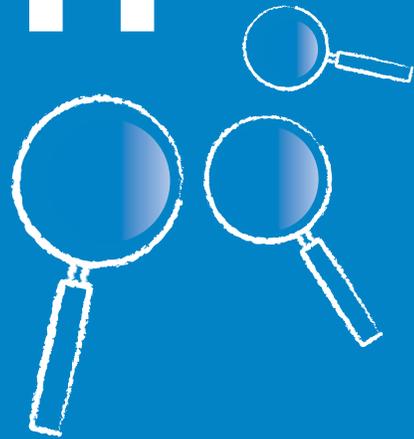


SEO 101:

The Basics
(and Beyond)



Over the last 12 years, a massive amount of material has been written about Search Engine Optimization (SEO). The majority of the information is acceptable, but there's a lot of dated information still being promoted as best practices (exact match domain names, keyword density targets, exact anchor text, and so on). In this eBook, you'll learn the current best practices in SEO that companies of all sizes can use to increase site visibility and the number of visitors coming to your site, and most importantly, improve conversion rates.

The United States Census Bureau research shows that a whopping 89% of internet users search online before they buy a product – even when they intend to buy that product from a local business. Pew Internet conducted a survey that found 92% of adults online use search engines to find information, and nearly 59% of them do it daily. Of the daily searches, 46% are for information about products and services.

What does that mean for you? Most of your potential buyers are going to search online for information before making a purchase. In order to have a chance to make the sale, you have to be found. And so you have to be find-able.

This book is your guide to the basics of search engine optimization.

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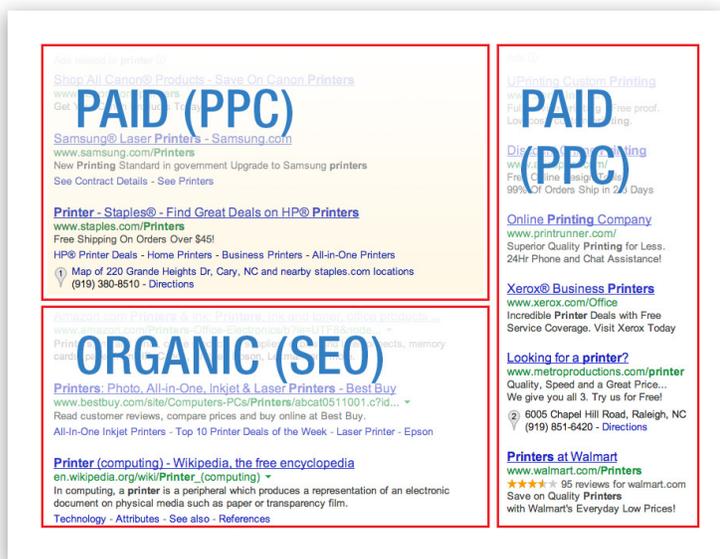
How search engines make money (and why it matters)

There are two kinds of search results

Organic results are “natural” results. Search engines attempt to return the web pages most relevant to the search query, and rank results according to perceived value derived through complicated algorithms.

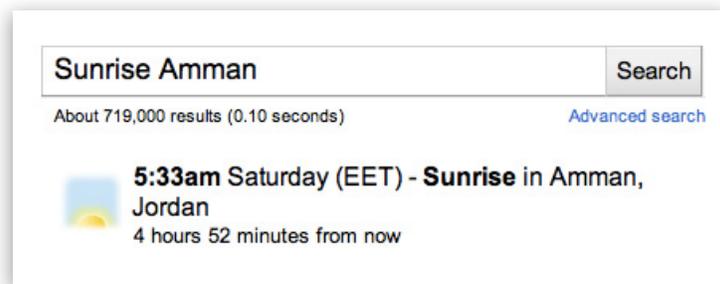
Paid results – so-called pay-per-click (PPC) ads – are placed by advertisers (or third-party advertising networks) and displayed according to a formula that includes how much the advertiser is willing to pay, how relevant the ad is to the keyword, and the quality of the landing page.

Search engines make money by getting searchers to click on ads. These ads are displayed both on the search engine results pages (SERPs) and on ad networks they are associated with. Just as with any other medium, the more people that use a specific search engine, the more advertisers are willing to pay for their ad to run.



Search engines are extremely vested in providing the best, most relevant organic search results – every single time. It’s the only quality that makes them sticky, and the only competitive edge that matters in their business model. Their market share will always be fragile, as there’s a very low barrier for the user to switch search engines. If a searcher doesn’t trust that the search engine they’re using provides the best results, they just visit a different one and repeat their search. This erodes the search engine’s user base, which means fewer searches to serve ads against... and lower rates for the PPC ads.

All of the major search engines are working very hard to increase the quality of their organic results. For example, Google typically makes between 500 and 600 algorithm changes each year. The majority of these updates are fairly minor, just small feature improvements or minor tweaks to how Google ranks a site. As an example, Google update #82580 was an improvement for showing the sunrise and sunset times search feature.



There are a few major algorithm updates each year that have significantly wider impact. These algorithm changes are generally named, and are always focused on improving a searcher's experience with the organic results. This usually involves improving Google's ability to detect web pages that deliver a bad experience or are trying to trick the search engines into ranking them better.

In 2012, Google had two major algorithm updates

Panda, which was designed to lower the rank of low-quality sites, advertising-heavy pages, and duplicate content. You're probably safe from the impact of Panda if you publish high quality, original content that people want to read.

Penguin, which looks for link spam and devalues it. There is minimum risk to your site from Penguin if you publish high quality, original content that reputable sites want to link to (and you do not buy links of any kind for "traffic value").

Again, the search engines are tightly focused on providing the best experience for the searcher so that they can become (or remain) the engine of choice, grow their traffic numbers, and charge more for advertising. This works in your favor if you optimize your site and content to deliver what people want to find.

