

Organic Marketing FAQ

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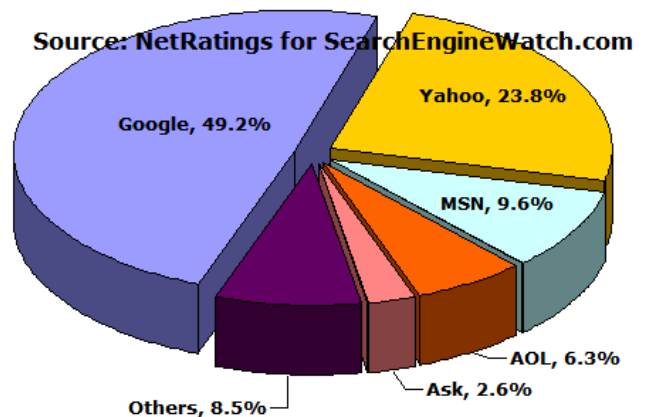
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Who are the major Search Engines?

That is easy

- Google
- Yahoo
- MSN

Google has about 55% market share (that includes AOL). Yahoo has about 24% market share. And MSN has about 10% market share. All the other search engines combined have about 8% market share. (Market share based on [Nielsen NetRatings Search Engine Ratings](#)). Google also seems to attract more B2B, while MSN and Yahoo have a higher percentage of consumer searches.



What are the fundamental influences or SEO attributes for good ranking?

Top ranking in the search engines boils down to 3 basic ingredients:

- Strong page optimization
- Strong link popularity and reputation
- Strong PageRank

PageRank is a Google invention, but other search engines have similar metrics.

In contrast, search engines use filters and human editors to detect and review 'un-natural' optimization practices such as:

- Hidden text (e.g. white letters on white background)
- Text link purchases often used to artificially attain higher PageRank
- Links from 'link-farms' often used to artificially boost link reputation
- Duplicate or excessive 'near-duplicate' content found on other domains
- Deceptive cloaking used to deliver content to the search engines that is different (private page) from what a normal visitor would see (public page).

Finally, technical issues and website design can influence how and what the search engines evaluate on your site. For example, search engines have difficulty reading store pages with session IDs in the URLs. And all graphic or flash sites offer no 'readable' html content for the search engines to analyze.

Does SEO really make a difference?

It can, in a big way. Although every keyword 'space' and search engine is different, typical click through rates range from 8-20% for 1-5 ranked websites, and 3-5% for 6-10 ranked websites. Searches for low value consumer products tend to have steeper declining rates. Searches for higher value risk reduction oriented products/services tend to have more gentle declines. Compared to typical PPC click through rates of 2%, organic SEO click through rates are far superior.

But that is not to say that SEO tactics can make every website a winner. Some keyword spaces are very competitive and require significantly greater SEO attributes than an SEO company is capable of providing.

For example, the SEO attributes of top ranked websites competing for the keyword space of "mortgage" require very high PageRank and link reputation values. The numbers are so large that SEO companies cannot possibly attain these values by their efforts. But if the website inherently possesses these kind of SEO attributes because of its longevity and/or exceptional content but lacks good page optimization, SEO companies can make a significant contribution.

Therefore, a critical success criteria in developing a winning keyword strategy is to understand the SEO attributes of competing websites for all keyword 'spaces' considered. Only then can the best keywords be chosen for an SEO campaign.

What are the best keywords?

The best keywords are those that possess 3 characteristics:

1. They are very relevant and focused on your products and services. Refrain from considering served market or application oriented keywords.
2. They are reasonably attainable and do not require extraordinary SEO attributes. It is better to rank well for a less popular keyword than rank poorly for a very popular keyword.
3. The alternative cost in PPC is relatively high. Then the savings you would receive from strong organic rankings would be larger.

Should all websites consider an SEO campaign?

It may be wise to consider an SEO campaign, but not all websites should embark on an SEO campaign. In some cases, the PPC cost for the keywords that best represent a website's product and services are low. Then, the wise choice would be to employ a PPC campaign. However, if the cost of PPC increases, an SEO campaign may be more cost effective.

What is Strong page optimization?

Page Optimization are those things that can be done to a website page. The most common form of page optimization is enhancement of keyword density. When a search engine examines a website page, it calculates how often words or word phrases appear. Their appearance, relative to all the other words on a page, is known as keyword density. Keyword densities should be enhanced in several html sections of each page:

- Head Section
 - Title Tag
 - Description Tag
 - Keyword Tag
- Body Tag

Can keywords be phrases as well as single words?

