superpages.com/about/new_chg_listing_business.html to get a business profile listing.

Switchboard.com

Go to <http://www.switchboard.com/adproducts.asp>. Listings range from \$15/mo to \$35/mo.

MSN Yellow Pages

Go to <http://yellowpages.msn.com>. MSN charges \$400/yr for this - they need to keep the shareholders happy I guess. Do only if you can really afford it.

Finding Industry-Specific Directories

Some of the most targeted traffic will become from the niche, specialty “vertical” directories in your industry or market. A simple way to find industry-specific directories is to search for them using terms such as:

"YourKeywords + add url"
"YourKeywords + add site"
"YourKeywords + add listing"
"YourKeywords + suggest site"
"YourKeywords + submit"
"YourKeywords + submit site"
"YourKeywords + directory"

A good resource for finding industry-specific and specialty directories is at http://www.isedb.com/html/Web_Directories/Specialty_Directories/.

Chapter 12 – Creating Content for Links

Writing Articles For Publication & Syndication

You should consider creating timely one-page articles about a product or service that you offer. Something that addresses industry issues or solves a customer problem perhaps. People who spend time writing online articles find their material published and distributed all over the Web in short order.

This is a sure-fire way to get links. Make sure you include a keyword-rich link back to your site at the bottom of the page. In this way, you control both the content of the page and what the link says. This is a powerful technique that should not be underestimated or underutilized.

The best sites for submitting your articles for publication and syndication are:

AMAZines - <http://amazines.com/>

Article City - <http://www.articlecity.com>

Business Know-How - <http://businessknowhow.com>

EzineArticles - <http://ezinearticles.com>

Go Articles - <http://www.goarticles.com>

Idea Marketers - <http://www.ideamarketers.com>

Knowledge Bed – <http://www.knowledgebed.com>

NetterWeb - <http://www.netterweb.com>

Posting on Blogs, Forums and Newsgroups

Don't overlook relevant blog sites, forums and newsgroups as venues for posting short articles and snippets of useful content. There are blogs and forums that pertain to every imaginable topic today. This is another great way to add links back to your site. Just don't spam and overdo it, like some others can tend to do.

In fact, the NOFOLLOW link attribute came as a result of the increasing tide of blog spam. Do a View Source on the page to ensure that your link won't have a NOFOLLOW attribute attached to it.

Regardless of the site, be sure and always include a link to your site in your email "signature" line when posting.

Writing Online Press Releases

Journalists today are overwhelmed by the deluge of new information arriving via fax, email, mail and by phone. Savvy journalists in the interest of time are using the News search engines, such as Google News, Yahoo News and Topix.net to find new press release material. Google News alone is read by more people each month than print or online newspaper.

Optimize your online press release page in the same manner you would optimize we page on your website. Make sure your most important keywords are listed in the title, and make sure you have a keyword-relevant link in the Resources section of the press release. Most people are not optimizing their online press releases – yet.

The best services for distributing your online press release are as follows. Each has a free distribution and a paid expanded distribution network:

PRWeb - <http://www.prweb.com>

PRLeap - <http://www.prleap.com>

Press World - <http://www.press-world.com>.

Donating to Non-Profits & Charities

There are non-profit and charity organizations that will gladly add a link to your site if you donate to their cause. Either you can do volunteer work, help them update their website, write an article for them, or simply write a check. Not only are you doing a good thing for society, but your business is benefiting as well.

For a site that with a great list of non-profit organizations, see GuideStar at <http://www.guidestar.org/index.jsp>.

Chapter 13 – Reciprocal Linking

Reciprocal linking, also called link exchange, is where you obtain a link from another website in exchange for you linking to that website.

To facilitate this, you need to have "Related Links" or "Related Resources" page on your site. You should have such a page regardless in order to list any sites that offer a complementary product or service to your own that might be of interest to your visitors.

You should also have "Link to Us" code on your site where other site owners can simply copy your HTML link code to their site. In this way, you control the use of keywords in the text of such links that point to your site.

Using a Related Links Page

You should really only link to other sites that offer similar products to your own. Don't clutter your links page with unrelated junk. Use keywords on your links page that are related to your site's keywords. This includes using keywords in the text of links that point to other sites.

Also include some actual content on your Links page. Don't merely create a long list of links with no text. Add a short description of the site to accompany each link.

Ideally, all outgoing links should be located on a single Links page on your site. This is because outgoing links can "leak" PageRank from any page that contains outgoing links.

Under no circumstances link out to link farms or other questionable site. While you can't control it if your site is placed on a link farm, you should definitely never link to such a site, otherwise your site may get penalized.

Adding "Link to Us" Code

You want other websites to use your best keywords in the text of links that point to your site. You can help ensure this by placing "Link to Us" code on your Links page that contains HTML code for others to easily copy to their websites. Using a site about *house plans*, here is some representative link code:

Adding our link to your site is easy! Copy the code below add it to your web page:

```
<A HREF="http://www.acmehouseplans.com">Unique House Plans</A> - Search from  
thousands of great home designs at ACME House Plans!
```

Note how the keyword phrase *house plans* is used both in the link text and in the description that follows.

Caution: Google has flagged pages created by link-generation software. If you use the Zeus program to generate a links page, change the name of the page from the default "themeindex". Such programs, while useful, need to be configured according to your needs and to avoid looking like a "cookie-cutter" page.

Link Exchange Etiquette

Because of email spamming, the days of sending out reciprocal link requests and getting any kind of response is coming to an end. Most reciprocal links requests today are generated by a software program that mindlessly spew outs grammatically incorrect, idiotic-sounding requests.

To get people to read and respond to your reciprocal link requests, put yourself in their shoes. Here are some do's and don'ts for email etiquette:

1. Link to their site first. You are the one asking for a favor, so show your respect by linking to them first. I reject all link requests where they have not linked to me first.
2. Make the Subject line concise: "MySite.com now links to YourSite.com". This simple subject gets to the point and doesn't waste any time.
3. Make it personal - include some information that actually shows you visited their site in the first place. Most don't and it shows.
3. Don't "threaten" by saying "your link will be removed from our site if you don't reciprocate within x days". YOU are the one asking for the favor.
4. Keep it brief - I don't want to read a 2-page link request where your link information is buried. Make it easy to find and keep it concise.
5. Be specific - let them know exactly which page you want a link on, don't make them spend time guessing or having to email you back.

6. Don't bug people with several follow-up requests... "This is our 3rd Link Request email". Everyone is busy and filling up their mailbox with multiple link requests is not going to get them to do it any sooner. Sending one follow-up email 2 weeks later is acceptable, sending one out every 2 days is not.

Use the following template for your emails to prospective linking partners for exchanging links. Copy and modify as needed.

[SUBJECT: *MySite.com* now links to *YourSite.com*]

Hello [**name if known**],

The information on your site is of value to our customers. Our site, [**name of your site**], provides [**your main product or service**].

As such we have added a link to your site at [**URL to your Links page**]. If you find our site to be a useful resource, consider adding a link back to our site. Our link information is as follows:

URL: [**your home page or other important page**]

Link Title: [**your link text using keywords**]

Link Description: [**brief description of your site using keywords**]

Or, simply copy the code between the dotted lines to your web page:

```
-----  
<a href="http://[your domain name]" target="new">  
[your link text using keywords]</a>  
[brief description of your site using keywords].  
-----
```

Please review the link we have placed on our site and let us know if anything needs to be changed.

Thanks for your time,

[**your name**]

[**your URL or email**]

The Reciprocal Link-Building Process

The process for setting up and managing a reciprocal link campaign is as follows. It is an expanded set of steps that was covered under the section on general link-building. Again, I recommend you use tools such as SEO Elite or Arelis to help you out, but you can do it manually if you wish.

Do a search of your most important keywords on Google, as mentioned before..

1. Determine which sites link to you now and which link to your competitors, as mentioned before. Visit each site and pare down the list as needed.
2. Obtain the email address of each website owner. This can be done several different ways:
 - a. Determine the email address directly from their Contact Us page.
 - b. Use the **Whois** utility from a domain registrar to look up the email address from the domain name record.
 - c. Use SEO Elite or Arelis, which have built-in Whois utilities to obtain the email address for a site owner.
3. Create a dedicated email account on your web server, such as *link-partners@YourDomain.com*, to help manage your efforts.
4. Create one or more email "templates" to use for contacting your prospective link partners. This is simply a form letter with "placeholders" that allow the email address to be automatically merged in. Most email clients, such as Microsoft Outlook and Eudora, allow you to generate templates for this purpose.
5. One simple way of sending the same email to multiple people is to use the "bcc" option (blind carbon) in your email program. This way, each email recipient won't see all the other email recipients.
6. Be sure and include sample link code in your email template that can be copied by your prospective linking partners.