Google typically makes between 500 and 600 algorithm changes each year. In 2012, two were major.



Know your audience

The first step in writing great content for the web

...is learning about your audience. You aren't writing web content simply because you enjoy writing and you (hopefully) aren't writing just to make the search engines happy. You should have a specific purpose in mind for the content, and a specific type of reader to write for.

If you're new to writing for the web or are trying to reach a new audience, it's worth going through a formal process to define your reader personas. Begin by assessing your best customers, the ones you'd like to replicate. Determine the characteristics they have in common, and then create a persona that exemplifies them. The aspects to define will vary depending on your industry, but for a **B2B** company, you might wish to determine whether your ideal reader is...

- In a specific industry
- In a specific department
- In a specific size of company
- At a particular level of responsibility
- In a specific geographic location
- Using a particular tool or program

For a **B2C** company, the characteristics of your ideal reader could include factors like:

- Gender
- Age
- Owner of a smart phone
- Plays sports
- Travels for work 12+ times annually

If you already have a strong understanding of your target audience, do just a brief, informal persona review in your head before beginning work on content for your new web page or your next blog post.

Begin by assessing your best customers. Determine the characteristics they have in common, and then create a persona that exemplifies them.



Know what your readers want

Understand why people may search for your content

This next step will help you refine your thinking, create content that connects with your target audience, and select the appropriate words and terms that have resonance for your audience. The content that you create to meet the needs of your persona is also likely to rank better in the search engines. **Nice benefit!**

People search for a variety of reasons. **Common reasons in the B2B realm include searching to...**

- Understand a product category
- Learn about a product or solution
- Solve a specific problem

Common reasons in the B2C realm include searching to...

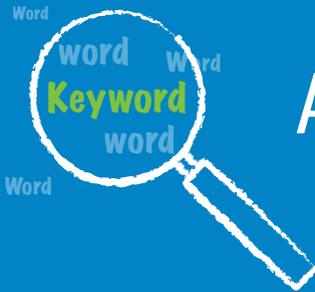
- Find the best deal
- Find the closest location
- Locate a product or service that's advertised

You can think of your persona as someplace along a continuum that approximates the buyer's journey:

- Awareness > Interest > Consideration > Purchase > Post-Purchase > Re-Purchase

The same content will not work for all stages. Is your persona:

- Looking for a general category of information? (Awareness)
- Looking for a solution to a specific problem? (Interest)
- Looking for an enterprise solution? (Awareness-Interest)
- Identifying and comparing specific products or vendors? (Consideration-Purchase)
- Looking for help with one of your products they already own? (Post-Purchase)
- Looking to replace or upgrade a product, and planning to remain loyal to you? (Re-Purchase)
- ...A college student writing a research paper? (Awareness)



All about keywords

A keyword primer

A keyword is the word (or phrase) you want searchers to find your page for. It should clearly identify what your page is about.

- Your page content is (or should be) about one main thing. Choose a keyword that that:
 - Represents your content well
 - A majority of searchers are likely to use when they want information about that one main thing
- Your keyword can contain more than one word
- If your keyword contains several words, the order in which you use the words matters. As an example, “Symptoms of diabetes” is not the same as “diabetes symptoms”, and returns different rankings
- Do the research to discover likely keywords. Ask people, drill down in social media, do a survey, see what’s already being used, and/or use a keyword research tool such as the **Google Keyword Tool**
- Understand who your ideal reader is, and use the same natural language and terms as they do
- Don’t use more than one keyword (or phrase)

For more background on keywords, [visit this Google page](#).

Do the research to discover likely keywords

Talk to real live people. If you have existing customers, listen to the language they use. How do they describe your products? How do they talk about the problems they are having? When they get excited about new features, what words do they use to talk about them? If you go to a conference or event, take an informal survey. Ask people, “If you were looking for (my product, a solution to this problem, etc.), what would you search on?”

Drill down in social media, especially if you’re just launching a product. Read blog posts and do lots of research on a wide range of sites. As an example, see which Twitter search terms turn up your potential customers.

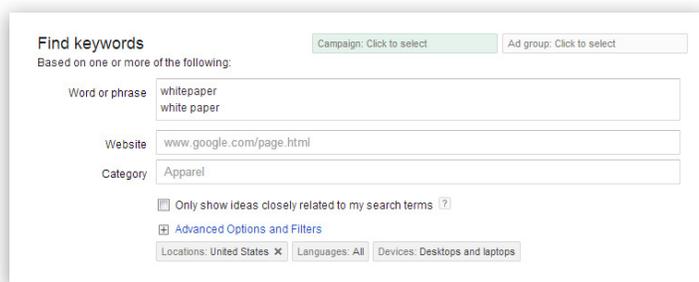
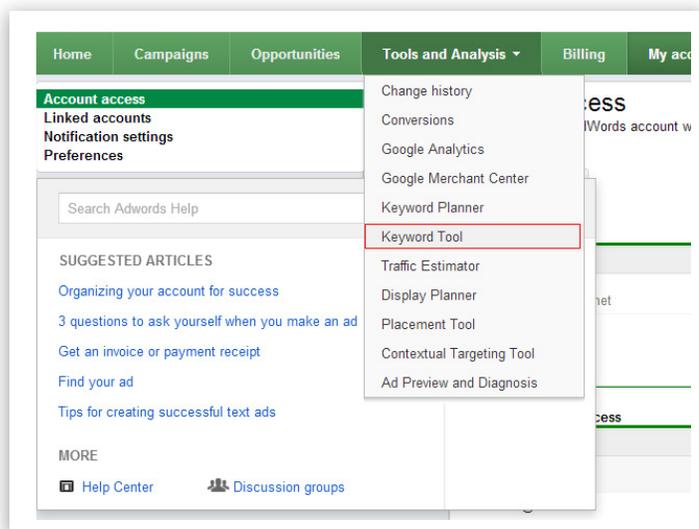
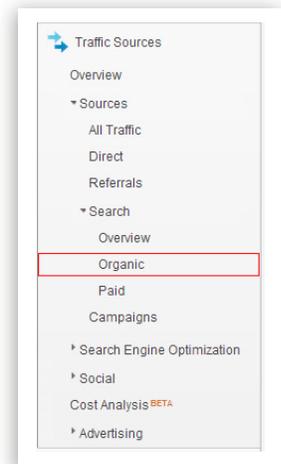
After you see what’s already being used, look in your current analytics solution and see which words visitors to your website are currently using to find you. In Google Analytics, this is under **Traffic Sources > Sources > Search > Organic**.