YES, In the early days of Search Engine Optimization (SEO), a keyword was a single word. But as the industry grew, the term "keyword" came to represent not only a single physical word, but also word phrases that represented a single thought or concept. Keyword phrases are more focused and help to better define the intent of the searcher. Consider "java" as a single physical keyword. Does it mean coffee, or does it mean a programming language? But "java script" as a keyword is very clear. "Ball" is another single physical keyword. Does it mean a round object, a dance, or is it a state of happiness? Adding another word to like "bouncing" or "soccer" would clarify the matter.

Is there an optimal keyword density that should be achieved?

NO, not a universal keyword density. But it is common to find 3-4% keyword densities in the Body Tag. That means for every 100 words, 3-4% are the keywords. Some keywords require higher densities and others lower. Too low means that the search engines will not score the page as high. Too high could trigger a SPAM filter as being "abnormal". Benchmarking of other website pages that are ranking well will provide reasonable upper limits on keyword densities.

How many keywords can I optimize for on each page?

That depends on the competition that is currently attaining top ranking. If these website pages are highly optimized, then more focus must be spent on fewer keywords. That is because more keywords typically mean weaker page optimization for each. Although it is possible (albeit awkward) to maintain keyword densities for more keywords in the body text, the page title, with its limited space (typically a maximum of 75 characters) cannot accommodate more keywords. Website pages with higher keyword densities in all html sections of the page perform better (assuming all other contributions being equal).

As a guideline, 2 +/- 1 keyword is typical. 3 keywords if the keywords are relatives (synonyms or stemmed versions of one another). 1 keyword if you are optimizing for a highly competitive keyword.

How can I tell what the keyword density is for a competitor and my pages?

That will require some tools. Although it is possible to count the number of total words and keywords on a page or use a word processor to aid in the process, there are specialty programs to help in this task. A popular on-line tool is: <http://seobench.com/keyword-density-analyzer/>.

Do different Search Engines rate website pages differently?

YES! Different Search Engines employ a different algorithm that weights website page attributes differently. For instance, Yahoo and MSN consider the Description Tag to be more important than Google does. And Google considers the Title Tag more important than Yahoo and MSN do. Google also considers the anchor text (that portion of a link that you see on a website page) of a link while Yahoo does not put as much emphasis on this factor.

Does optimization for one Search Engine hurt ranking for another?

No. All SEO activity (so long as it is considered “white hat”, those that do not employ SPAM techniques) will have a positive influence, but some things will make a bigger difference than others in different engines. Since Google is the most popular Search Engine, you should optimize for it first.

What is Link Popularity and Reputation?

Link Popularity is the number of links that are inbound to a page. These are often referred to as ‘backlinks’ as they link back to a page. Backlinks can be from within your own site (e.g. linking to your home page from interior pages), or from external website pages. Links from other websites are considered citations or 3rd party referrals. Citation based Search Engines like Google, Yahoo and MSN value the links that appear on other websites as if they were a vote of confidence. Therefore, the more links you have from other websites, the better your ranking will be.

But a word of caution should be spoken here. Some links are bad, although you cannot control who links to your site, you can control who you link to. If you link to a ‘bad’ site (one that the Search Engines have black listed), you will be in trouble too. And not every link counts. Typically, only text links count – not graphic links like banner ads. And the page must be indexed in the Search Engines for the link to count. If a Search Engine does not know the link exists, they cannot count it.

Google values link reputation a lot. Link reputation is the visible words in the link. In HTML terms, that is the hypertext or anchor text (the words you physically click on). Google associates the anchor text of a link with the underlying link target. So if the words “american river rafting” appear as a link to california-river-rafting.com, Google will associate the keyword “american river rafting” with that site.

Google like other Search Engines have a special query that can be run to see who has the best link reputation. Simply type the word “allinanchor:” (without the quotation marks) immediately followed (no space) by the keyword phrase, and Google will report a list of sites, the highest presumed to be the sites with the strongest link reputation.

Are all links created equal?

NO, links are not created equal. There are lots of factors affecting the value of a link:

- Is the link on a page that the Search Engines can crawl?
- The Anchor Text – does it contain the right keywords
- Does the link have a “nofollow” tag?
- Is the link constructed using Java Script?
- Are multiple links from the same IP (domain/shared host)?
- Are multiple links from the same class C IP address, IPs in a sequential range typically given to a single web-hosting provider?
- Does it reside on a page that has good Google PageRank?
- How many other outbound links are on the same page?
- Is the website where the link resides within the same “TOPIC” as the target site? Is the site considered an authority?

There are more factors, but these are the most important.

Is the TOPIC of the site where my link resides that important?

This question is in hot debate. Some SEOs would say YES, while others say NO. What we can tell you is that Google has developed a technology called Topic Sensitive Page Rank. In effect, it discounts the affect of links that come from websites that are not in the same general Topic.