7. Once you start getting, make sure you have links to their sites on your links page. You will get a much higher response rate if you put their link on your site first.
8. Systematically manage, track and expand your efforts. Get in the habit of spending at least one hour per week looking for new link partnerships. Your goal is to find new targeted traffic in as many different relevant locations as possible.

Reciprocal Linking Best Practices

Although the blanket statement of “get as many links as possible” applies in *general*, here are some tips and best practices for prioritizing your link exchange efforts:

- Only exchange links with sites that are relevant to, or are in a complementary market to, as your own business.
- Focus *first* on getting links from pages with a high PageRank (PR). Links from low PR pages won't influence your ranking negatively, but you probably won't be getting an appreciable PR boost unless you have a large number of them.
- Don't discount the power of low PR pages directing traffic to your site. Today's PR = 3 page could be tomorrow's PR = 6 page.
- Your best links will be from sites that have a large number of incoming links themselves and that also have a relatively small number of outgoing links (such sites are called *authorities*). Make sure these sites are relevant to your theme or keywords.
- Try to get your link on a page that is as close to their home page as possible. A link has less PR if it is buried several levels deep. For example a link on <http://www.acme-house-plans.com/resources.htm> is better than a link on <http://www.acme-house-plans.com/Links/SectionA/CategoryB/links2.htm>.

Changing Old Link Anchor Text

If you have a site that is several years old, chances are you have links on sites you aren't aware of, or that use less-than-optimal link text.

In this case, contact those site owners to see if they will change the anchor text of the link to include your most important keywords where applicable.

Not everything will respond to you, let alone change the link text, and a few may decide to remove your link altogether. But it is still a worthwhile effort.

Using an .htaccess File for 301 Redirect

A common problem is having links that point to the www version as well as an non-www version of your home page. An example is <http://www.YourDomain.com> vs. <http://YourDomain.com>. A simple fix for this is to create an .htaccess file that contains the following lines of code:

```
RewriteEngine On
RewriteCond %{HTTP_HOST} !^www\.YourDomain\.com
RewriteRule ^(.*)$ http://www.YourDomain.com/$1
[L,R=301]
```

Simply place this file in the root (usually www) folder of your server. This will redirect any non-www links to the www version of your site to keep PageRank going to a single version of your home page.

About Non-Reciprocating Links

It is common to have outgoing links that are for the benefit of your customers and that you don't expect reciprocal links back to your site for.

A good example are links that go to book pages on Amazon.com. Clearly such links can benefit your visitors, but Amazon.com is not going to reciprocate by placing links on their site back to your site either.

There are two methods you can use to prevent "leakage" of PageRank from non-reciprocating links on your site. Don't go overboard with this. It is only an issue if you have LOTS of outbound, non-reciprocating links. You are leaking PR only from the page that contains outbound links. So the leakage is quite minimal.

Using the NOFOLLOW Link Attribute

Simply use the "NOFOLLOW" attribute in any link you don't want Google to follow (and hence transfer PageRank from). The syntax is as follows:

```
<a href="http://www.OtherWebsite.com" rel="NOFOLLOW">
```

This attribute is also used by Google to combat blog spam, where people spend all day on blogs posting links back to their site in order to boost PageRank.

Using JavaScript Code

Most links use a standard HREF format, which Google has no problem understanding. However, if you use JavaScript code to create your links, Google *may* not be able to recognize this as a link.

Bear in mind that Google *can* recognize some JavaScript-coded links, depending on how the link is coded. For information on how to construct a JavaScript-coded link, look anywhere on the Web for samples. The best way is to use a separate JavaScript (.js) file to store the URLs.

Please do not consider such tactics for reciprocal links, as it is deceitful to other site owners as they do not get the value of your link counted by Google. However, these methods are used by unscrupulous linking partners to prevent links from transferring PageRank. So be on the lookout for this when getting links.

Chapter 14 – Adopting a Natural Linking Mindset

Google favors sites that look like they were built and are managed as if the search engines didn't exist. That means not doing anything that looks like you did it JUST for the sake of trying to game your rankings. In many cases, sites that complain of being penalized are simply no longer showing up highly on Google searches where they never really belonged in the first place.

A slew of questionable link-building tactics that used to work great no longer do. Ever wonder why some really crappy, minimal-content, borderline spam sites managed to rank so well in your keyword space? It's mainly because of aggressive use of various link-building tactics that inflated their PageRank.

Google is casting a careful eye on how "natural" or "artificial" linking arrangements are - who links to whom, in what fashion, and how fast it happens.

You need to focus on creating a natural-looking incoming link structure that increases slowly and steadily over time. Here are some guidelines to help you adopt a "natural" linking mindset:

Obtain Your Links Gradually

People now are buying massive amounts of links in a hurry. There are people overseas that do nothing but build links aggressively for sites. This is a red flag to Google.

Getting 100 new links to a site each a month is probably OK, while getting 1,000 links a month does not typically happen naturally. Again, Google is on the lookout for any activity that indicates you are trying to "game" their ranking algorithm. So keep it slow and steady.

PageRank manipulation through massive, rapid link-building for the sake of gaining any link, no matter how off-topic, has probably led to more drops in ranking than any other cause.

Vary Your Incoming Link Text

If your link text contains your most important keywords, you get the most ranking benefit from Google. However, if you have hundreds of links that all have exactly the same link text, this is a red flag to Google. This does not happen "naturally" - some people will link to you using your business name, your site name, your URL and other variations.

I recommend that you create a set of 3 to 5 different variations of your link text (both titles and descriptions) that you use when submitting to directories, when exchanging links and for putting up on your "Link to Us" page.

Stay Away From Link Farms & Off-Topic Sites

Link farms are collections of sites that contain thousands of links to every type of site imaginable. They generally have very little (if any) content and often have links to porn, gambling, get-rich-quick, and body-part enlargement sites - to name a few. The multiple sites are also generally all cross-linked together.

Free-For-All (FFA) sites should also be avoided – they are easy to spot. You are encouraged to add a link to their site yourself using an automated form. Often the purpose of these sites is to collect and resell your email address when you fill out the form so you can be spammed with useless and illegal products in email.

Whenever you see an ad for you to "submit your site to 18,000 search engines", you can be sure that 17,975 or more of those actually go to FFA sites.

Google has penalized link farms and FFA sites by downgrading their PageRank value to zero. Nobody in their right mind should waste time getting a link on these sites. If you have too many links on too many link farms, this is not natural and Google may decide to ding your site as well for being part of a "bad neighborhood".

Don't Cross-Link and Stay Away from ROS links

Google is cracking down on what are called run-of-site (ROS) links or site-wide sites. This where you have the same link on every page of a site, usually in the footer of each page or in a Sponsored Links section on the side. If you are "renting" your links from a link broker, make sure you don't sign up for ROS links.

Similarly, if you happen to own multiple websites, don't add a link to each page of every site and then cross-link them together. This is particularly acute for sites that dynamically generate their pages from of a database. All of a sudden you can have multiple sites that have thousands of pages all linking to one another.

Google can detect such arrangements and prevent outgoing links from passing PageRank.

Don't Use Triangular Linking Schemes

Triangular linking works this way: site A link out to site B, and site B links out to site C, and site C links back to site A. In real life, this arrangement would not occur.

Google can also detect such arrangements and prevent PageRank from passing.

Are a High Percentage of Your Links Reciprocal?

Google may devalue your incoming links if a high percentage of them are reciprocated back out again. Google thinks it looks a bit artificial if say, 90% of all incoming links to your site are reciprocated back out to those same sites.

In a world without Google, a site would get links from a variety of other sites - many of which wouldn't contact you to ask for a link in return. People would link to a site because they think it's a useful resource, not so they can get a link back to your site to improve their PR. *One-way links to your site are now considered more important than reciprocal links.*

Not All Links Should Point to Your Home Page

You need to have at least SOME incoming links that go to an interior page of your website. If 100% of your incoming links go to your home page, Google may raise a bit of a red flag as in the "real world", people will naturally link to another page of your website besides the home page.