Finally, you can use keyword research tools such as the **Google Keywords Tool** to see how searchers in general are looking for information. You’ll get better

information if you can access the tool through an AdWords account (these are free), but there is anonymous access as well, through which you can get basic information.

Once you access the tool, you can get a rough estimate of how many searches are happening each month on a specific term. You can filter by location, languages, devices people are using to access the search engines, and other factors.

For example, if you're planning to offer a white paper on a landing page, you want to know how people look for the term. Are they using the one-word “whitepaper” or the two-word “white paper”? It turns out that searchers are more than twice as likely to look for “white paper” than “whitepaper,” so that’s the term you should use.



The Google keyword tool will also give you suggestions of keywords (related to what you searched on) that you might be interested in. Based on the white paper example, I might want to create a “How to write a white paper” article – if it meets the needs of my target audience.

Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches ?	Local Monthly Searches ?
<input type="checkbox"/> whitepaper ▾	Low	301,000	110,000
<input type="checkbox"/> white paper ▾	Low	823,000	301,000
<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Save all Keyword ideas (800) 1 - 50 of 800			
Keyword	Competition	Global Monthly Searches ?	Local Monthly Searches ?
<input type="checkbox"/> white papers ▾	Low	301,000	110,000
<input type="checkbox"/> white paper templates ▾	Low	5,400	3,600
<input type="checkbox"/> white paper sample ▾	Low	3,600	2,400
<input type="checkbox"/> white paper samples ▾	Low	4,400	3,600
<input type="checkbox"/> white paper format ▾	Low	4,400	2,900

In summary, in this stage you want to identify words your audience uses to look for content you are going to create. You can do this by:

- Asking customers how they would find a specific product or category
- Analyzing existing search engine referrals
- Researching external keyword databases
- Listing product names (and their generic equivalents)

The most important thing to keep in mind while creating content is to write for your audience. Not Google, not Bing, not Yahoo. Some website owners and search engine optimizers use tricks to try and fool search engines into sending traffic to a page. This is a bad, bad idea for a couple of reasons:

- The Google police WILL catch you. Google and the other search engines actively, constantly look for websites that violate their terms and conditions. They continually update their algorithms to automatically detect pages and websites trying to cheat the system. Even if you aren't caught by the algorithm, the search engines review reports of cheating submitted by the public and will take manual action to punish sites that get caught attempting to fool the algorithm, or violating the guidelines.
- The second (and more important) reason is that the search engines are not your target audience. People are. You want your readers to appreciate the content so much that they read it, recommend it, and return. If the content they discover when they visit your site via search is misleading, they'll skip away and never become buyers or advocates. Bringing random traffic to your site won't accomplish your goals.

Word choices and natural language

Once you know who you are writing for and why they're looking for your content, you're almost ready to start writing. There is one more important step before you get started though...you need to know the language of your audience.

This is more than knowing that your target audience speaks U.S. English, or British English, or Russian, or Japanese. It is about the actual words they use when talking about your products, the industry you are in, or whatever they are looking for.

Search engines are getting much better at trying to understand searcher intent, but they are still fairly limited. They look for the actual words searchers type in. If you discover what those words are and use them, you'll lift your chances of appearing in search results. If you don't use them, you site probably won't appear.

For example, suppose you manufacture automotive accessories. You want to promote a new anti-slip mat for car trunks – to a U.K. audience. You should write about “boot liners”.

[BOOT LINERS - TAILORED CAR...](#)

www.bootliners.co.uk/

Boot Liners for all makes and models. Audi, BMW, Mercedes, Ford, Land Rover, Peugeot, Vauxhall, Nissan and many more **car boot liners**, UK STOCKIST.

If you write about "boot liners" for a U.S. audience, you will get very different results.

[Insulated Boot Liners and Performance Insoles from Schnees.com](#)

www.schnees.com/category/boot-liners-insoles

Insulated replacement **boot liners** from Schnee's feature Thinsulate and wool to keep your feet warm and dry. Performance insoles add extra comfort and support ...

A note about long tail keywords

"Long tail" keywords often contain as many as five to seven words.

It's estimated that over 70% of Google search terms are long tail. They are used by people looking for something very specific: "digital camera" is short and general (710M results); "canon digital rebel xti 10.1mp digital slr ef-s 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6 lens" is long and specific (54k results). The long tail keyword is more likely to make the search more successful for both the searcher and the site found.

- Long tail keywords:
- Bring more targeted visitors to your site
- Are less competitive
- Clearly illustrate the searcher's intent
- Keep visitors on your site for longer (if you've met their exact needs)

In general, your shorter and more general keywords are useful for traffic in the early part of the buyer's journey, when people are doing broad research; long tail keywords are more useful for people who skew toward the end of the process, who know exactly what they're looking for.

Lorem ipsum
dolor sit amet,
consectetur
adipiscing elit.



Five best practices for writing content

Tips to serve both search engines and your visitors

1. Target one keyword per page. Remember the keyword research you did when you were considering your target audience? Pick the single word or phrase that the article or page you're writing should distill, that it can be found by. It's difficult to optimize a page for more than one keyword, so select something that will resonate with your audience.

