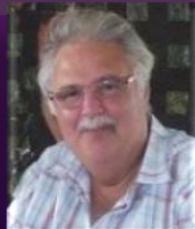


**E-Book of
Google
Recommendations**

From Webmaster Tools
And Videos by Google
Engineers



A Regularly Updated E-Book
By
Dr David A Viniker MD



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SEO IN GENERAL

How Search Works

March 2010

When you do a search on Google you are not searching the web; you are searching Google's index of the web. The index is created with programs called spiders that follow the links they find to build a picture of the content of the web.

When you do a search there might be many thousands of pages with related information but how does Google decide the ones required. Search - Google asks a number of questions including:

- How many times does the page contain the keywords?
- Do the keywords appear in the title?
- Do the keywords appear in the URL?
- Are the keywords directly adjacent?

- Are there synonyms for those words?
- Is this page on a quality website or is it low quality?
- What is this page's PageRank? PageRank is a formula invented by the Google founders Larry Page and Sergei Brin that rates a webpage's importance by looking at how many outside pages point to it and how important those links are.
- Finally, we combine all those factors together to determine each page's overall score and send you back your search results about 0.5 seconds after submitting your search.
- Google is committed to providing useful and impartial search results.
- No payments can be made to influence the results.
- The results page includes the PageTitle and a snippet of text to assist searchers find the information they are after.

Does Google consider SEO to be spam?

5 Aug 2011

The answer is no. SEO is not spam: There is an enormous amount you can do that is white hat as a search engine optimiser.

- Make sure your pages are accessible to the search engines.
- Use the right keywords.
- Usability – making sure that the design of the website is good for users and for search engines.
- Make your site faster. Google considers speed of download as an important factor.
- Some SEOs go further than Google would like including black hat techniques that are unacceptable, or sneaky things with redirects.
- Google's goal is to return the best possible results.
- Google is trying to find out about synonyms.
- SEO can assist Google to provide the information people are looking for.
- There are webmaster guidelines provided by Google.
- If you can find someone you can trust with good references – use them.

May 2013 – Changes to SEO in next few months

May 2013

- Make a website with great content.
- Next generation of Penguin – Penguin 2.0 – dedicated to target black hat web spam. – Likely to have more impact than the original Penguin 1.0
- *Adverts should not pass PageRank.*
- *Google is working on other ways to reduce the value of spam links.*

- Sophisticated link analysis.
- Hack site detection.
- Better communication with webmasters.
- Ways to help expert authors – to rank more highly.
- Panda – additional features.

Using Webmaster Tools like an SEO

Maile Ohye – Google’s tech lead at Google’s Webmaster Central.
January 2011

Maile pretends to be the SEO of the GoogleStore
 (www.googlestore.com)

1. Login to Webmaster Tools
2. Sign up for **email forwarding**. It allows important messaging like Malware notifications or alerts for crawling issues.
3. Find out the **website’s objectives** - in this case ‘online sales of Google merchandise’.
4. **Prioritise**. Rather than trying optimising for everything, concentrate on product pages that already have visibility in the market.
 - a. Use **Webmaster Tools Search Queries** to find the queries that are already doing well on search. We can * those that are receiving clicks.
 - b. Maile goes on to show how she would make SEO changes to a product page that is doing well, a Meta description for example.
 - c. She then looked at the **Keywords option** in the Webmaster tools. These show the keywords that are doing well on your site.
 - d. **HTML suggestions**. Ensure that every webpage has a unique title and description.
 - e. Look for **crawl errors**. This ensures that the benefits of external links are attributed to the right URL.
 - f. Check internal links. The HomePage typically has the highest PageRank. Important pages on the site should have a link from the HomePage.
 - g. **Fetch as Googlebot** to see that pages are retrievable and indexable.
 - h. **Site performance tool**. The faster pages load the happier the user. Aim for under 2 seconds.



SEO in a large company Website?

If you are the SEO of a large company, what would you include in your 2011 strategy? (Video - SEO Strategy)

March 2011

Make sure you have control of the CMS. In large companies, there may be new people who may have access to website development. They may have an adverse effect if you do not have control.

Which is more important: content or links?

March 2009

Google always has to trade off authority and topicality. You want the sites that are reputable but also the pages that have useful information.

Great content has to be the foundation of any good site because it attracts good links naturally. Good content includes great information and great resources. The search engines will take note of the fact that users consider that your site has great content.

Nobody can guarantee top positioning.

Matt Cutts takes a bribe... @ 69 seconds

Dec 2007

You cannot guarantee a ranking on Google. There is no amount of money that can do this. Even in the ads because we sort not only by the bid but by clickthrough. So even if someone says they are going to guarantee you a first place ranking – nobody can guarantee you a first place ranking – not even me. I cannot force any website to be #1.

How can I explain to clients that rankings can't be guaranteed?



How can I explain to clients that rankings can't be guaranteed?

Read Google's help article about SEO here: www.google.com With a lot of my potential clients, the first words out of their mouth when building a ...

HD CC by GoogleWebmasterHelp | 1 year ago | 39,697 views

October 2010

With a lot of my potential clients, the first words out of their mouth when building a site is "Can you make my site #1 on Google" This question is extremely annoying to me. How can I respond in a professional and honest manner?