Have Some Outgoing Links

Since the Web is all about hyperlinking, a website with all incoming links and no outgoing links looks a little contrived. At a minimum, I recommend you link out to the directory pages of DMOZ, Google and Yahoo for your main topic, as well as any other "authoritative" society, industry or professional organization websites.

Tread Carefully When "Renting" Links

More people are "renting" links from high PageRank sites on a monthly basis. If you are in a highly-competitive industry or have a company policy against doing reciprocal links, you may want to consider this.

Because this method can be fraught with peril, there are two firms I recommend that act as honest "link brokers" who do the groundwork for you:

- Text Link Ads: <http://www.text-link-ads.com>
- Text Link Brokers: <http://www.textlinkbrokers.com/>

Consider signing up for a links "package" from a variety of on-theme sites that are on different class C IP blocks, instead of getting run-of-site (ROS) or site-wide links.

Be aware however that such links may become worthless in the future from a PageRank book standpoint. Ask your link broker what they think of this issue before spending money on such a program.

PART IV - SEO Monitoring and Strategy

After all your hard work, you need to measure your progress and results over time. This section discusses what you should monitor regularly and what strategies you may need to implement for success. To wrap it up, there is a checklist that summarizes the processes and tasks used in the book.

It amazes me the resources that people put into continuing plain dumb business practices. I believe there are two mindsets out there with webmasters when it comes to Internet marketing, including SEO. The following illustrates the differences:

The Successful SEO Mindset

1. Creates useful, relevant new page content as needed.
2. Syndicates useful articles in a regular manner.
3. Submits newsworthy online press releases regularly.
4. Submits their site to relevant directories, one by one.
5. Worries about increasing traffic, conversion, growing market share.
6. Builds a site with visitors and customers as top priority.
7. Realizes that successful online promotion costs time and money.
8. Finds quality writers and link-builders to complement their own resources.
9. Quality and adding value is their mantra in everything. (Ex: fewer, quality links)
10. Steady, incremental improvements. In it for the long term.
11. Doesn't give up, and doesn't stop when success is achieved.
12. Spends time understanding and improving relationships with customers.
13. Measures, tests and refines SEO campaign for improvement.

The Unsuccessful SEO Mindset

1. Buys software that automatically creates hundreds of spammy junk pages.
2. Spams every blog site with irrelevant drivel.
3. Spams every blog site with irrelevant drivel.
4. Buys software for \$29.95 to submit their site to 18,000 directories.
5. Worries about PageRank, keyword density, stuffing H1 tags, ranking #1.
6. Builds a site with search engines (and their manipulation) as top priority.
7. Tries to get everything for free and complains when results suck.
8. Uses cheap offshore labor to buy as many pages and links as possible.
9. Quantity and saving money is their mantra. (Ex: Get as many links as possible)
10. Short-term, quick-buck, "lets try everything and see what sticks" mentality.
11. Gives up before results are achieved (SEO doesn't work for me).
12. Spends time whining in the forums.
13. Doesn't measure, test or try anything different.

Chapter 15 - SEO Monitoring and Tracking

The long-term key to success on Google is to measure and monitor the performance and success your web site over time, modify your efforts, test, and repeat. This means you need to regularly monitor different metrics of your website.

Monitoring Your Site Traffic

This is a **must-do** activity. If you are not viewing and analyzing your site traffic and visitor statistics over time, you are essentially flying blind. This would be akin to a retail store not tracking how many customers come into their store, what they buy, and on which days.

You should first take advantage of the free statistics or “stats” program that most Web hosting companies offer in their packages. These work by reading the contents of the server log file for your site. Such programs are also called *log file analyzers*. More often than not, such programs don’t provide the information you need or they present it in poorly-organized, hard-to decipher reports. As such, I highly recommend you use a third-party program or service to obtain the information you need to track your site. You can often customize the of reports you want to view and download them into Excel.

You have two choices – use a different log analyzer program, which runs either on the server or on your desktop computer, or sign up for a monthly service that monitors real-time traffic for you. There are pros and cons to each as follows:

Using a Log-file Analyzer

Log-file analyzers can be installed on the server or on your desktop computer. Unless your log files are really large, I recommend the latter. However, getting your Web host to install and configure a different log-file analyzer than the default one they offer can be a frustrating experience. Regardless, make sure the **referrer** option is enabled for your site (it is usually disabled by default), otherwise you’ll be reading IP addresses instead of domain names to figure out where your traffic is coming.

One issue with log-file analyzers is the information isn’t shown in real time – the data is a day old. This usually isn’t a problem. One of the more popular analyzers is Urchin, which Google now owns. Two free log-file analyzers that are worthwhile include Funnel Web Analyzer (http://www.quest.com/funnel_web/analyzer/) and AWStats (<http://awstats.sourceforge.net/>).

Using a Tracking Service

Real-time tracking, also called browser-based tracking, is sold as a monthly service. Instead of reading a log file, you include JavaScript tracking code on each page of your site. Each time a visitor comes to your site, the JavaScript code sends information to the service provider where it is stored. Information can be accessed in near real-time and usually the quality of information is better (more accurate visitor and page view counts) than with a log-file analyzer. However you are paying a monthly recurring expense and you are charged by how much traffic you receive on your site – this can be **very** expensive for high-traffic sites.

More popular service providers include WebTrends Live and HitBox, which start at around \$30/mo for low-traffic sites. There are also a couple of even lower-cost vendors that I recommend – Webstat.com (<http://www.webstat.com>) and IndexTools (<http://www.indextools.com>). Both are excellent choices for the value.

What to Monitor?

At a minimum you should check your traffic stats weekly as they are a goldmine of information. Of particular importance is tracking the following for your web site:

Keywords: This lists the actual keywords people typed into search engines to find your site. Also listed is the percentage of the total traffic each keyword brought in. There will probably be an entry called “other”, “no keyword” or something similar. This represents people that either directly typed your site into their browser or that have bookmarked your site in their Favorites list.

Spend time determining which search terms visitors used to find your site. You may uncover some new keyword combinations that you didn’t think of using. If this is the case, tweak your site or create a new page around this phrase accordingly.

Search Engines: This lists the search engines that visitors used to find your site. Also listed is the percentage of the total traffic each search engine brought to your site. Usually Google is at the top of the list.

Referrals: This lists the websites that brought traffic to your site and what percentage of the total traffic each “referral” site brought in. Over time, you should start seeing referral traffic from websites you’ve exchanged links with. There will probably be an entry called “direct”, “no referral” or something similar. This represents people that either directly typed your site into their browser or that have bookmarked your site.

Tip: Create a **favicon.ico** file. A favicon is a small 16 x 16 pixel icon that is displayed when you bookmark a page and add it your Favorites. Place this file in the root directory of your server and you can track how many referrals are coming from people that have bookmarked your site. Favicons are created with special software that creates the correct file format. They are also great for branding purposes. For more information, see <http://www.favicon.com/>.

Page Views: This represents the most viewed (or popular) pages on your site. This is useful for determining where visitors are spending their time on your site.

Click Path or Visitor Path: This shows the actual path that a visitor took while browsing through your site. This is great for determining what visitors are looking for.

Exit Pages: These represent the last pages that a visitor views before leaving your site. Hopefully it is your sales page and not your home page!

Length of Session: This shows how long visitors spend on each page and on your site in general. Are people leaving your site too fast? Try to find out why.

Monitoring Your Ranking

Although the focus of this book is on how to get top rankings on Google, what you are really after is lots of traffic to your site that you can turn into sales. Google is one way (albeit an important way) of getting traffic. Don't get too hung up on your rankings - if you are in the top 10, you will do fine. Some people obsess over getting a #1 ranking to the exclusion of all else, when what is really important in the end are conversions and sales. Keep this in mind.

There are two ways to check your ranking on Google for a particular keyword phrase – check it manually by simply counting your position in a search results pages (this works OK if you are in the top 20 or so), or by using software.

The premiere software program for checking ranking is WebPosition. This is a powerful, full-featured tool designed for the professional. It contains several modules, but only one is really recommended for use – the Reporter module.

Some of WebPosition's features have gotten people in trouble with search engines in the past. Before you use this tool, make sure your read the online manual and understand how it works. For more information, go to <http://www.webposition.com>.