2. Include the keyword in your copy. If a visitor is coming to a page on your website from a search engine, they expect to see the words they searched for on in the page. You want to use each keyword phrase three to four times within your copy — more if it makes sense and still sounds natural. Longer copy gives you more chances to do this.

3. Use the exact term. Search engines are very good at interpreting a searcher's intent, but they still rank pages that exactly match a searcher's query higher than a page that has all the words — just in a different order. Your keyword research told you how your customers think and the words they use. This includes the order in which they use words. Write your content accordingly.

As an example, “Symptoms of diabetes” is not the same as “diabetes symptoms”, and returns different rankings. MayoClinic.com didn't rank in the top three for “symptoms of diabetes”. They instead optimized for “diabetes symptoms”, probably because their research showed that this was the precise term much of their audience was using. The other factors remain the same, but because the word order

matches the search query, they are able to bump WebMD and About.com down and take the number two spot on a query that gets 673,000 searches each month. This increased ranking for this one term

Search Query	Search Results (Top 3)
symptoms of diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Symptoms - American Diabetes Association 2. Diabetes Symptoms: Excessive Thirst, Nausea, Vision Problems ... 3. Top Warning Signs of Diabetes - Diabetes Symptoms - Symptoms of ...
diabetes symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Symptoms - American Diabetes Association 2. Diabetes symptoms: When diabetes symptoms are a concern ... 3. Diabetes Symptoms: Excessive Thirst, Nausea, Vision Problems ...

brings MayoClinic.com an estimated 40,000 additional highly qualified visitors each month that would otherwise go to one of their competitors.

4. Optimize, but don't overdo it. You are writing for real people, not search engines. You want your writing to sound natural. If your text sounds awkward to you, slice your keyword usage or use synonyms. Have a coworker read it and give you feedback. If that's not possible, read it out loud.

People may not consciously know what's wrong with your page, but if you use the exact same words in the exact same order, too many times, your visitors will feel like something isn't right. This requires a balancing act with #3 ("Use the exact term"), but you want to make sure that you use natural language to communicate your message (synonyms, varying word order, etc.).

Never sacrifice the user experience to force your copy to meet a SEO goal.

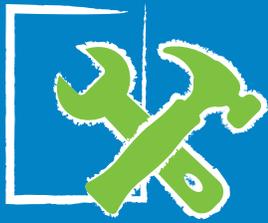
Use the exact term in the most strategic locations, including the URL, title tag, and headlines (see the next section, "How To Optimize a Page" for details). Use it throughout the body copy when appropriate, but if a different term makes more sense when you are writing the main copy on the page, use it!

Never sacrifice the user experience to force your copy to meet a SEO goal.

5. Page length. Page length should be dictated by the message you want to communicate, not an arbitrary limit. However, a minimum of 300 words is a good target. Longer copy provides a better opportunity for keyword placement that sounds good and allows you to provide more information to your visitors.

A few other considerations:

- Structure your content so it's easy to read. Use subheads, bullets, and numbering, and break long paragraphs up into shorter ones. The easier your content is to read, the more likely it is the reader will remain on the page to read it. More time spent on the page tells the search engines your content is valuable.
- Make every word count.
- Duplicate content filters are getting more aggressive. If two pages are using the same metadata and have very similar title tags, perhaps you don't need both pages. Combining them or making them distinctly different will make life easier for your reader.



How to optimize a page

Understand which parts of a page are most strategic

Judicious keyword use will help search engines find and deliver your content to the people who are looking for it.

Title Tag → `<title>Investing in SEO: Marketers are Doing More SEO Than They Think - Search Engine Watch (#SEK)</title>`

URL → `searchenginewatch.com/article/2202277/Investing-in-SEO-Marketers-are-Doing-More-SEO-Than-They-Think`

Headlines & Sub-headlines (H1 & H2 Tags) → **Links are SEO fuel.**

Call to action links (hyperlinks) → **Investing in SEO: Marketers are Doing More SEO Than They Think**

Main body text copy, top to bottom → **As a quick recap, the research concludes that 94 percent of searchers use organic search results, and that the top three positions in Google earn 61 percent of the available search traffic.**

Title tag

The title tag is the most important tag on the page. It helps tell both search engines and searchers what the page is about. It's displayed when someone bookmarks your page, is shown in search results, and is shown at the top of a browser window when someone is looking at the page. A well-written title tag that uses the same keywords your audience uses will help your page rank better and will increase the number of searchers that click through to your content.

`<title>Diabetes symptoms: When diabetes symptoms are a concern - MayoClinic.com</title>`

Diabetes symptoms: When diabetes symptoms are a concern ...
www.mayoclinic.com/health/diabetes-symptoms/DA00125
Diabetes symptoms are often subtle. Pay attention to the clues your body's giving you.

Tips for a good title tag

1. A good title tag is between 8 and 65 characters (including spaces)

- If it's shorter than 8 characters, you'll have a hard time effectively communicating what the page is about.
- Search engines will index up to 150 characters (including spaces), but anything over 65 characters (including spaces) will be hidden from searchers, and so unable to influence them to click on a search result. They will see only an ellipsis (...).

2. The title tag should accurately describe the page

[Animal Superpowers - National Geographic Channel - UK](http://natgeotv.com/uk/animal-superpowers)

natgeotv.com/uk/animal-superpowers ▾

In **Animal Superpowers** see how different species have evolved and developed mesmerising powers to stay ahead in the ultimate survival-of-the-fittest ...

- It is extremely important to use your focus keyword in the title. This is the word (or phrase) you want searchers to find your page for. They are far more likely to click on your listing if they see the keyword in the title.
- It is best to use the focus keywords in exactly the same order as you use them in the rest of the page ("diabetes symptoms" is different than "symptoms of diabetes"), but it isn't mandatory. It is still possible to rank well when the words are out of order, but your page won't rank as highly as it would when the order matches the keyword your searchers use to find the page.
- You have only 65 characters and spaces to communicate what the page is about; it's best to use the focus keyword just once.
- Make sure the title tag corresponds with the reasons people would visit the page. "Smartphones: The top 10 phones for social media" will appeal to a different audience and create different expectations than "Cheap smartphones".
- For a lot of people, the title tag will be their first introduction to your brand. Make sure you make a good first impression.