- Matt refers to a Google page that emphasises that "No one can guarantee a #1 ranking on Google." - <http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35291>

Which says:-

No one can guarantee a #1 ranking on Google.

Beware of SEOs that claim to guarantee rankings, allege a "special relationship" with Google, or advertise a "priority submit" to Google. There is no priority submit for Google. In fact, the only way to submit a site to Google directly is through our Add URL page or by submitting a Sitemap and you can do this yourself at no cost whatsoever.

Matt also gives the example of very long keyword phrase which no one is likely to search on and then explains that it would be possible to guarantee high ranking but there would be no value as no one is searching for this phrase.

ON-PAGE OPTIMISATION

Do top level domains have any SEO influence?

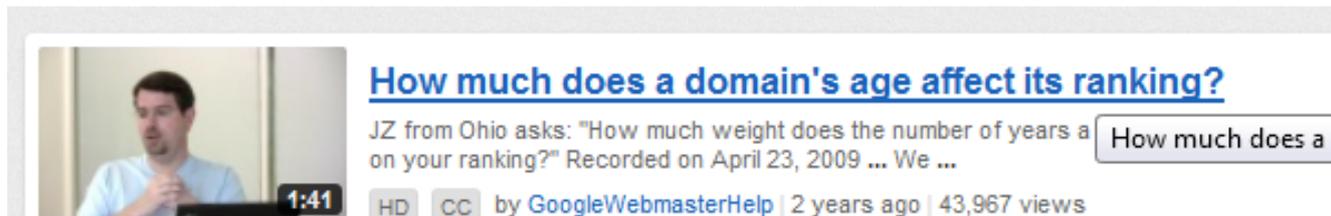
In general the level of domain (e.g Top Level domain - tld) such as .com does not help.

Does the size of a website (number of indexed pages) affect its authority in Google?

October 2009

- The answer is zero – It is not the number of pages you have but the links coming in to the Website's pages and the PageRank that determine authority. A website with a million webpages but only a couple of incoming links would not have much authority in the eyes of Google.
- Just making more pages will not help at all.

How much does a domain's age affect its ranking?



Domain age. "How much weight does the number of years a domain is registered for have on your ranking?" May 2009

Short answer is not to worry very much about it. Some say that Google give a bonus in ranking if your site has been registered for three or more years. This is not based on anything that Google has said. It is true that Google filed a patent based on historical data but it has never put it to use in determining positioning.

Blog sites v regular websites.

Blog sites are treated the same way from a positioning point of view. There is no distinction unless you search for blogs.

Does it matter how far a webpage is from the root directory?

March 2009

This is not an SEO issue. What matters is how difficult it is to find the information being sought. The example is given of registering for a conference. If visitors can see the link on the landing page they are more likely to register than if they would have to go

through a number of clicks to get there. The inference is that directories and sub-directories do not have a negative effect on positioning

Does the number of subdirectories in a URL affect its ranking?

Sept 2010

Does 'www.domain.com/keyword' give much higher rankings on 'keyword' than www.domain.com/blabla/blabla/keyword?

The answer is there is virtually no difference. Think about things in terms of PageRank. Usually the Root Page (HomePage) has the most PageRank. That's where everybody is linking to.

Underscores vs. dashes in URLs -

Aug 2011

Red-widget in URL means two separate words – red and widget. War_of_1812 in URL means warof1812 – one word!

In practice it makes little difference as other places where keywords matter such as Page title and body text. However, if you are starting a new webpage, go for dashes rather than underscores. Underscores are not a huge factor – so do not go back and change all your URLs.

Does the position of keywords in the URL affect ranking?

2007

Do not obsess about it. It helps a little to have keywords in the URL. Use two or three of your keywords but not more as it looks spammy to users and may reduce click through rates.

Should I strip file extensions from my URLs?

March 2009

For example should I remove .html . This is not recommended.

Does the age of a domain help in SEO?

Live Q&A September 21, 2011

(@16 mins)

Fresh information helps.

Having an older website does not mean that you automatically get a ranking boost.

If a website has been around for a while it should have picked up links and that can lead to the confusion that age alone helps.

When I change domains, how long should I leave the redirects in place?

March 2011

If I get a new domain and want to 301 redirect www.old-domain.com to www.new-domain.com, how long do I have to keep the redirect up before I can start using the old domain for something else? Just until it has been crawled once?

The answer may be different at different times. 301s happen at a page level so the migration takes place on at a time. Typically it takes a couple of month for Google to recognise that a site has entirely moved.

What's your take on "addon domains"?

June 2010

What's your take on "addon domains?" Does Google penalize someone for having one or more addon domains on their main website, (or if they're self-hosting)? e.g. If you saw 2, 5, or 10 websites all coming from the same IP address, would that be bad? If you have mattcutts.com and you also wanted matt-cutts.com, I would personally make matt-cutts.com redirect to mattcutts.com because people tend to think that it is the same site. If you buy variations of your main domain name – use them as 301 redirects to your main site.

"Are Google putting more weight on brands in search results?"

4 Mar 2009

"No we don't, we just changed something so that brands might now be appearing higher up on the list"

We do not try to return brands. We try to return the best answer for a search.