The theory of Topic Sensitivity starts with the assumption that there are authority websites for a specific subject or keyword phrase. These authority websites link out to other websites and other websites link to more websites. Every time there is an outbound link, there is a component of that link that had its origins from the authority websites. The topic sensitivity that is passed through the link is defined by where the upstream websites got their links.

It may be easier to think of Topic Sensitivity as a “bloodline”. Some dogs are pure breeds, but most dogs are mutts, a combination of bloodlines. Mutts may have blood from a few or many different dog types just as websites have

links from different website categories. If a dog has a lot of bloodline from golden retrievers, then presumably that dog would be better at hunting than other dogs. Likewise, if links to a website are primarily health related, then the website would rank better for health related keyword phrases.

If Google is employing this technology for which they were awarded a patent, "junk links" from off topic websites will have little or no value in GoogleLand. If Google is not implementing this kind of technology, then it may be a matter of time before they do.

What is PageRank?

PageRank is a Google thing. It is named after one of the founding fathers of Google, Mr. Lawrence Page. While serving on the board of Stanford University, he authored a paper that described a method of determining the "importance of a website page". This method became one of the foundational elements in the Google algorithm. Google still uses PageRank in its algorithm today.

PageRank is a measure of how interconnected or linked a website page is to the rest of the Internet. PageRank is passed from one website page to another website page through links. The amount of PageRank that is passed depends on the number of outbound links.

If a website page has 10 outbound links, one of which goes to your website, you will inherit 1/10 of the available PageRank from that page. Links residing on website pages that have a high PageRank and relatively few outbound links pass the most PageRank.

Can a Webmaster do something that will KILL search engine rankings?

Absolutely. For the last few years, Google and Yahoo have been working hard to identify SPAM. Google has developed proprietary filtering algorithms while Yahoo uses several dozen editors to screen websites.

If you have any one of these conditions, you could be in serious trouble:

- Broken links or poorly coded html
- Near-duplicate content
- Page with a no-robot.txt file or no-cache tag
- Multiple URLs for the same page

In Google's case, website pages found to have one or several of these conditions may be listed in Google's index with URL only (no title and no description). If you see this condition when you perform a site:www.mydomain.com query, you know those pages are in trouble.

Webmasters can also create a site architecture that is not search engine friendly. E-commerce pages are notoriously poor SEO candidates as they often include long URL strings that pass many variables and sometimes include session ID information. Search engine spiders can get 'stuck' or 'trapped' in these kind of sites and regularly avoid these pages.

Flash sites or highly graphic intensive pages are also poor SEO candidates. Flash sites do not have body content for the search engines to read. Hence, sites that do have SEO friendly content will typically rank higher.

Can broken links really affect my rankings?

Back in the old days when Yahoo managed their directory, broken links were a criterion for disqualification. As spiders became more prevalent, broken links were not so much an issue, but they are now. Both Google and Yahoo don't want websites in their SERP (Search Engine Results Pages) that have broken links. It reflects poorly on the Search Engine, and it is an indicator that the website is not well maintained.

More recently, MSN has made strong suggestions that broken links are considered to have a negative influence in their ranking algorithm.

What is 'Near Duplicate' content?

Most research suggests that 'near duplicate' content makes up as much as 30% of the Internet. That is a lot of extra search engine spidering and a lot of near duplicate listings. Search engines don't like the extra spidering and searchers don't like SERP with repetitive information.

So Google has figured out a way to identify pages that have “near duplicate” content. They received a patent covering their methods. Unfortunately their patent does not cover the exact criteria they are using. Our research, however, has led us to believe that website pages possessing these conditions are at high risk:

- Greater than 2 consecutive sentences with identical content
- A single paragraph with identical content
- More than 50% of any portions of a page with identical content

Can I keep Search Engines from indexing pages that may be considered ‘Near Duplicate’?

YES! There are 3 methods for keeping a search engine spider from indexing specific website pages.

- Place a robot.txt file in the root directory indicating where search engine robots are to avoid
- Place a no-robot meta tag on website pages excluding robot crawling.
- Links with JavaScript code will thwart search engine spidering.

How important is content?

You have heard it said, “Content is king”! It is true. Content is king, and there is a good reason for it. The more appealing your content, the more websites will link to you. By appealing, I mean differentiated from the rest of the ‘pack’.

Even though your websites may be prettier or have lower prices, it still does not stand out. There must be something that appeals more to the public than the others. It may be a section on ‘how to find the right size’, or a special tool that calculates the amount of time it takes to filter a pool. If there is no differentiation, then why should another webmaster want to have their site associated with yours, why would they want to link to yours? And if not, why should the search engines rank your site above others that may have more appeal?