3. Put the keyword early in the title

[Walking Shoes: How to Choose - REI.com](#)

[www.rei.com](#) > [Learn at REI](#) > [Expert Advice](#) ▼

Mar 5, 2013 – A: Walking causes less impact to your feet than running does. As a result, **walking shoes** don't offer as much cushioning in the heel as running ...

- It is best if you can use the focus keyword starting in the first 10 characters of the title, but don't sacrifice a great title to force this.
- Google attributes more value to the first words in a title tag than the last one.
- Research shows that the first 11 characters determine whether someone continues to read on or not.

4. Each page of your web site should have a unique title tag

- Every page on your website should be unique. It solves a specific problem, addresses a specific need, conveys unique information, or answers a question. The title tag should reflect this. If the page is similar enough to another page that you need (or /want) to use the same title tag, do you really need this additional page?
- If you can't decide what a page is really about and what makes it unique – then neither Google nor your visitors will be able to figure it out either.

URL

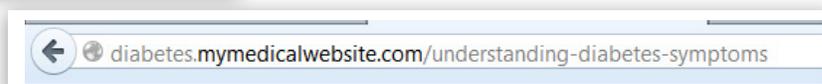
The URL is an extremely important place to put your keyword. It will help your page ranking because when people link to your page, the link they use will automatically include your keyword. Having the keyword in the URL also helps visitors make the decision to visit your page.

When you use multiple words to form a keyword, separate the words with a hyphen ("diabetes-symptoms"). Removing the spaces and smashing the words together ("diabetessymptoms") makes them hard to read, and creates a keyword unlikely to be used by a searcher. An underscore is treated as an actual character instead of a word separator (e.g., "Diabetes_symptoms" reads as one single 17-letter word).

If you are researching diabetes symptoms, which of these two pages are you more likely to visit?



or

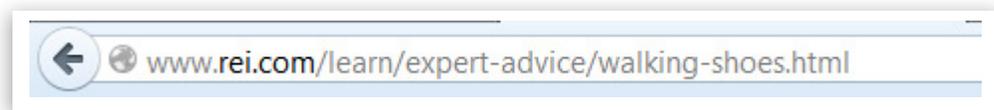


Tips for a good URL

1. A good URL is shorter than 115 characters

- Search engines will index URLs over 115 characters, but research shows content with shorter URLs has a higher click-through-rate than content with long URLs. Try to keep them as short as naturally possible.

2. The URL should accurately describe the page



- It is extremely important to use your keyword in the URL. This is the word (or phrase) you want searchers to find your page for. They are far more likely to click on your listing if they see the keyword in the URL.
- It is best if you use the words in the keyword in exactly the same order as you use in the rest of the page ("diabetes-symptoms" is different from "symptoms-of-diabetes"), but it isn't mandatory. It's possible to rank well when the words are out of order, but your page will rank even better if the order exactly matches the order your searchers use to find the page.
- Keep the URL as short as naturally possible while still being able to communicate what the page is about. Use the keyword just once.

Meta description

The meta description displays in your listing. If you use it well, it conveys to the reader what the page is about and offers a compelling glimpse of content.

In the yellow-highlighted USGS example below, you get a good idea what the page is about. In the Merriam-Webster example, it appears that the meta description was left blank. Sometimes, by default, Google will fill empty meta descriptions with content chosen by an algorithm. If it's clumsy, it could do you more harm than good.

Frequently Asked Questions on Metadata - Geology - the USGS

geology.usgs.gov/tools/metadata/tools/doc/faq.html

Dec 11, 2012 – Metadata consist of information that characterizes data. Metadata are used to provide documentation for data products. In essence, metadata ...

Metadata - Merriam-Webster Online

www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metadata

meta da ta : noun plural but singular or plural in construction 1- dā-tā - da- also - dā-1
Definition of METADATA : data that provides information about other ...

The meta description doesn't impact the ranking itself, but a well-written description is in essence advertising your content to searchers, showing them exactly how your page delivers what they're looking for. If you leave the description blank, you are wasting this opportunity.

Tips for a good meta description

1. A good meta description is shorter than 150 characters (including spaces)

- Search engines will index up to 255 characters (including spaces) of the meta description, but anything over 150 characters (including spaces) will be hidden from searchers and unable to influence which search result they choose. They will see only an ellipsis (...).
- Since the main benefit of the meta description is to get searchers excited about visiting the page, content hidden by the search engines is wasted.

2. The meta description should accurately describe the page

- It is extremely important to use your focus keyword in the meta description. People are far more likely to click on your listing if they see the words in the description.



[Old English Sheepdog - Dog Breed Information Center](http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/oldenglishsheepdog.htm)
www.dogbreedinfo.com/oldenglishsheepdog.htm ▼
All about the Old English Sheepdog, info, pictures, breeders, rescues, care, temperament, health, puppies and much more.

- It's best to use the focus keywords in exactly the same order as you use in the rest of the page ("diabetes symptoms" is different than "symptoms of diabetes"), but it isn't mandatory. Using the words in the same order that searchers use is a strong indicator to them that the page is relevant to what they are searching for.
- You have only 150 characters and spaces to communicate what the page is about; it's best to use the focus keyword just once.
- Make sure the meta description corresponds with the reasons people would visit the page.

3. Each page of your web site should have a unique description

- Every page on your website should be unique. It should solve a specific problem, address a specific need, convey unique information, etc. The page's meta description should reflect this.
- If the page is similar enough to another page that you need (or want) to use the same description, consider carefully whether you really need this additional page.