WebPosition (and other programs like it) should be used during off-peak hours and only when really needed. Google, along with other search engines, have a dislike for the chronic use of such tools as they impact the performance of their servers. Google

has been known to block access to their site from computers that carelessly and frequently run such tools.

Google changes their ranking algorithm all the time, and ranking changes you may see on your site are more likely due to algorithm changes and not because of small changes you may have recently made to your pages. With that said, you should wait a few months after initial optimization before changing anything.

Even though your server logs may indicate that GoogleBot visited your site recently, it takes time before Google indexes the information and synchronizes it across all its datacenters, and can months after that for a stable ranking of your pages to stop bouncing around.

If your site is kicked out of the index for a spam penalty it will usually come back after 60 days if the factor(s) that triggered the spam penalty have been removed. To be proactive, send an email to help@google.com after you have cleaned up your website, explaining in detail what you did to fix the issue and promising not to do it again. If you are still having problems after emailing them, give them a call at 650-330-0100.

However, before assuming that Google has penalized your site, make sure your Web host hasn't implemented a process to block search engine spiders from visiting their hosted sites in order to save bandwidth. This has been documented to happen with some of the lower-end hosting companies.

Important: If you have a new site, or an existing site that has been redesigned to the extent that page filenames have changed, your site will likely be placed in the "Google Sandbox". In this case, it can take 12-18 months to get a decent ranking for your most important keywords, especially for competitive terms.

Monitoring Your PageRank

You can see an *approximation* of the actual PageRank that Google uses by downloading and installing the Google Toolbar at <http://toolbar.google.com>.

Some people have turned the monitoring of PageRank (PR) into an obsession. Don't waste your time being one of them. PR is but a single factor that influences ranking. PR displayed in the Toolbar can also be inaccurate, but it is better than nothing.

The Toolbar PageRank (PR) scale goes from 0 to 10. Bear in mind that there are vast gulfs between ranges at the upper end, due to the logarithmic nature of actual PageRank. Also bear in mind that sometimes the PR value shown for a new page may not be real and is only a guess.

Checking Number of Pages Indexed

If you have a new site or if you have added new pages to your site, check to see if those pages have been added to the Google index. The easiest way to check is to go to <http://www.google.com> and in the **Google Search** box, type:

```
site:www.YourDomain www.YourDomain
```

replacing **YourDomain** with your domain (such as www.xyz.com).

Checking Number of Incoming Links

Managing an active linking campaign involves seeing who links to you and to your competitors. The most accurate way to see the total number of incoming links to your site is by using Yahoo. Go to <http://www.yahoo.com> and type the following in the **Search the Web** box:

```
linkdomain:www.YourDomain -site:www.YourDomain
```

replacing **YourDomain** with your domain (such as www.xyz.com).

Using the link command in Yahoo gives the most accurate number of incoming links today, but it is not 100% accurate.

Don't use the Google Toolbar to count incoming links for a page, this method is totally inaccurate. This feature is on the Toolbar by clicking **Page Info**, then by clicking **Backward Links**.

For an comparison of how many links each major search engine has on record to your site, use MarketLeap's Link Popularity Check tool at <http://www.marketleap.com/publinkpop/default.htm>. MarketLeap also has a great tool for checking the number of pages indexed on the major search engines.

Measuring Sales Conversion and ROI

At the end of the day, what matters are your sales and your bottom line. After all your hard work, are you converting your visitors to customers? Do you know what percentage of visitors turn into customers? Do you know what your return on investment (ROI) is when you have added up your web site development costs, web hosting costs, consultants, books and all other expenses related to driving traffic to your web site? Do you know what that cost per customer is? Few people do.

The subject of sales conversion and ROI (and how to measure and increase them) is complex and is really beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, this is an important topic that should be introduced for you to think about. For more information on calculating sales conversion and ROI, as well as improving copywriting, improving website usability, and in general creating a high-performing website, see my other book *Desperate Websites* at <http://www.desperatewebsites.com>.

Quite a number of business owners don't make their money back on their web sites. Commonly this is because they got carried away with the look for their site (We just have to have Flash and all those gorgeous graphics!), bells and whistles on their site (We have to have that interactive, self-updating, daily survey!), or what the site should say (We just have to use those paradigm-speak, marketing buzzwords – that is what our company is all about!). As a result, you have a case of “Corporate Egos Gone Wild”. Well guess what? The customer does not care about any of this. The customer wants to find a solution to their problem, they want to find it fast, at a value, and they don't want to be patronized.

You need a method to track visitors from beginning to end and “close the loop”. This means tracking a single visitor from which keyword they typed into Google to find your listing, to which page they landed on your site, to the “sales” page where they took an action. The “sales” page can be an actual product purchase page, form or request for information page, or any other page that represents the next desired action you want visitors to take on your site before.

The easiest way to track visitors in this way is to use a service like Conversion Ruler at <http://www.conversionruler.com>. For a monthly fee, they will set this up for you.

Alternatively, you can also place custom JavaScript code on each page of your site that obtains the referral URL of the page that a visitor came from before landing on your site, and then storing a cookie that tracks the visitor through the site. The code then emails this information to you when a “sale” takes place (product confirmation email, form submission, etc).

Chapter 16 – Competitive Strategies

We are almost at the end now. You are probably wondering where your site sits in your chosen keyword space and against your competitors. You might also be wanting to figure out what your competition is doing in terms of SEO and link-building. These sections can help out in this regard.

Low-Competitive vs. High-Competitive Sites

Your chosen keyword space directly impacts the scope and what kind of SEO strategy you will need to implement for success. Websites that sell to a national or global market in a competitive industry need a different SEO strategy (and overall marketing strategy) than a site that caters to a local or regional market, or for a product in a niche category.

For highly-competitive sites that target keyword phrases that are shorter, more generic, and that command higher PPC bid, Google gives much more weight to off-page link factors. For local and niche sites, on-page SEO factors like keyword phrases used on relevant content, can be weighed as much or even more than off-page link factors.

I have seen sites that cater to a local audience rank very well on a number of different keyword phrases having only a handful of incoming links. Conversely, I have seen giant, content-rich, well-optimized sites that sell nationally rank nowhere for ANY search terms until they have a ton of incoming links.

With this said, every site needs to do both on-page optimization as well as have an active link-building campaign. However, if you are going after short, generic or competitive keyword phrases, I strongly suggest you do the following:

1. Start optimizing your site for as many different more-specialized permutations of your best keyword phrases as possible and build content pages around each one.
2. Start getting very serious and persistent about your link-building campaign. Your competitors know this and that's why they are busy getting hundreds if not thousands of links to their site over time. Just don't obtain your links too quickly.

To clarify the differences between a "low-competitive" and "high-competitive" sites and to further illustrate the type and amount of resources that may be involved to obtain satisfactory ranking results, here are representative examples. Note that these are generalizations for comparative purposes only:

Low-Competitive Site

Keyword phrase: "Redmond Reflexology Services"

On-site factors keyword contribute heavily to rankings. Often all that is needed is a handful of links and solid SEO methods used on the site. Most competitors won't even know what SEO is. Good rankings can be achieved with relatively little effort within 3 months.

Medium-Competitive Site

Keyword phrase: "Seattle Plastic Surgery" or "Seattle Dentist"

An equal combination of on-site factors and off-site factors contribute to good ranking. For such sites, 100 or so quality links are needed (this is a generalization). About half of your competitors will know what SEO is and of those that do, a fair percentage will be doing a good job at it. Good rankings can be achieved with moderate efforts within 6 months to a year.

Medium-to-High-Competitive Site

Keyword Phrase: "House Plans" or "Limo Service"

On-site factors contribute little toward ranking, unless you have a large site, in which case they count for some. Such sites need an aggressive link-building campaign and typically have hundreds or thousands of incoming links that use effective anchor-text strategies. Most if not all of your competitors will be using SEO tactics, some quite aggressively and spending a fair budget on it. Good rankings can be achieved only with steady, continual, focused efforts after 12 to 18 months, and assigning (and paying) a dedicated SEO person for it. Most if not all will use PPC advertising like Google AdWords to augment traffic, especially in the near-term.