Canonical Link Element

The following are essentially the same page:-

www.example.com

Example.com

www.example.com/

Example.com/

www.example.com/index.html

Example.com/index.html

www.example.com/home.aspx

These could lead to:-

1. Duplicate content issues.
2. Splitting of links.

How to fix duplicate content issues?

- Change your Content Management System (CMS) to generate only the URLs you want.
- Pick one "canonical" URL and ensure you link consistently within your website.
- Make all the non-canonical URLs do a permanent (301) HTTP redirect to the canonical / preferred url.
- Google's Webmaster Tools: specify the preferred URL.
- Break ties in Google by submitting your preferred URL in a Sitemaps file.
- Use the new (2009) This must go between <head> and </head>

```
<link rel="canonical" href=http://example.com/page.html/>
```

Matt Cutts Explains Canonical Tags from Google, Yahoo, Microsoft Bottom of Form

February 2009 - Google Yahoo and Microsoft announced canonical tags.

10-36% of webhosts might be duplicated content.

e.g. www.example.com and example.com are the same but Google treats them like two urls.

There are a lot of ways to resolve duplicate content issues.

You can use 301 redirects.

You can make sure that your content management system only generates one URL.

An important tip – if you submit a sitemap, Google will use those URLs in the sitemap to identify the preferred URL.

But some duplication issues may occur with WordPress for example.

The new tag is a page level tag – the preferred URL is indicated – the canonical URL. So if there are links to 'duplicate' URLs all the link juice will now flow to the one URL. It is working much like a permanent 301 redirect. It only works within one domain.

Is comma a separator in a title tag?



Is comma a separator in a title tag?

Hi **Matt**. More and more websites started using comma (,) as a separator in title tag (less pipes or dashes). Is comma really a separator OR if ...

HD CC by GoogleWebmasterHelp | 11 months ago | 14,979 views

14th January 2011

More and more websites started using comma (,) as a separator in title tag (less pipes or dashes). Is comma really a separator OR if it's better for the visitors it's better for SEO ?

Spaces, dashes, commas are fine the only one that does not work is underscores.

Snippets - Meta description

Nov 2007



Matt Cutts Discusses Snippets

Google guru **Matt Cutts** discusses how best to optimize your site for Google. **Matt Cutts** joined Google as a software engineer in January 2000. He is ...

by **Google** | 4 years ago | **161,406** views



The snippet on the search engine results page appears below the Page Title. Google tries to find the most relevant part of the page. Sometimes it is a single snippet. Sometimes it comes from multiple places. In many cases, the Meta description tag is chosen. It is worthwhile AB testing to see if greater click through rate can be achieved. Words in the Page Title and Snippet that match the search keywords are emboldened.

Does the ordering of heading tags matter?

March 2009

Do not worry about it. Do not make your entire page H1 tags

More than one H1 on a page: good or bad?

Do not overdo it. Once or twice OK but if you abuse it, Google has an algorithm to counter the effect.

Does Google use the keywords Meta tag in web ranking?

Sept 2009

Google does not use the keywords Meta tag at all.

How do Meta geo tags influence the search results?

July 2009

It is not important. We tend to look at the IP address, country codes, .fr .de There is an option in webmaster tools where you can indicate the relevant countries.

More on geographic targeting

March 2009

Beware of making changes that try to alter the targeted audience. The example is given of a website that targeted Singapore and then tries to say this is relevant to the USA. The danger is that it may show less in Singapore and not do well in the US.

What impact does server location have on rankings?

June 2009

Early on the tld so .fr meant the website was French. In 2000 Google began to look at where the server was located so if a website was not a .fr but the server in France then that would indicate the information was helpful for people in France. Server location is a factor in determining the relevance of the website information for the user groups.

How much content should be on a HomePage?

May 2011

Veer towards a little more content.

Page Layout Algorithm Improvement



January 19, 2012 – Posted by Matt Cutts

In our on-going effort to help you find more high-quality websites in search results, today we're launching an algorithmic change that looks at the layout of a webpage and the amount of content you see on the page once you click on a result.

As we've mentioned previously, we've heard complaints from users that if they click on a result and it's difficult to find the actual content, they aren't happy with the experience. Rather than scrolling down the page past a slew of ads, users want to see content right away. So sites that don't have much content "above-the-fold" can be affected by this change. If you click on a website and the part of the website you see first either doesn't have a lot of visible content above-the-fold or dedicates a large fraction of the site's initial screen real estate to ads, that's not a very good user experience. Such sites may not rank as highly going forward. We understand that placing ads above-the-fold is quite common for many websites; these ads often perform well and help publishers monetize online content. This algorithmic change does not affect sites who place ads above-the-fold to a normal degree, but affects

sites that go much further to load the top of the page with ads to an excessive degree or that make it hard to find the actual original content on the page. This new algorithmic improvement tends to impact sites where there is only a small amount of visible content above-the-fold or relevant content is persistently pushed down by large blocks of ads.

This algorithmic change noticeably affects less than 1% of searches globally. That means that in less than one in 100 searches, a typical user might notice a reordering of results on the search page. If you believe that your website has been affected by the page layout algorithm change, consider how your web pages use the area above-the-fold and whether the content on the page is obscured or otherwise hard for users to discern quickly. You can use our Browser Size tool, among many others, to see how your website would look under different screen resolutions.