Headlines and subheads

Headlines help your audience understand what a page is about and quickly navigate to the sections that interest them. Search engines understand this, and look at content with header tags <h1> to help understand what a page is about. It's important to keep this text to headline length; if you have a paragraph of text in an <h1> tag, search engines will think it is spam. Try to limit your <h1> tags to 10 or fewer words (65 or fewer characters, including spaces).

Tips for a good H1 heading

1. A good H1 heading is shorter than 65 characters

- Search engines will index the entire H1 tag, but if it's too long they will discount it as spam. The H1 should be a short description of what visitors can see on the page.

2. The H1 heading should accurately describe the page

- It is extremely important to use your focus keyword in the H1 heading. They are far more likely to stay on the page if they see the keyword in the heading.
- It is best to use the focus keywords in exactly the same order as use them in the rest of the page ("diabetes symptoms" is different than "symptoms of diabetes"), but it isn't mandatory. Using the words in the same order that searchers use is a strong indicator to them that the page is relevant to what they are looking for.
- You have only 65 characters (including spaces) to communicate what the page is about; use the focus keyword just once.
- Make sure the H1 heading corresponds with the reasons people would visit the page.
- The H1 heading should be different than the Title tag.

3. Put the focus keyword early in the H1 heading

- It's best to use the focus keyword starting in the first 10 characters of the H1 heading, but don't sacrifice a great heading to force this.
- Google attributes more value to the first words in a heading than the last ones.

Body content

The most important thing to keep in mind while creating content is: Write for your audience. Not Google, not Bing, not Yahoo. You want to attract the right visitors - the ones who will be happy with the content you are sharing with them. If your visitors find your content valuable, they will be more likely to link to it and share it with their social networks.

The most important thing to keep in mind while creating content is: Write for your audience.

Alt text

Alternative text is used with images (and other non-text content) to describe what the image shows. The words used within an image's alt attribute should be its text equivalent, and convey the same information or serve the same purpose that the image would. This helps the visually impaired understand what an image is about, and it helps people whose browsers don't download images. It's also another chance to tell search engines what the image, and your page, are about.

When writing the alt text for an image, ask yourself these questions: If you were to replace the image with the text, would most users receive the same basic information?

Tips for good alt text

1. Every image on the page should have alt text

- This is mandatory for accessibility and for valid XHTML.
- For images that play only a decorative role in the page, use an empty alt (e.g., alt="") or a CSS background image so that reading browsers do not bother users by displaying text such as "spacer image".

2. Good alt text is shorter than 65 characters (including spaces)

- The alt text should be a short "stand in" in the event that the image itself is not available.

3. The alt text should accurately represent the image

- It's important to use your keyword in the alt text of your images. Search engines use the alt text to help determine what an image is about.



```
<font face="Arial">  
  
</font>
```

- It is best to use the focus keywords in exactly the same order as you use them in the rest of the page ("diabetes symptoms" is different than "symptoms of diabetes"), but it isn't mandatory. Using the words in the same order that searchers use is a strong indicator to them that the image is relevant to what they're looking for.
- You have only 65 characters (including spaces) to communicate what the image is about; use the keyword just once.

Google authorship

Until recently, content quality (as measured by search engines) has been based largely on the authority of a domain or Web page. This is changing. Google has begun to include content authorship as a factor in quality determination, which means page rank will increasingly be influenced by the authority of a page's author.

The "verified online profiles" that Google implements this practice through are Google+ profiles (also known as "G+" profiles). In order to take every opportunity to influence your page ranking, it's a good idea for your organization's authors to have Google+ profiles, and claim the content they produce. This does not negate the value of your keywords, but can add additional value to the page.

Google+ Authorship links a person with a Google+ profile to content they have written. This content could be on any website.

- If your author has a picture in their Google+ profile, it will show up in search results.
- There is a *More by...* link on author results. If a reader clicks this, they will see other posts your author claims authorship on, wherever those posts may be.

Most SEO experts surmise that Google will recognize you as an authority in your niche based on the content you have claimed and how each piece of linked content has performed on social media networks (tweets, likes, +1s, etc.).

How to claim Google+ authorship for content

Set up Google+:

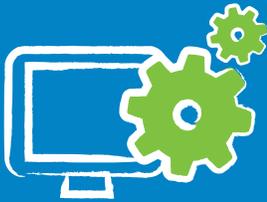
- Visit <https://plus.google.com/authorship> and follow directions.
- Make sure that your Google+ email is the same one you use for authorship in your applications. You may need to change a few Google+ settings; Google will cue these if they are necessary.
- On your G+ page, look under Links for the Contributor To section.
- Add website URLs for the websites you contribute to, and label them.

You also must set up the websites you contribute to:

- First, on your G+ profile page, copy the URL. It should look something like this: <https://plus.google.com/1101010101010101010>
- Now visit each website you publish on. Navigate to your profile on this site and look for the social media fields. Enter the G+ URL in the Google+ field.

"...content written by established experts carries more authority, and ranks higher than content with less-credible authorship or no authorship whatsoever. By facilitating the development of internal subject experts and encouraging them to publish on the company blog (and on their own personal blogs), employers can reap tangible rewards that will impact their business's bottom line."

— Steven Shattuck,
writing for Search Engine Journal



How to optimize a web site

Site maps and sitemaps

One of the first things you want to do when you restructure your site or add a new piece of quality content is add it to your site maps. You don't need to do this with every blog post, but you should list every main page in your website that you would like your visitors to be able to find. Including pages in a site map doesn't guarantee that the search engines will index them, but it helps.

There are two major types of site maps, and you need both:

- An HTML site map is a standard web page that is public-facing and intended to help real people
- An XML sitemap is a file written in computer code (Extensible Markup Language) that's written only for search engines and is not public-facing. It isn't linked where people can find it, and most people couldn't understand the code even if they found the file

Note the different spellings: HTML site maps use "site map." XML sitemaps use the term as one word, "sitemap".