Very-High-Competitive Site

Keyword Phrase: "Used Cars" or "Discount Travel" or "Home Mortgages"

Such markets are ripe with spammy, black-hat techniques and on-site factors count for extremely little. For such sites, a very aggressive link-buying, link-building strategy is needed, along with analyzing exactly what the competition is doing and copying their methods. Such sites have many thousands of incoming links. Tactics used need to be monitored and changed in case of penalties applied. All of your competitors will be throwing lots of money on every trick in the book because so much money is at stake. Good rankings may never be achieved unless you are ready to spend the time and money for it, are dogged, and be willing to take risks. All will use PPC advertising like Google AdWords to augment traffic and spend a lot of money (like \$100K or more a month) doing it.

How To Reverse-Engineer Your Competition

Do you have a site in a competitive market and want to determine how your top-ranked competitors are doing so well. This involves reverse-engineering the linking structure of the top 3-5 sites in your keyword space and emulating what they are doing right. Here is how to go about doing it:

1. Use Yahoo's backlink command, or software such as SEO Elite (<http://www.seoelite.com>) find every site that is linking to the top 3 sites in your chosen keyword in Google.
2. Obtain links from those exact sites that your competitors are getting links from. This takes time so be patient.
3. Use the same anchor text that is pointing to the competition's sites for your own incoming links. Try to duplicate the percentage of different anchor text variations used – this is important.
4. Look at the page titles of the #1 site and duplicate them for your site. You don't need to do this for all your pages, just your most important ones - home page, important category/product/service pages.

Why reinvent the wheel? Your competition has already figured out how to rank well, so you should emulate their strategies.

Bear in mind that site age and link age is a factor, so even if you duplicate your competitor's link-building strategies 100%, it is going to take time for you to rank well as the new links to your site won't be as good as the old links that your competitors have.

How Much Competition Do You Really Have?

Some people are confused about the true number of online competitors for a given keyword phrase, particular when using keyword research tools or looking at the number of returned pages in Google. Many such "competing pages" are what are called "accidental competitors" - they aren't necessarily trying to beat you in search engine ranking, they just happen to use the term somewhere on a page.

If you want to get an accurate number of other sites that are optimizing their pages for a given search term, follow these steps. Open Google and follow these steps using your keyword phrase:

1. Type in `allintitle:"your keyword phrase"`

and see how many pages are displayed in the search results. These are pages that use the exact phrase in the <TITLE> tags of their pages - the first important step to optimizing a site.

2. Next, type in `allinanchor:"your keyword phrase "`

and count the results. These are sites that have incoming links that contain these keywords - the next important step to boosting one's ranking.

3. Next, type in `allinurl:"your keyword phrase "`

and count the results. These are sites that use the keywords either in their domain name or in a file name. Although by itself not an important factor, Google does give slight weight to keywords used in domain names and file names.

4. Now combine everything by typing:

`intitle:"keyword" inanchor:"keyword" inurl:"keyword"`

to see how many sites do all three things together. The resulting number is an accurate indication of how many true competitors you have that are doing SEO for their site for your given keyword phrase.

Using Pay-Per-Click to Augment SEO traffic

Every year it is getting harder to rank well in Google, as well as Yahoo and MSN. This is due to the following factors:

1. More new sites are coming online all the time.
2. More sites are incorporating SEO tactics.
3. The search engines are devaluing tactics that used to work fine in the past.
4. The search engines are more aggressive at penalizing sites that use black-hat and spammy tactics, and often unfairly penalize legitimate sites as well.

All the more reason you may need to implement a PPC strategy like Google AdWords. A targeted Google AdWords campaign is an ideal way to supplement your website traffic anyway, and is crucial for new sites in the Sandbox. For more information, see my book *The AdWords Edge* at <http://www.adwordsedge.com>.

After all, you are in business to make a profit. I use AdWords all the time because the advertising much more than pays for itself and the traffic is immediate.

Chapter 17 – End-to-End SEO Checklist

Here is the simplistic and summarized process you need to undertake to achieve a top ranking on Google. Print this page out where you can refer to it.

1. Determine the best keyword phrases for your site. Use KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker to come up with a list of at least 100 2 to 4-word phrases for your site.

2. Create content-rich pages. It's better to have 20 short pages than 5 long pages on your site, all else being equal. Each page should contain at least 200 words and discuss one topic only. Optimize for at most two keyword phrases per page.

3. Optimize each page for its best keyword phrases:

- Include keywords in the <TITLE> of each page. This is a must.
- Include keywords in the <H1> headings for each page.
- Include keywords in the first paragraph of each page.
- Include keywords in the text of links. Never use "Click here".
- Read Appendix A - Website Do's and Don'ts.

4. Link to each page from your sitemap page, and from each page back to your home page. Also link between pages that discuss the same topic.

5. Submit your site to search directories. Submit your site to the Open Directory Project (DMOZ), Yahoo Directory, GoGuides, and other general and industry-specific directories. Stagger your submissions over time, don't submit them all at once.

6. Setup and maintain a link-building & exchange campaign:

- Create a "Related Links" page on your site for exchanging links.
- Create "Link to Us" code can be copied by your link partners.
- Determine the best sites to exchange links with. This is important.
- Read Appendix B - Linking Do's and Don'ts"
- Submit articles, write online press releases and post in blogs and forums.
- Actively manage your link campaign. Always strive to get more links!

7. Regularly monitor your progress and modify your efforts:

- Monitor your site traffic often – it contains a wealth of information.
- Check to see that all new pages are indexed in Google.
- Check your site's ranking on your chosen keywords once a month.
- Regularly check your incoming links as part of your link campaign.

Appendix A - Website Do's and Don'ts

This is a general list of SEO do's and don'ts for your website. Adhering to this list will not only improve optimization of your site, but will make it easier on visitors in terms of faster pages and better navigation.

DO

- Do create relevant, timely, and useful content on your site – particularly for your home page. This may be obvious, but often is overlooked.
- Do update your content frequently – particularly your home page. Sites that frequently update their content get visited by Google more often. This also gives your visitors a reason to return to your site regularly.
- Do create lots of relevant content and pages on your site. It is better to have 50 short pages than to have 10 long pages, all else being equal. It's also easier to optimize a page tightly focused on a single keyword. Make sure each page contains a minimum of 200 words of content.
- Do use your keywords in the page title, headings, first paragraph, and in link text. These are the main places that Google looks – the page title is extra important.
- Do keep your page size small. Both your customers and Google like smaller pages. They download (and are crawled) faster and are easier to read. For every second it takes your page to load, you lose 10% of your visitors.
- Do create unique titles and META descriptions for each page. Unique titles are a must. Don't skimp on this.
- Do use a shallow site structure. If you can manage it, keep all your web pages in the same folder on your server as your home page.
- Do create a "Related Links" page for adding links to other sites as part of your link exchange campaign. Try to add some content on this page too.
- Do put JavaScript code in a separate .js file and link to it. This makes pages load (and get crawled) faster.
- Do create a stylesheet .css file and link to it from your pages. This makes pages load (and get crawled) faster.

DON'T

- Don't use page redirects on your site. Google has been known to penalize sites that use fast redirects.
- Don't use "doorway pages" hosted on free servers, or create one-page "mini-sites" as such pages usually have very low PageRank. Spend time adding new content to your main site instead.
- Don't repeat your keyword over and over again throughout a page, otherwise Google may consider it as spam - as might other search engines.
- Don't use hidden text on your site, such as using white text on a white background. Search engines consider this as spam.
- Don't use tiny text with extremely small font sizes. Search engines may consider this as spam.
- Don't use hidden image links on your site. Hidden image links are 1-by-1 pixel sized images inside a <A HREF> link tag.
- Don't use frames. Although Google can crawl framed sites, they are problematic in other areas. Most sites don't use frames.
- Don't use elaborate image maps, gratuitous animations, or Flash on your site if possible - especially on your home page. Google needs to see actual textual content on your pages!

Appendix B - Linking Do's and Don'ts

DO

- Do submit your site to the Open Directory Project (ODP or DMOZ). A listing in the ODP is considered golden as the ODP feeds so many other directories.
- Do exchange links all sites that offer similar or complementary services to yours, with specialized directories, and with industry associations.
- Do include a link to your site in your “signature” line when you post in forums, blogs, or newsgroups. This also applies when submitting articles or sending out newsletters.
- Do link to each page on your site from your home page or sitemap page and back again. This will help funnel PageRank to your most important pages.
- Do include inline links on your site. Inline links appear in the body of a paragraph rather than in a navigation menu. Google likes the neighboring text that surrounds inline links.
- Do use simple A HREF format links rather than JavaScript to generate the link. Google may have a harder time deciphering your link otherwise.
- Do actively monitor who links to you. You need to track this on a regular basis to make sure your link is added on sites you have agreed to trade links with.