If you decide to update your page layout, the page layout algorithm will automatically reflect the changes as we re-crawl and process enough pages from your site to assess the changes. How long that takes will depend on several factors, including the number of pages on your site and how efficiently Googlebot can crawl the content. On a typical website, it can take several weeks for Googlebot to crawl and process enough pages to reflect layout changes on the site.

Overall, our advice for publishers continues to be to focus on delivering the best possible user experience on your websites and not to focus on specific algorithm tweaks. This change is just one of the over 500 improvements we expect to roll out to search this year.

What is the ideal keyword density of a page?

August 2011

What is the ideal keyword density: 0.7%, 7%, or 77%? Or is it some other number?

There is no ideal keyword density that will guarantee you #1 positioning and this is not the case. The first few times you mention a word, Google takes notice but after a while using the same word has no additional benefit. If you use it too much you are in danger of keyword stuffing and this can be counter-productive. If you overuse the keyword and it does not read well then this will drop the positioning. There is no hard and fast rule on keyword density. Do not buy keyword density software.

****Is the same content posted under different TLDs a problem?**

If you have 4 or 5 TLDs (top level domains) with the same content, then Google will only display the content of one on its results pages. In general, it would not be classified as spam.

Bold v Strong: Emphasised v Italic

Lightning Round

April 2011



Bold was used originally but 'strong' is what WC3 recommends. "The Google code gives them the same weight." Duplicate detection. Google looks for exact duplicates and near duplicates.

Do spelling and grammar matter when evaluating site quality?

August 2011

It is not used as a direct signal although interestingly the sites that do better in positioning tend to be spelt better.

Does using stock photos on your pages have a negative effect on rankings?

June 2013

Currently stock photos, and for that matter original photos do not affect ranking either positively or negatively. Matt suggests that it might be worth exploring a positive influence for original photographic content in the future.

Matt Cutts discusses the importance of alt Tags.



Computers are not good at detecting the content of an image. The alt text can in a few words explain to the search engines the content of an image. Alt = alternative text and was primarily used

for visitors who had their image download switched off. It helps with webpage accessibility.

Why doesn't google.com validate according to W3C?

Sept 2009



It is more important to be compatible for various browsers including mobile.

It is nice if webpages validate but **validation does not boost rankings** and the reason for that is that the vast majority of pages on the web do not validate.

How important is the frequency of updates on a blog? – (Fresh Content)

“Some people are under the impression that blogs are good for SEO only if they're updated frequently. How much does frequency play into PageRank for blogs & other dynamic sites? Isn't the content more important than the simple # of posts per day/week?”

From an SEO point of view it is the quality of the content that matters far more than the frequency of updates but for readers new content encourages them to revisit. If the quality is good it will encourage natural links.

Sitemaps

What is the recommended priority value you can submit in a sitemap.xml?

If you say that everything is high priority, we may not take much notice but if you limit it to just a few pages then this might add some more weight.

Which is better: an HTML site map or XML Sitemap?

They are both good.

What are some best practices for indicating breadcrumbs?

Jan 2010

Google is beginning to use breadcrumbs in ranking but it is still early days. If there is any change, it will appear in the Google webmaster blog.

(A breadcrumb looks like Home > SEO > On-Page Optimisation > Breadcrumbs and each is hyperlinked)/

Is speed more important than relevance?

Relevance is the most important factor in positioning but if everything else is equal, download time of pages can affect positioning but it is just one of 200 factors.

Do site load times impact on Google rankings?

April 2009

What impact do site load times have on Google rankings? – Currently none unless there are extreme delays. One second v two seconds – no effect.

Optimizing for speed.

If you were an SEO of a large company, what would you include in your 2011 strategy? ([Video - SEO Strategy](#))

March 2011

Download speed is a slight factor in Google's rankings. Lot's of people have done tests. They have discovered that if you can decrease the latency for pages to be returned, customers do more browsing and more purchasing. You can definitely increase your ROI if you increase speed.

- Minify JavaScript or CSS.
- Optimize images.

Cloaking

August 2011

Cloaking is showing different content to viewers than search engine bots.

It is a violation of Google's quality guidelines.

Duplicate Content

If I report the same news story as someone else, is that duplicate content? Video - [Duplicate Content](#)

May 2012

If you just take an article with exactly the same text then probably users do not want to see copies of it. They probably want to see the site that is more authoritative, the site that gives original reporting and the site that reports their own version. If you have expertise on the topic, at least write the article yourself. If you are not adding anything new, your version is likely to get lost in the noise. If you are not adding anything then Google does not want to show it.

SMX Seattle: Matt Cutts on Duplicate Content and Paid Search

June 2007

The problem arises if someone duplicates your content before the search engines have cached your content.

If you have an article, ensure there is a link back to your website identifying who the original author is.

Every webmaster has the right to do as they please but Google has the right to decide how it runs its index. Google has recommendations that amount to best practice.

There is a risk involved with paid links. Matt mentions that 'four-way links' are against Google – ie anything to do with reciprocal linking seems inappropriate. (@ 5mins and 20 seconds)

What are your views on PageRank sculpting?

28 May 2009

It is not unethical. It is stuff on your website and you are allowed to control how PageRank (link juice) flows around your website. It should not be given high priority. Preferable to work on getting

- more links
- higher quality content.