HTML site maps

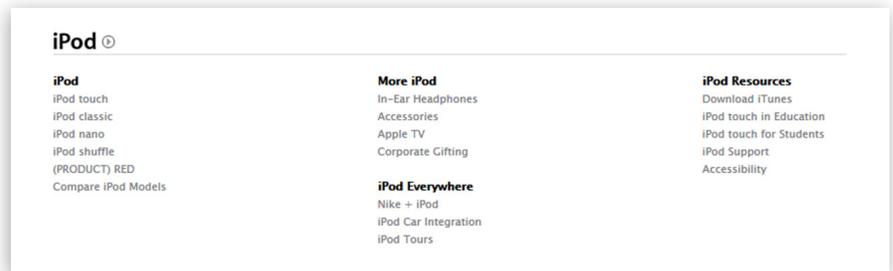
HTML site maps are intended to make a visit to your site easier for your visitors. People navigate the web in different ways, so you want to give them multiple ways to find your content.

A site map lets people find specific pages without having to go through menus or other navigation. Since HTML site maps are treated like any other web page on your site, they're also a good way for search engines to discover more of your pages. In general –

- If your site has fewer than 200 pages, you can include everything in one site map
- If your site has 200 or more pages, consider a main site map that has the top level pages and links to category-specific site maps

Your task-oriented visitors aren't there for pretty graphics; they don't want to read paragraphs of text, and they don't want to spend a lot of time trying to figure out which link they should click. Give

them a nice, clean layout with logical headings, subheadings, and page names. Apple does a good job with their site map. It's categorized into major product categories, such as "iPod":



It's good to include a link to the site map in the footer of every page. People expect to see it there, so it is easy for them to find. Since search engines look for page links and this is a page link, search engines will discover it (and therefore every page on your site) if they discover any page on your site.

XML sitemaps

An XML sitemap is a file created specifically for search engines. Having one won't guarantee the search engines will index all of the pages in your site, and won't influence how the pages rank.

Shop the [Apple Online Store](#) (1-800-MY-APPLE), visit an [Apple Retail Store](#), or find a [reseller](#).

[Site Map](#)

[Hot News](#)

[RSS Feeds](#)

[Media Info](#)

[Environment](#)

[Job Opportunities](#)

[Contact Us](#)

But it is the quickest and easiest way for search engines to learn about your pages and give you the best chance to get them indexed.

Since sitemaps are intended for search engines instead of human visitors, there is a specific format for the file that you must follow. The sitemap must:

- Begin with an opening `<urlset>` tag and end with a closing `</urlset>` tag
- Specify the namespace (protocol standard) within the `<urlset>` tag
- Include a `<url>` entry for each URL, as a parent XML tag
- Include a `<loc>` child entry for each `<url>` parent tag
- All other tags are optional

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9">
  <url>
    <loc>http://www.example.com/</loc>
    <lastmod>2005-01-01</lastmod>
    <changefreq>monthly</changefreq>
    <priority>0.8</priority>
  </url>
</urlset>
```

All URLs in a sitemap must be from a single domain, such as "www.example.com" or "store.example.com". You can see more examples and all the options at:

<http://www.sitemaps.org/protocol.html>

Once you have your XML sitemap ready, upload it to Google Webmaster Tools by going to **Optimization > Sitemaps** and choosing **Add/Test Sitemap**.

Webmaster Tools

- Dashboard
- Messages
- Configuration
- Health
- Traffic
- ▾ Optimization
 - Sitemaps**
 - Remove URLs
 - HTML Improvements
 - Content Keywords
 - Structured Data
 - Data Highlighter
 - Other Resources
- Labs

Image search

Once you have a standard XML sitemap, you can expand it to include your images. This will help search engines such as Google discover the images you have on your site, so those images can be included in image search. Like the standard XML sitemap, there is a specific format to follow for image search and the details can be found at:

<http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=178636>.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9"
  xmlns:image="http://www.google.com/schemas/sitemap-image/1.1">
  <url>
    <loc>http://example.com/sample.html</loc>
    <image:image>
      <image:loc>http://example.com/image.jpg</image:loc>
    </image:image>
    <image:image>
      <image:loc>http://example.com/photo.jpg</image:loc>
    </image:image>
  </url>
</urlset>
```

Video search

A video sitemap is another addition to your XML sitemap. It's the most complicated of the sitemaps, but if you have video content you would like people to discover in search engines, it's worth taking the time to expand your XML sitemap to include it. Video content includes web pages which embed video, URLs to players for video, or the URLs of raw video content hosted on your site.

Each URL entry must contain the following information:

- Title
- Description
- Landing page URL
- Thumbnail URL
- Raw video file location and/or the player URL (SWF)

You can learn more about video sitemaps at

<http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=80472>

```
<urlset xmlns="http://www.sitemaps.org/schemas/sitemap/0.9"
  xmlns:video="http://www.google.com/schemas/sitemap-video/1.1">
  <url>
    <loc>http://www.example.com/videos/some_video_landing_page.html</loc>
    <video:video>
      <video:thumbnail_loc>http://www.example.com/thumbs/123.jpg</video:thumbnail_loc>
      <video:title>Grilling steaks for summer</video:title>
      <video:description>Alkis shows you how to get perfectly done steaks every
        time</video:description>
      <video:content_loc>http://www.example.com/video123.flv</video:content_loc>
      <video:player_loc allow_embed="yes" autoplay="ap:1">
        http://www.example.com/vidoplayer.swf?video=123</video:player_loc>
      <video:duration>600</video:duration>
      <video:expiration_date>2009-11-05T19:20:30+08:00</video:expiration_date>
      <video:rating>4.2</video:rating>
      <video:view_count>12345</video:view_count>
      <video:publication_date>2007-11-05T19:20:30+08:00</video:publication_date>
      <video:family_friendly>yes</video:family_friendly>
      <video:restriction relationship="allow">IE GB US CA</video:restriction>
      <video:gallery_loc title="Cooking Videos">http://cooking.example.com</video:gallery_loc>
      <video:price currency="EUR">1.99</video:price>
      <video:requires_subscription>yes</video:requires_subscription>
      <video:uploader info="http://www.example.com/users/grillymcgrillerson">GrillyMcGrillerson
        </video:uploader>
      <video:live>no</video:live>
    </video:video>
  </url>
</urlset>
```