DON'T

- Don't use “click here” as the text for your links. Otherwise, Google may decide your page is about “click here.”
- Don't exchange links with link farms, link free-for-alls (FFAs), or other sites that are obvious spam.
- Don't exchange links with unrelated sites simply to boost the number of links. Your customers won't be on these sites and it won't help with Google.
- Don't have your Links page automatically generated by a program. Google has been known to penalize sites that generate Links pages using “cookie-cutter” template pages.

Appendix C – Best Tools & Resources

Rather than list a mind-numbing number of different resources simply to impress you, this list represents the best of the best:

Best Software Tools

A. Keyword Research & Analysis Tools

Keyword Discovery - – Indispensable online software tool for researching keywords. This tool from Trellian contains 12 months of data from 180 different search engines and has a Seasonal Trend graph for each keyword.

<http://www.keyworddiscovery.com>

WordTracker – Another outstanding keyword research tool. A great complement to Keyword Discovery. I use both, they each have their unique strengths.

<http://www.wordtracker.com>

B. Link Analysis & Management Tools

SEO Elite - Outstanding link analysis and link-building software that does the job of OptiLink and Arelis combined, truly top-notch. <http://www.seoelite.com>

Arelis – Great software for finding and managing reciprocal link partners. Complement to SEO Elite – I still use this as it has unique features.

<http://www.axandra.com>

C. Website Ranking Tools

WebPosition Gold – Full-featured software for checking website ranking. The gold standard and used by SEO professionals to produce ranking reports.

<http://www.webposition.com>

Digital Point – A good free ranking tool, but not as full-featured as WebPosition Gold. Requires you to obtain a Google Web API Service key first.

<http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/keywords>

D. Other Tools

MarketLeap – Great free tool for determining link popularity, how many of your pages are actually indexed, and if your site is in the top 30.

<http://www.marketleap.com/services/freetools/default.htm>

Google Toolbar – Toolbar used for measuring “public” PageRank (PR).

<http://toolbar.google.com>

Best Books & e-Books

The Unfair Advantage – Planet Ocean

Great e-book that discusses all things SEO. You also get a monthly newsletter “Search Engine News” for 12 months which contains a link for the updated e-book.

<http://www.searchenginehelp.com>

Search Engine Marketing Kit – Dan Thies

Excellent guide to SEO and PPC. Includes huge 3-ring binder and CD.

<http://www.sherpastore.com/Search-Engine-Marketing-How-To-Kit.html>

SEO Book – Aaron Wall

Superb e-book on SEO from Aaron Wall that is actually updated daily. Also runs a very popular blog. <http://www.seobook.com>

Small Business Guide to Search Engine Marketing – Jennifer Laycock

Comprehensive SEO and marketing e-book for the small business owner.

<http://www.searchengineguide.com/ebooks>

The AdWords Edge – Dan Sisson

Don't pin your business model just on Google SEO rankings. Discusses how to setup a cheap, targeted Google AdWords campaign to drive traffic.

<http://www.adwordsedge.com>

Desperate Websites – Dan Sisson

Great book that discusses how to convert visitors to your site into customers. Discusses website usability, copywriting techniques, ROI calculation and more.

<http://www.desperatewebsites.com>

Best Forums & Online Newsletters

Search Engine Watch – Danny Sullivan’s daily and monthly newsletters that discusses search engines in general. Danny also organizes the acclaimed Search Engine Strategies (SES) Conference. <http://www.searchenginewatch.com/>

Search Engine Roundtable – Forum 5 is a great source of Google SEO. <http://forums.seroundtable.com/forumdisplay.php?f=5>

WebProWorld – Forum 7 is another good source for SEO information. <http://www.webproworld.com/viewforum.php?f=7>

Cre8asite – Forum 21 is a great source of Google SEO information. <http://www.cre8asiteforums.com/forums/index.php?showforum=21>

Webmaster World (Google News) - Forum 3 discusses every move that Google makes. If you want to discuss Google ranking algorithms, this is the place to be. <http://www.webmasterworld.com/forum3/>

HighRankings – This is Jill Whalen’s superb site. Her forum is especially useful for anything SEO and has really grown in size. <http://www.highrankings.com/forum/>

Matt Cutts Blog – Matt is an engineer at Google widely considered as THE preeminent expert on the Google ranking algorithm. When he speaks, people listen. <http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/>

Other Google Information Sources

Google Information for Webmasters – Important information straight from the horse’s mouth. The information here is MUST reading. www.google.com/webmasters/index.html

US Patent Office – "Historical Retrieval Based on Historical Data" – Important Google patent paper that discusses who it will rank pages in the future.

<http://appft1.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-parser?Sect1=PTO2&Sect2=HITOFF&p=1&u=%2Fnetahtml%2FPTO%2Fsearch-bool.html&r=1&f=G&l=50&co1=AND&d=PG01&s1=20050071741&OS=20050071741&RS=20050071741>.

Google SEO Glossary

Here is a list of terms that were either used in this book, or represent terms in the Internet marketing industry that you may encounter.

Aging delay. Term describing a set of filters applied to new websites whereby the site cannot rank well (or at all) for any competitive keywords for 6 – 24 months. Also called the *Sandbox*.

Algo, Algorithm. A specific mathematical process for achieving a desired result. Google uses a proprietary algorithm that contains over 100 different criteria to rank Web sites in a specific order based on a specific search request.

Algorithmic listing. Any search engine listing that is on the “free” or unpaid section of a search results page. These listings are obtained using SEO techniques without the use of paid advertising. Also called *organic, natural or editorial listing*.

Anchor text. The clickable portion of text displayed (usually as blue, underlined text) for a link. Also known as *link text*.

Authority. Site with a high number of incoming links and a relatively low number of outgoing links. Opposite of *hub*.

Backlinks, backward links. Links from other sites that point to your site. Also known as *inbound or incoming* links.

Cascading Style Sheet (CSS). Code that defines the visual appearance, style (size, color, font), or positioning of text on a Web page. This code can be located either on the page it is used on or can be stored in a separate (.css) file.

Conversion rate. The percentage of visitors to a website that end up performing a specific action that leads to a sale. Such actions can include the purchase of a product, the submission of a form, or an email requesting more information.

Cost-Per-Click (CPC). See *Pay-per-click (PPC)*.

Crawl. The operation of reading or analyzing pages of a website by an automated program called a *spider or robot*. Spiders crawl your site by following links on each page of your site. After crawling, the spider will return the results back to the search engine for later inclusion into its database for *indexing*. See also *Index*.

CSS. See *Cascading Style Sheet*.

Directory. As opposed to search engines, search directories use humans to review and place websites in alphabetical order under defined categories and sub-categories. The best-known directories are Yahoo! and the Open Directory Project (ODP).

DMOZ. Another term for the *Open Directory Project*.

Editorial listing. Any search engine listing that is on the “free” or unpaid section of a search results page. These listings are obtained using SEO techniques without the use of paid advertising. Also called *organic, algorithmic or natural listing*.

Everflux. Term used for the constantly changing search results that occur regularly.

External links. Links located on websites other than your own.

Googlebot. The name given to the main Google *spider* that crawls sites.

Google AdWords™. Google’s Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising program, whereby your site is listed in the right-hand side of Google search result pages in a small box. This type of advertising involves an auction where you bid, along with your competitors, for the cost per click for a specific keyword.

Google bombing. Term used to describe the process of artificially altering the ranking of a page by the use of links. It requires a concerted group effort from many different site owners who all agree to use the exact same link text in links that point to the same site. The linked-to site may not even contain the text used anywhere on the page.

Google dance. Older term designating the time period where Google updates their index, which results in site rankings that jump around, sometimes minute by minute. This is caused by Google running PageRank calculations for all pages repeatedly until the values reach a steady-state.

Google Directory™. The Google Directory lists those websites that are in the Open Project Directory (ODP), then ranks them according to PageRank alone.

Google Toolbar™. A downloadable program that attaches to your browser, allowing you to see a public approximation for the PageRank (PR) value of a page, along with the external sites that link to that page.

Hub. Site with a high number of outgoing links and a relatively low number of incoming links. Opposite of *authority*.