Would not recommend doing sculpting with nofollow except for a login page.

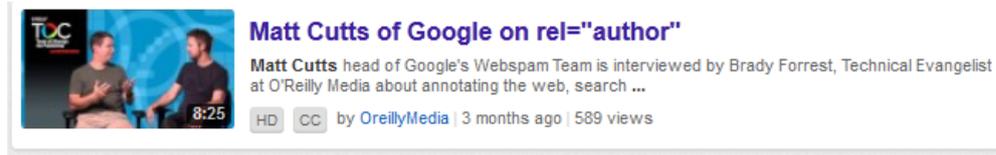
The idea is to take care on which pages to link to from your homepage.

Should internal links use rel="nofollow"?

April 2011

If you are linking from one page on your site to another on your site, do not add `no-follow`. Adding such nofollow links does not work that well because Google has tried to counter such website sculpting. Use `nofollow` if you are linking to a site that you do not wish to endorse.

Matt Cutts of Google on rel="author"



Sept 2011

rel="author" recently announced.

The web is potentially an anonymous place where anyone can show up, leave a comment and you do not really know who wrote a blog post. By adding a rel="author", Google can tie together all the author's content. For the moment it is only on-site but in time it can apply to multiple sites. Eventually authority authors will be recognised and even if their guest blog post carries few links, the post will be boosted in the results pages.

OFF-PAGE OPTIMISATION

What are some effective techniques for building links?

March 2010

"Organic link building, according to me is one of the most difficult tasks for SEOs of SMEs. Can you please list 5 effective ways of organic link building other than building great content?"

Participate in the community. Answering questions. Provide original research. Once you begin to get known, participate in a conference. Have a blog and establish yourself as an authority. Provide tutorials and videos.

Is the order of links on a page important for SEO?

January 2010

- Unless you have thousands of links on a page, it does not matter.
- Google will extract hundreds of links to find the ones it thinks are relevant.
- Google will find all the links and treat them equally.

What is Google's current thinking about getting links from article marketing, widgets, footers, themes, etc?

October 2012

- No recent change.
- Links that are not editorially thought through have less value e.g link in recurring footer through numerous webpages.
- Google gives greater value to links that have been chosen carefully.
- People who are lazy or take shortcuts to gain links.

Editorial comment: It is apparent that Google accepts that promoting a website and webpages by back linking ("getting links") is inevitable. The links should be as natural as possible.

Is there such a thing as building too many links?

June 2010

Is there such thing as building too many links, if you're following Google's webmaster guidelines exactly? Too many where you would get banned, even if you're following the rules?

There are no problems building too many links. Build a great attractive site and those links will come naturally. Google has no cap. Get as many links as you can.

Is cross-linking websites bad?

January 2010

- *If the links make sense then that is fine.*
- *If there is a good reason to make the link, there is no problem.*
- *A bunch of irrelevant links could be detrimental.*

If a site linking to mine gets caught selling links, what happens to my site?

April 2013

- (1) The link seller's web site will have PageRank downgrade 30 - 50% diminishing the value of its outgoing links.
- (2) The link seller's web site loses the ability to send PageRank going forward. – its links are discounted.
- (3) As the links pointing to your web site from the link seller's web site are no longer counted and no longer benefit your web site.

What is the effect of buying links from a link seller who is found out? Matt didn't discuss it in his 90 second video. Typically, this is how Google handles it, they simply stop those paid links from benefiting you, which will feel like a penalty. For those who have bought links from the seller, those links are no longer of value.

Do links have different values if they come from .gov or .edu websites

– No. They are treated the same. It is just that .gov and .edu tend to have higher PageRank because more people and more reputable people link to them.

A link from a .gov carries no more weight than any other.

How would a non-optimized site outrank a site which has done SEO?

April 2011

When analyzing rankings for highly competitive keywords in our industry, we have found sites not as optimized as ours is (on-page), that have few links & little content are still ahead of us. What gives? Why are 'unoptimized' sites ranking so well?

Fundamentally we look at on-page content as well as off-domain links.

We typically do not show all the backlinks. Originally, 'link:' we did not have the storage to return all the information and over time it became a tradition not to return all the results in the index. So there could be high quality links that are not being shown. Bear in mind that there might be links to your competitors that you do not know about.

Will Google penalize sites which only link using the nofollow attribute?

March 2011-12-14

As many webmasters are linking only in nofollow killing the natural way of links do you think Google will penalize people who only link out with nofollow attribute in the future?

In fact only a small percentage of links across the web are nofollow. There is, however, no penalty for using nofollow.

Are nofollow links irrelevant?

Feb 2010

"Are nofollow links worth getting? Or are they almost irrelevant?"
Nofollow links negate benefit with search engines but they are fine if you plan to have searchers arrive through such a link.
So if a blog uses nofollow links, they will not provide link juice but they may result in people coming to your website who may in turn provide a link.

What types of directories are seen as sources of paid links?

It depends on editorial overview of the directory. The yahoo directory links are paid for but editors may reject a link – so the link has value.

Listings on fly-by-night directories that users do not use are not of value so do not get obsessed with directory submissions.