The principle is similar to the Peacock Principle. The more noticeable the peacock’s plum, the more likely a peahen will mate (or ‘link’).

More links means higher PageRank. If these links are from relevant websites, the link value is higher. Combine this with strong page optimization, and well crafted link reputation and you have an unbeatable formula for success.

Do you turn away SEO business?

Yes we do. About 50% of the inquiries we receive are turned away. There are several reasons, but these float to the top:

- Prospective client has multiple websites, all with ‘near duplicate’ content.
- The served market is an ‘affiliate market’ space.
- The website is an ecommerce store with virtually no valued content.
- The Pay-per click (PPC) sponsored link cost for the best keywords are relatively low.
- The website has coding problems that cause search engine spidering errors.

What recommendations do you have for webmasters developing new websites?

Start with keywords that best represent your served market. Then build really great content that everyone can see (not behind some special log-in) about your keywords. Make sure your content is valued in the eyes of your visitors, valued enough to differentiate your site from the rest of the pack and worthy enough for other webmasters to want to link to your site.

Optimize that great content so the search engines recognize what users can see. And make sure you design a website that the search engines can easily spider and read.

Sounds like a simple formula, but don’t kid your self. Getting all the pieces to fit is not as easy as it seems. But for those who see it through, the rewards are well worth the journey.

What is the bottom line?

At the end of the day, SEO efforts can refine, enhance and in some cases create SEO attributes or 'energy' for website pages. When properly planned and implemented, these efforts can make a huge difference in search engine rankings. With strong rankings come more qualified visitors.

But unlike the old days when SEO companies could employ tactics that would create SEO 'energy' from nothing, today's SEO efforts are more restricted. In yester-year SEOs could create reciprocal links by the hundreds that would significantly affect link reputation and buy text links from high PR sites to inherit high PageRank values. But today, these tactics are considered 'un-natural' by the search engines. Google has filters that detect 'un-natural' SEO tactics. Google claims that buying text links from high PR sites no longer contributes to a site's PR value. Sites using excessive reciprocal linking may be penalized as well.



Without these legacy tactics, SEO efforts are restricted to working with the characteristics of the website itself. If the site has some natural SEO 'energy' in and of itself, then SEO efforts can improve upon what is already there and make a real difference.

So how does a website create natural SEO 'energy'? It must offer something to visitors that is noticeably better than competition: special or value based content, free online tools, etc. Just like the male peacock who displays his feathery plum, your website must offer something that will be noticed by other webmasters and will compel them to associate with and link to your website. You must promote your website with press releases and articles. How else will others notice your great content? When others see your special or

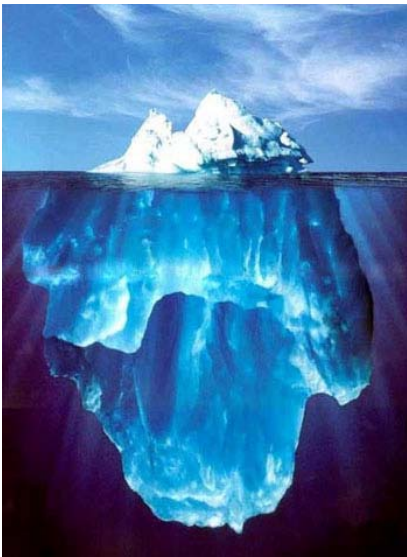
value based content, they will link to your site. And with links comes link reputation and PageRank.

Strong ranking involves 3 basic attributes:

- Strong page optimization
- Strong link popularity and reputation
- Strong PageRank

PageRank is like the engine in a rocket. More PageRank equates to higher horsepower. Horsepower will help you get off the ground, but you need a guidance system to direct your rocket to the desired keyword destination. That is where SEO comes in.

SEO is like the tail fins on the rocket. Page optimization is like the horizontal tail fins. Link Reputation is like the vertical tail fins. Yes, SEO can enhance PageRank (your engine) a little, but in competitive markets, SEO can never replace the natural SEO 'energy' of a strong website with superior content.



So the bottom line is this. SEO can take a rocket with good horsepower, turbo-charge it and give it a guidance system to point it in the right keyword direction.

To know where to aim requires reconnaissance: studying the SEO attributes that got your keyword-competitors to where they are now. In this respect, SEO is like an iceberg: 90% of the information needed to make an informed navigation decision is below the "water line". The ice that you can see represents all the commonly available information, but to see what is below the water line requires specialized research: research that will quantify the primary SEO attributes of competing website. Without this information, your keyword strategy is more likely to be flawed, just like the navigation of the Titanic.

Only with competitive SEO attributes in hand, can a winnable keyword strategy be develop that may be implemented within the scope of resources at your disposal.