Inbound, incoming links. Links that reside on another website that point to your website. Also known as *backlinks* or *backward* links. The opposite of inbound links are *outbound* links.

Index. Term used to denote the database that stores information about every web page for every website that a search engine has *crawled* (visited). If your website is included in the Google database (index), it is said to be *indexed*.

Index page. Another name for a home page. Many home pages are named *index.html* so that Web servers will display this page by default.

Internal links. Links that are located on pages within the same website. As opposed to *external links*, which are links that are located on a different website.

Inline links. Links that are part of a sentence in a paragraph on a page, rather than simply listed in a menu bar or a links page without any surrounded text.

IYP. Internet Yellow Page directories such as Verizon Superpages, SMARTPages and other local-based directories like Google Local and Yahoo Local.

KD. See *Keyword density*.

Keyword phrase. General term used to define a specific word phrase that best describes the main topic of a web page. Synonymous with a *search phrase* that a visitor enters into a search engine to find specific information.

Keyword. General term used to define the main topic of a page. Synonymous with *search term*. A group of keywords used together in a phrase is called a *keyword phrase*. Google looks for keywords on a page that match searched-for terms.

Keyword density. The number of times a keyword is used on a web page divided by the total number of words on the page. Expressed as a percentage.

Keyword prominence. How close to the beginning or top of a web page that a keyword is found.

Keyword proximity. How close together the individual words that make up a keyword phrase are to one another, and in what order.

Keyword weight. Also known as *keyword density*.

Landing page. Generally speaking, the web page that a person reaches when clicking on a search engine listing or ad. This may be any page of the site. For paid advertising, it is common to have multiple ads, each one linking to a specific landing page on the site that is targeted specifically for that ad.

Latent Semantic Indexing. A technology used by Google that factors in synonyms and related keyword phrases when ranking a page for a specific keyword. A page could rank well for a related keyword that may not even appear on the page.

Link quality. A general term referring to *link reputation* and *link strength*. Links with high quality are those where the *PageRank* of the linking page is high, and where your keywords are used in the *link text* and in the page title that the link is.

Link popularity. A term referring to the number of incoming links to your site.

Link reputation. A term referring to how closely link text matches the title of the page the link is on and, more importantly, the text on the page that the link points to.

Link strength. Dependent on the *PageRank* of the linking page as well as the number of other links on the page. Also referred to as *link voting power*.

Link text. The clickable portion of text displayed (usually as blue, underlined text) for a link. Also known as *anchor text*.

LocalRank. A variation of basic PageRank whereby links from sites that share the same Class C IP address block are weighed less (are worth less) than links from a variety of different IP addresses (different servers owned by different businesses).

LSI. See *Latent Semantic Indexing*.

META tags. HTML tags located in the <HEAD> section of a web page that specify information that is viewable only to a search engine. The two most commonly-used META tags are the “Keywords” META tag and the “Description” META tag. Most search engines ignore META tags today due to their abuse in the past – however Google and others still use the contents of the Description META tag when listing web pages. In addition, the “Robots” META tag can be used to prevent search engines from indexing a web page.

Natural listing. Any search engine listing that is on the “free” or unpaid section of a search results page. These listings are obtained using SEO techniques without the use of paid advertising. Also called *organic, algorithmic or editorial listing*.

Off-page factors. Those elements of a website that are not located on your website (such as incoming links). Off-page factors are largely out of your control.

On-page factors. Those elements of a website that are located on your website (such as keywords). You are in control of on-page factors.

ODP. See *Open Directory Project*. Also known as DMOZ.

Organic listing. Any search engine listing that is on the “free” or unpaid section of a search results page. These listings are obtained using SEO techniques without the use of paid advertising. Also called *algorithmic, editorial or natural listing*.

Orphan pages. Pages with an incoming link but without any outgoing links.

Outbound, Outgoing links. Links on your website that point to other websites. Opposite of *inbound or incoming* links.

Paid placement. Similar to pay-per-click. See below.

Pay-Per-Click (PPC). A paid advertising mechanism whereby you bid to have your site listed in a specific position on a search engine. You bid, along with your competitors, for the cost per click of a specific keyword. Every time a visitor clicks on your listing (ad), you pay the PPC company the bid price. *Google AdWords* is the name of the PPC program that Google offers.

PPC. See *Pay-Per-Click*.

PR. See *PageRank*.

Page. Synonymous with web page. The actual HTML file and associated graphics that are displayed in a browser.

PageRank™. Google’s patented system for measuring *page importance*. PageRank analyzes the quantity and quality of links that point to a web page. The more high-quality links that point to your web page from other sites, the higher your PageRank.

Page importance. Synonymous with *PageRank*.

Page relevance. How closely *keywords* on your page match a search request.

Page reputation: what other sites “say” about your site. Google looks to see if your keywords are used in the link text, page title, and in the link text of other links on the page that links to your site.

Page topic. What your page is about. Google looks at keywords on your page to determine the page topic.

Popularity. A general term referring to how “important” your web site is in terms of how many external links point to it.

Rank, ranking: a website’s actual placement or position on a search engine results page for a certain search term or phrase. It is meaningless to speak of website rank without specifying what search words or phrase you are ranked for. Sometimes confused with PageRank – the two are totally separate concepts.

Robot. The software program which a search engine runs to read and analyze your site. See also spider. Google robots is called *Googlebot*.

ROI. Return On Investment. The amount of revenue generated from a specific marketing expense, expressed as a percentage.

Sandbox. Term describing a set of filters applied to new websites whereby the site cannot rank well (or at all) for any competitive keywords for 6 – 24 months. Also called the *aging delay*.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM). A general term that encompasses both paid and “free” forms of advertising a website using search engines. SEO is one type of SEM. The other major type of SEM is Pay-Per-Click advertising (PPC).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO). A general term used to describe specific techniques that can be used on websites in order to rank them favorably with search engine.

Search Engine Positioning (SEP). A term used interchangeably with *SEO*. However, since search engine optimizers do not actually “position” pages within the search engines, this is. SEP more closely describes Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising, since that is the only way a site can be positioned in a search engine.

Search Term. The word or words a person enters into a search engine's search box. Also synonymous with keyword or query term.

SE. Acronym for search engine.

SEM. See *Search Engine Marketing*.

SEMPO. Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization. A non-profit group whose focus is increase the awareness of and educate people on the value of search engine marketing.

SEO. See *Search Engine Optimization*.

SEP. See *Search Engine Positioning*.

SERP. Search Engine Results Page. The page or pages that a search engine displays after a search query for a certain search term or phrase.

Server log. The data file that a Web server produces (usually daily) that lists website traffic activity by domain. Web statistics programs use the server log file to produce graphic reports. See *statistics*.

Spider. The software program, also known as a robot, which a search engine runs to read through and analyze your site. Google's spiders is called *Googlebot*.

Statistics, stats. The data associated with visitor traffic to your site over time.

Theme. The overall subject area, topic, or category of a web site.

Topic-Sensitive PageRank. A variation of basic PageRank whereby a web page is assigned different PageRank scores for each different topic a page covers.

Tracking URL. Typically used in paid ads, such as Google AdWords, where unique code is added to the end of a link in order to track visitors who click on that ad. Tracking URLs allow you to measure the popularity of an ad.

TrustRank. A variation of basic PageRank whereby links from site that are "trusted" or "white-listed" by Google carry more weight (are more valued) than other links.

Vote, voting. When one website links to another website, it "casts a vote" for the other website. The strength or weight of this "vote" depends on the PageRank of the page and the number of other links on the page.

Yahoo. A popular search directory (as opposed to a search engine). All Web sites listed on Yahoo are first reviewed by a human editor.

BONUS REPORT – About Froogle

Froogle is a separate index in Google that lists commercial merchant sites that provide products for sale. Listing your products on Froogle is a free way to extend the reach of your marketing efforts. Froogle only lists products with set prices - it excludes services and affiliate products for now.

Each one of your products needs a separate listing in Froogle.

Similar to Google Search, relevancy to the search query will be important to good Froogle ranking. For more info, see <http://froogle.google.com/froogle/about.html>.

A Froogle product listing has the following minimum components:

Product Title. Write a title using the techniques you would use for a Web page on Google. Keep it concise and include the most important keywords earliest in the title. Since the foundation of Froogle is specific product search, include a specific product make and model number in the title if applicable. Consumers that are price comparison-shopping are likely to include this information in their search query

Product Description. Create a compelling keyword-rich description of about 25 words. This improves the chances of Froogle using your supplied description rather than “scraping” one from a different location.