At one time Google had guidelines suggesting that websites should submit to some website directories. So people started trying to find such directories and people set up website directories. So the mention of website directories has been removed from the guidelines.

Matt Cutts on Panda May 25th Live

25th May 2011

Panda came from the search quality team and not from the web spam team. It tends to rank better quality sites higher. Panda 2 has caused some blocking of websites. Understanding Panda explains the Google mindset on how they are trying to improve search results.

A Google blog post was recommended and it is as follows:

More guidance on building high-quality sites

Friday, May 06, 2011 at 11:22 AM

Webmaster level: All

In recent months we've been [especially focused](#) on helping people find high-quality sites in Google's search results. The "Panda" algorithm change has improved rankings for a large number of high-quality websites, so most of you reading have nothing to be concerned about. However, for the sites that may have been affected by Panda we wanted to provide additional guidance on how Google searches for high-quality sites.

Our advice for publishers continues to be to focus on delivering the best possible user experience on your websites and not to focus too much on what they think are Google's current ranking algorithms or signals. Some publishers have fixated on our prior [Panda algorithm change](#), but Panda was just one of roughly 500 search improvements we expect to roll out to search this year. In fact, since we launched Panda, we've rolled out over a dozen additional tweaks to our ranking algorithms, and some sites have incorrectly assumed that changes in their rankings were related to Panda. Search is a complicated and evolving art and science, so rather than focusing on specific algorithmic tweaks, we encourage you to focus on delivering the best possible experience for users.

What counts as a high-quality site?

Our site quality algorithms are aimed at helping people find "high-quality" sites by reducing the rankings of low-quality content. The recent "Panda" change tackles the difficult task of algorithmically assessing website quality. Taking a step back, we wanted to explain some of the ideas and research that drive the development of our algorithms.

Below are some questions that one could use to assess the "quality" of a page or an article. These are the kinds of questions we ask ourselves as we write algorithms that attempt to assess site quality. Think of it as our take at encoding what we think our users want.

Of course, we aren't disclosing the actual ranking signals used in our algorithms because we don't want folks to game our search results; but if you want to step into Google's mindset, the questions below provide some guidance on how we've been looking at the issue:

- Would you trust the information presented in this article?
- Is this article written by an expert or enthusiast who knows the topic well, or is it more shallow in nature?
- Does the site have duplicate, overlapping, or redundant articles on the same or similar topics with slightly different keyword variations?
- Would you be comfortable giving your credit card information to this site?
- Does this article have spelling, stylistic, or factual errors?
- Are the topics driven by genuine interests of readers of the site, or does the site generate content by attempting to guess what might rank well in search engines?
- Does the article provide original content or information, original reporting, original research, or original analysis?
- Does the page provide substantial value when compared to other pages in search results?
- How much quality control is done on content?
- Does the article describe both sides of a story?
- Is the site a recognized authority on its topic?
- Is the content mass-produced by or outsourced to a large number of creators, or spread across a large network of sites, so that individual pages or sites don't get as much attention or care?
- Was the article edited well, or does it appear sloppy or hastily produced?
- For a health related query, would you trust information from this site?
- Would you recognize this site as an authoritative source when mentioned by name?
- Does this article provide a complete or comprehensive description of the topic?
- Does this article contain insightful analysis or interesting information that is beyond obvious?
- Is this the sort of page you'd want to bookmark, share with a friend, or recommend?
- Does this article have an excessive amount of ads that distract from or interfere with the main content?
- Would you expect to see this article in a printed magazine, encyclopedia or book?
- Are the articles short, unsubstantial, or otherwise lacking in helpful specifics?

- Are the pages produced with great care and attention to detail vs. less attention to detail?
- Would users complain when they see pages from this site?

Writing an algorithm to assess page or site quality is a much harder task, but we hope the questions above give some insight into how we try to write algorithms that distinguish higher-quality sites from lower-quality sites.

What you can do

We've been hearing from many of you that you want more guidance on what you can do to improve your rankings on Google, particularly if you think you've been impacted by the Panda update. We encourage you to keep questions like the ones above in mind as you focus on developing high-quality content rather than trying to optimize for any particular Google algorithm.

One other specific piece of guidance we've offered is that low-quality content on some parts of a website can impact the whole site's rankings, and thus removing low quality pages, merging or improving the content of individual shallow pages into more useful pages, or moving low quality pages to a different domain could eventually help the rankings of your higher-quality content.

We're continuing to work on additional algorithmic iterations to help webmasters operating high-quality sites get more traffic from search. As you continue to improve your sites, rather than focusing on one particular algorithmic tweak, we encourage you to ask yourself the same sorts of questions we ask when looking at the big picture. This way your site will be more likely to rank well for the long-term. In the meantime, if you have feedback, please tell us through our [Webmaster Forum](#). We continue to monitor threads on the forum and pass site info on to the search quality team as we work on future iterations of our ranking algorithms.

Written by [Amit Singhal](#), Google Fellow

Article Marketing and Syndication

Do you recommend article marketing as an SEO strategy and how are the backlinks treated when other websites republish the same article?

Mar 2011

I am not a great fan of article marketing. You are writing an article and you include a link at the bottom and you are hoping that a bunch of other people put up copies and that those links might flow through. Typically the sites that republish these articles are not the

highest quality There is a tendency to grab articles from elsewhere. These do not add anything valuable to the internet. Should you pursue article marketing? I would lean away from it and work towards great content that naturally has links; some good social media marketing so that people link to your website organically.

Live Q&A September 21, 2011

Why is Google still taking notice of DMOZ?

May 2010

"Why is Google still taking notice of DMOZ? Many have alleged that the editors are corrupt. Its impossible to get them to list a site even if it is very relevant to an specific area."

We take less notice of DMOZ. Do not worry if you cannot get into DMOZ

How do you rate links from sites like Twitter and Facebook?

14 Jan 2010

Does not matter if .com or .edu and that applies to Twitter or Facebook as well.

With Facebook, a lot of those profiles are not public and Google can only assign PageRank if we can see what the outgoing links are. Most links on Twitter tend to be nofollow.

How would a non-optimized site outrank a site which has done SEO?

April 2011

"When analyzing rankings for highly competitive keywords in our industry, we have found sites not as optimized as ours is (on-page), that have few links & little content are still ahead of us. What gives? Why are 'unoptimized' sites ranking so well?"

Google does not display all the links in its index. This makes it difficult to compare the links going to a particular webpage. So the competitor may have good links that are not visible.

Does anchor text carry through 301 redirects?

February 2009

Typically anchor text does carry through the 301 redirects. Google logs all the redirects it sees just like it logs all the links that it sees.

Trust Rank Explained by Matt Cutts Pubcon 2007

December 2007

What is Trust Rank? People at Yahoo wrote a paper about Trust Rank – it tries to treat reputation like it has physical mass. But it is completely separate from Google. At the same time as Yahoo was developing its concept of Trust Rank, Google was working on an anti-phishing filter and used the name Trust Rank. So there are different definitions about Trust Rank.

PAGERANK

<http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/seo-for-bloggers/>
2009

What is PageRank?

Named after Larry Page one of the two co-founders of Google.

PageRank is the number and importance of links pointing to you.

The value of each link depends on its PageRank and the number of outgoing links. (Pr/L)

In practice, if it just worked like this, PageRank would just keep cycling around forever and mathematically speaking the world would blow up. So there is an additional thing which is that PageRank kind of evaporates. A little bit of it decays every time it goes across a link. (@8minutes and 15 seconds). (Author comment – this is like a Google tax – Google is removing a little of the value of each link. For those involved in reciprocal linking it means that if each link used to reciprocate have equal value, both websites lose a little link value from their websites.

Growing your website – Katamari (@27mins 30 secs)

How can a photographer's image-focused site gain PageRank?

July 2010.

How would a photographer gain any significant PageRank for his or her site when the subject that really matters—images—has no anchor text?

Often, the photos alone will sell the photographer to his/her clients. How can we overcome this challenge?

Google has no good method of assessing an image. Include the content of the image in the surrounding text. If the content is good it will attract links and these increase PageRank.

Are links in footers treated differently than paragraph links?

In the original PageRank paper, link value was allocated uniformly no matter where they were on the page.

What we compute today is still called PageRank. In general, our link analysis continues to get more and more sophisticated. It bears resemblance to the original PageRank.

We do reserve the right to treat links in footers a little bit differently. For example if someone has set up a footer with a link that is carried throughout the site. This would not be as important as a link within the text.

How can I identify causes of a PageRank drop?



August 2011

"I use the Google Toolbar to monitor PageRank. I read on the Internet that it gives old and quite unreliable data. Can I have reliable realtime PageRank information about the sites I administer? And how can I identify causes of a PageRank drop?" silviot, Torino, Italy

The information you get from the Google toolbar is updated 3 or 4 times a year. We do not want webmasters to get obsessed with PageRank and not pay attention to titles, accessibility and good content.

What can cause a drop in PageRank? If one authority site stops linking to you that could cause a drop in PageRank.

1. Canonicalisation issues can have an adverse effect. This can occur if a webpage can be accessed as `www.thispage.com` and `thispage.com`
2. Another reason for dropping PageRank is if you have been selling links – this violates Google code of conduct. (Similarly links from sites that sell links may be found out and this can devalue incoming links.

This is the code used on Matt's blog:-

```
<link rel="canonical"
href="http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/" />
```

When are you going to update PageRank again?

Live Q&A September 21, 2011

We tend to do this about every three or four months but there is no complete regularity.

Why are links used in ranking when they all have the nofollow attribute?

September 2010

How can linking remain a major part of a search algorithm when the majority of Internet users are unable to post a 'followed' link on the World Wide Web? For example Twitter, Facebook, wiki etc. are all 'nofollow'. It seems only a very small percentage of links count. If you link at the volume of links on the web, only very small percentages are nofollow.

The trick is make your own website and make it so compelling that people want to link to your site. Usually links to your website will be do follow including blog comments – they do flow PageRank.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

How Google Social Search works

Oct 2009

Google social search indexes blogs, tweets, pictures. These online social services are part of the 'social circuit.'

Live Q&A September 21, 2011

Do Google +1s have any effect on search rankings?

(@8.30mins)

Google uses the blocks but it is still assessing the +1s

Social Media Marketing

If you were an SEO of a large company, what would you include in your 2011 strategy? ([Video - SEO Strategy](#))

March 2011

Spread your information on Twitter, Facebook, Digg, Reddit and Stumbleupon. This will get your information out to a wider audience.