Product Photo. Froogle has a place to the left of a listing for a product photo. A user is less likely to click on a listing that does not include a photo as it looks unprofessional and sloppy compared to other listings that do. You may need to create specific product images on your server just for Froogle as they need to be a specific size.

Product Price. A product price must be included. If you have multiple prices for a product (regular, special, after rebate) place the current price you want displayed. Froogle will not display multiple prices. You can update your product information daily, weekly or monthly.

Product URL. Like Google, product Web pages that are closest to the root folder of the server are believed to score better with Froogle.

Using a Data Feed

When your product Web pages are indexed by Google, your products *should* automatically be included in the Froogle index if they meet Froogle guidelines. However this is not the ideal way for your products to be listed on Froogle.

Instead, you should create submit a Froogle data feed, which is a tab-delimited text file. A data feed file can be submitted to Froogle daily, weekly or monthly as best fits your product updates and price changes. The data feed file is uploaded via FTP to *hedwig.google.com*.

Submitting a data feed is by far the most efficient method of listing your products in Froogle. For specific information on creating a Froogle data feed, see <http://froogle.google.com/froogle/merchants.html>.

Here is the actual data feed I use for the Google SEO Secrets book on Froogle. Note that an actual data feed can have more fields than this (product ID, color, size, etc):

product_url	name	description	price	image_url
http://www.google-secrets.com/	Google SEO Secrets - How to Get a Top Ranking	The complete guide to search engine optimization and linking strategies for the Google search engine. A must-have ebook for Webmasters and Internet marketers alike. Order now. 97.00		http://www.google-secrets.com/froogle1.jpg

Although hard to tell, my feed is comprised of 5 tabbed columns - URL, title, description, price, and URL to product photo.

Submission of data feeds gives you time-sensitive control over product changes and accuracy rather than waiting for regular Google updates. **Data feeds must be submitted at least once a month to avoid automatic expiration in the Froogle index.** I have had this happen to me so make sure you submit once a month.

Submitting data feeds can be a time-consuming. There is a great tool available, **Froogle Feeder**, that helps automate product additions, deletions, and product conversions to data feed format and will submit your feed to your Froogle account.

For more information on Froogle Feeder, see <http://www.siteall.com/>. This site also contains a wealth of information about Froogle.

BONUS REPORT – About Google AdWords™

Note: This is an excerpt from my book **AdWords Edge: How to Get More Clicks With Less Money** available at <http://www.adswordedge.com>.

Google AdWords are those small boxed ads that appear on the right-hand side of a Google search results page. Google AdWords is a pay-per-click (PPC) program.



Setting up a low-cost AdWords campaign is a great way to test your business idea and your keyword selections. It is a fast and cheap predictor of how successful your site can be before you spend a lot of time creating content, building a web site, optimizing your pages, and acquiring links.

Studies have shown that the best sales results are obtained by those that do a combination of both SEO and PPC. If you are listed in more places on a search results page, you stand a greater chance of being clicked on. Another reason is that if you are listed on the both the free (organic) side of the page AND on the paid side of the page with an AdWord ad, you may be seen as a more important player.

What makes Google AdWords great is that it can also be used as a relatively low-cost way to quickly validate the results of your keyword research. Unlike other PPC programs, AdWords can be setup for \$5 with no monthly minimums and your ads run almost immediately.

One problem with site optimization is that it can take awhile to see the results of your efforts. With Google AdWords, you can place a number of different ads simultaneously and start seeing your results within a matter of minutes. As such, it is a great keyword research.

The name of the game with Google AdWords is to avoid a costly bidding war with your competitors, get your clicks as cheaply as possible, and to run you ads against keywords that have the least competition. This is best accomplished by finding as

many unique keyword phrase variations as you can. Many advertisers using AdWords simply copy each other and hence drive up the cost of everyone's clicks on keywords they feel they must compete on.

Ongoing Keyword Research and Testing

Although it is a good start, don't assume that you can simply use the results of your KeywordDiscovery or WordTracker keyword research for your AdWords campaign..

Keyword phrase research for a successful AdWords campaign should be ongoing and you should strive to come up with at least a couple hundred different keyword phrases at the beginning. This means having a list of possible permutations of different phrases that use different action verbs, singular and plural, single and double words, hyphenation, etc.

Find those keyphrases that nobody else is bidding on and therefore that you can get very cheaply. You may not get a lot of clicks on each one, but if you have enough of these, collectively they can account for a substantial portion of your click traffic from your AdWords campaign.

Make it a habit to think of at least three new keyphrases every day for a month. If you follow no other recommendations here, make sure you do this – because chances are your competition won't.

Use Keyword Matching Options

Google allows three different forms of keyphrase matching:

1. **Broad matching.** Phrase words can be in any order, and can be part of larger phrase. For example, *google search engine optimization*. With broad matching, these words can appear in any order such as “search engine optimization for google” and as part of a larger phrase.
2. **Phrase matching.** Enclose those words you want to appear in exact order in parentheses. For example, use “*search engine optimization*” if you want to allow only phrases with the words “search engine optimization” in that order. With phrase matching, there can be other words included in the phrase, such as *google search engine optimization best practices*.
3. **Exact matching.** Enclose the entire phrase in square brackets. For example, [google search engine optimization]. With exact matching, the phrase must be in the exact order shown and cannot include any other words.

Set up Multiple Ad Groups

You should have a number of different keyword phrase variations that are centered around common, similar keywords. Each “cluster” of related phrases should be placed in their own Ad Group.

Create Multiple Ads per Ad Group

Because you don't know in advance which ads will have the highest click-through rate (CTR), you should create several ads per Ad Group. These ads then be constantly tweaked and refined to determine which ads are the best for pulling in clicks. I cannot stress how much difference it can make by simply changing one word in the title or in the description, or changing the order.

Writing Great Ads

Writing compelling ads in a Google AdWords campaign is both an art and an science. It is all about writing good sales copy, in a very limited space, for the Web.

Google has the following limitations:

Ad title: 25 characters maximum

Ad description: 70 characters maximum (2 lines at 35 characters per line maximum)

This isn't a lot of space, so make every word count. Some tips for writing good ads:

1. Use keywords from your particular Ad Group in the ad title or description. Your click-through rate may double if you include the keywords in the ad.
2. Consider stating the problem or the solution in the ad. For example: “No traffic to your site?” or “Learn SEO tips for your site”.
3. Use of the following can have particularly good results:
 - Use of “action words” (get, buy, order)
 - Use of “sales” words (new, leading, top, discount)
 - Use of region, geography (Seattle services)

Setting Up Tracking URLs

Although you can see at a glance in the AdWords program which ads are pulling the most clicks, you should nevertheless set up tracking URLs for each ad or each Ad Group for ease of analyzing all of your site traffic using your stats program. With tracking URLs, you can look at your site traffic reports and see exactly how much

traffic your pay-per-click (PPC) campaign(s) did in relation to your “free” clicks obtained through traditional SEO methods and from your incoming reciprocal links.

Tracking URLs for Google ads are extremely simple to set up. Here is a representative tracking URL: *www.your-web-site.com/?gg&grp1&ad1*

Use whatever format works best for you to track your Google AdWords traffic. At a minimum, you should at least be tracking at the Ad Group level to determine which “keyphrase clusters” are doing the best and ideally down to the ad level so you know which specific ads are doing the best in each Ad Group.

Setting Your Daily Budget Limit

Whatever daily budget you decide to place on your Google AdWords campaign is totally up to you. The only recommendations I can give here are as follows:

- Set your daily budget higher than is comfortable for you in the first month. Much good testing data can come out of the first month, but only if you don't stifle your efforts by setting your daily budget too low. Google states that your daily budget can be exceeded, but not your daily limit x 30 (for a monthly budget). Pump up the budget initially to see quickly which ads and groups to dump or revise.
- Don't fret about trying to appear in the #1 AdWords spot for a given keyword. There is no real difference in click-through rate between positions 1 thru 3.

This just covers a few of the tips and best practices for using Google AdWords.

Note: This is an excerpt from **AdWords Edge: How to Get More Clicks With Less Money**, available at <http://www.adwordsedge.com>.