Can social media marketing affect SEO?

If you get 100 visitors, one might make a blog post or make a link. Sure you must have great content to attract natural links from visitors.

MISCELLANEOUS

What are some examples of SEO misinformation?

Jan 14, 2011

Name 5 examples of SEO misinformation from the past year given by reputable persons that made you want to bang your head against the wall. (You don't need to name names.)

The biggest one is that customers complain on customer complaint sites, the resulting links count which will increase your positioning. Those links tend to be 'nofollow' and therefore carry no link juice to benefit PageRank and the anchor text does not count. So these customer complaint sites do not benefit the abusers website.

The second misconception is that the web spam team are not working so effectively. This is wrong. The biggest thing we faced was hacked sites. They are using these sites to distribute links to their own sites or distribute malware, viruses and Trojans. A lot of people on the web spam team working for a number of months to counter these hacked sites. That work is mainly completed and so those working on it have now returned to the regular anti-spam work.

Another misconception is that only links matter. It does help to have good content on your site. Do not just pursue links. Think about your site architecture, how crawlable it is, how discoverable it is, whether you have good internal links and the relevant keywords on your pages.

Another misconception is that the keywords meta tag counts. It does not.

Some say that the web-spam team is all algorithmic or all manual. The fact is that we do reserve the right to manually remove sites when we get spam reports or when we detect something inappropriate is going on.

Results for technical issues has become poor since the Panda update?

Panda is trying to improve quality of results and is not subject specific.

Malware

5th August 2011

Matt Cutts discusses malware detection at Google, including what to do if Google says your site has been infected with malware.

Malware and hacked sites – you would not believe how common it is.

1: Safe browsing diagnostic page. This will show if a website is infected with malware. In some cases it will show if a third party domain is infected.

2: Malware review. Register your site in google.com/webmasters
Prove you control the site.
Click on diagnostics page. > Malware
When site cleaned up > Request review. – May take several hours for Google to visit. Google will define pages that have malware.

3: Fetch as googlebot – on google.com/webmasters – helps with hacked websites.

4: check .htaccess file

5: Do not just look at source files – the malware may be placed on the site and you will not see it on the source files.

6: Use the most recent version of software – e.g. Wordpress.

7: When you have corrected the Malware, change the passwords to something not obvious.

8: unmaskparasites.com advises on current attacks.

9: It can be a pain to clear this up but Google takes this very seriously as users complain to Google.

How can I optimize my site on a small budget?

June 2009

How does someone begin to SEO their site on a small budget in an overwhelmed industry such as real estate?

Regardless of industry:-

1. Start with a small niche such as individual neighbourhoods and gradually build your links and expand.
2. Be different. For example a blog, amusing videos, fantastic advice. Look for some unique angle. Be creative.

How are site: results ranked?

January 2011

If you do a `site:website.com` on Google, on what basis the results are ranked? Is this the order in which Google gives importance to

each and every page in the website? Because most of the time the top listed pages get more search traffic.

We do not promise to return the pages in a specific order. We use a version of PageRank but it is still not exactly in PageRank order.

Matt Cutts on Big Brand BlackHat Sites

August 2008

Google does not advertise that it has done this – BMW is an example.

When are penalties lifted?



14 Feb 2011

Hi Matt. Is there a thing like a permanent Google penalty for sites, or if the necessary fixes were made according to Google guidelines the penalties are lifted in all cases?

There are algorithmic and manual penalties. Google's web spam team are willing to take action manually, for example if it receives a spam report. This data may be used to improve Google's algorithms content spam, keyword stuffing, redirects etc.

If your website is affected by an algorithm, if you change the site when the site is recrawled the positioning should improve.

On the manual side, there is a time-out. If it is hidden text, then after correction the penalty should be removed in say 30 days. If you are doing something more severe such as cloaking or more malicious stuff that penalty will last for a longer period of time but eventually that penalty will also expire.

You can at anytime do a reconsideration request and if there is a manual penalty that has been responded to then if it is now within the Google guidelines the penalty may be lifted.

What steps can I take to diagnose a drop in ranking?

August 2011

When you notice a drastic drop in your rankings and traffic from Google, what process would you take for diagnosing the issue?

Firstly do a `site:domain` to see if you have been completely removed from the Google index.

Next the webmaster tools google.com/webmasters.

Look for Google reporting a violation of quality guidelines.

Consider going to the Google webmaster forum which carries a lot of advice.

If a bunch of people are experiencing similar problems it might be an algorithm change.

Look at other search engines because if they are not listing you then the problem is probably on your website.

Consider changes you have made to design or hosting.

If you have caused a quality violation, request a reconsideration.

Reconsideration requests – After your website has been removed from the Google Index:

Live Q&A September 21, 2011

Sept 2011

Google will tell you if there has been manual action and if the changes made to the website have made it acceptable or if it still contravenes the Google guidelines. Google will also advise if there has been no manual action. If no manual action has been made then the problem is algorithmic and should resolve when appropriate changes have been made and Google re-caches the pages.

There is no downside in doing a reconsideration request.

Buying adds

Live Q&A September 21, 2011

– Adwords has no effect on organic ranking.

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