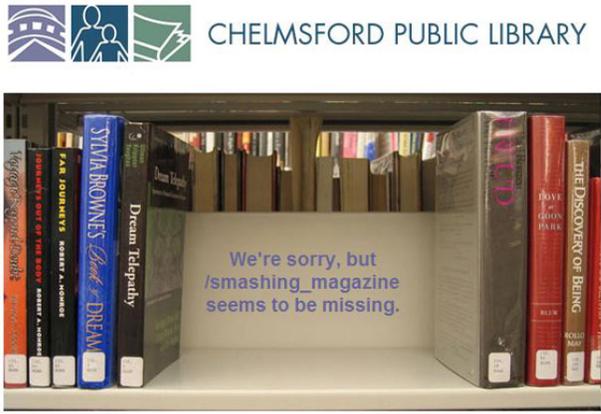
Custom 404

No matter how careful you are, people will occasionally get to a page on your website that doesn't work. Perhaps you moved a page and forgot to set up a redirect, or maybe you mistyped an internal link when you were building a page. Sometimes it is completely out of your control; perhaps the visitor mistyped a URL, or another website linked to a page on your site that doesn't exist. By default, every web server will return an error message with some version of "404 Page Not Found" when this happens. By now, most people know that this means something went wrong and they'll just move on, but there is a better way than an unsympathetic generic page.

All web servers give you the ability to configure a custom 404 page. This is a standard web page you design to appear whenever someone tries to access a page that doesn't exist. You want to ensure that it offers the visitor options to find what they're looking for, with links to useful places. This is good for both visitors and search engines. Visitors are more likely to have a positive experience with your brand; search engines still have links on your site that they can follow and discover new content to index.

When you create a custom 404 page there are a few things to keep in mind:

- The page is there to help people understand where they are if they get lost.
- Something went wrong and your visitor ended up on this page instead of the page they were expecting. Make sure they have a positive experience and use this as an opportunity to reinforce your brand
- Provide links back to the main domain, ensuring users and search engines can access other pages on your site.
- Link to key content
 - Important/popular pages
 - Articles/videos
 - Contact information
 - Sign up for a demo
 - Link to the site map



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- Email us with what you're looking for: askus@mvlc.org
- Contact the Reference Desk and we'll help you:
 - 978-256-5521 x211
 - <http://www.chelmsfordlibrary.org/reference>
- Find a nice book in our catalog, a comfortable place to sit, and just read.

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There are a number of great examples of custom 404 pages from the basic glorified site map to the humorous; just for fun, search for “custom 404 page examples”. If you want to see what a specific website is doing for their 404 page, go to the website and try and access a page you know won't exist. For example, if you want to see Apple.com's 404 page, you could paste this string into your browser: <http://www.apple.com/asdf>.

Canonical URL

This is one of the most important things you can do to improve your SEO and is the only thing in this eBook that doesn't provide a direct benefit to the visitor.

One of the key factors in how a page ranks in the search engines is how many high quality links are pointing to that specific page. If your website resolves with both **www.your-domain.com** and **your-domain.com** (no www), both versions will get links. Since the search engines treat www and non-www as separate sites, they will not combine the link scores from two versions of the same page. This means your pages are essentially cannibalizing each other, with this result: the version of the page you care about most will not rank as well as it could.

These four URLs will each be ranked separately, and any links will be shared among them indiscriminately:

- www.company.com
- company.com/
- www.company.com/index.html
- company.com/home.asp

To fix this, you need to choose a canonical URL and make it the standard for your brand. Decide if you want your website to show up with or without the www. With the www is more common, but it's a matter of personal preference and doesn't make a technical difference. Pick one and stick with it. Once you have decided which version you want to use, your webmaster will need to configure the canonical URL to be the one you selected.

Another common situation calling for a canonical URL is when several pages list the same set of products. For example, one page might display products sorted in alphabetical order, while other pages display the same products listed by price or by rating. If Google knows that these pages have the same content, it may choose to index only one version. Through using a rel:canonical you can suggest to Google: "Of all these pages with identical content, this page is the most useful. Please prioritize it in search results."

301 redirect

When this is accomplished, all links, clicks, traffic, etc. from the versions you didn't select must be redirected to the version you did. Just make sure your webmaster sets up a 301 redirect instead of a 302 redirect. They should know to do this without prompting, but it doesn't hurt to make sure. A 301 redirect lets the search engines know that the content is permanently moved and they should apply all value from the old page to the new page. A 302 redirect tells the search engine that the move is only temporary and that they shouldn't pass on any value to the new page.

For Act On, we selected **www.act-on.com** as our canonical URL. If you go to the address bar in your web browser and enter **Act-On.com** or click a link that takes you to **Act-On.com**, you will notice that the address is automatically changed to **www.act-on.com**.



URL hacking

Web visitors are getting more sophisticated at finding the content that interests them. One of the things people are starting to do is hack URLs. This isn't a malicious attempt to try and access parts of your site or get information that you don't want them to have – it's a way for them to get more of your quality content without having to go through your navigation menus.

The key to this is: Most quality sites have started using standard directory structures within the site. These directories may be different from every other site out there, but they're consistent within the site, which means people can use logic and intuition to find what they want. Web visitors are starting to learn that if you edit the URL to remove the part specific to the page the visitor is currently on, they can get information that's one step (or more) closer to the home page.

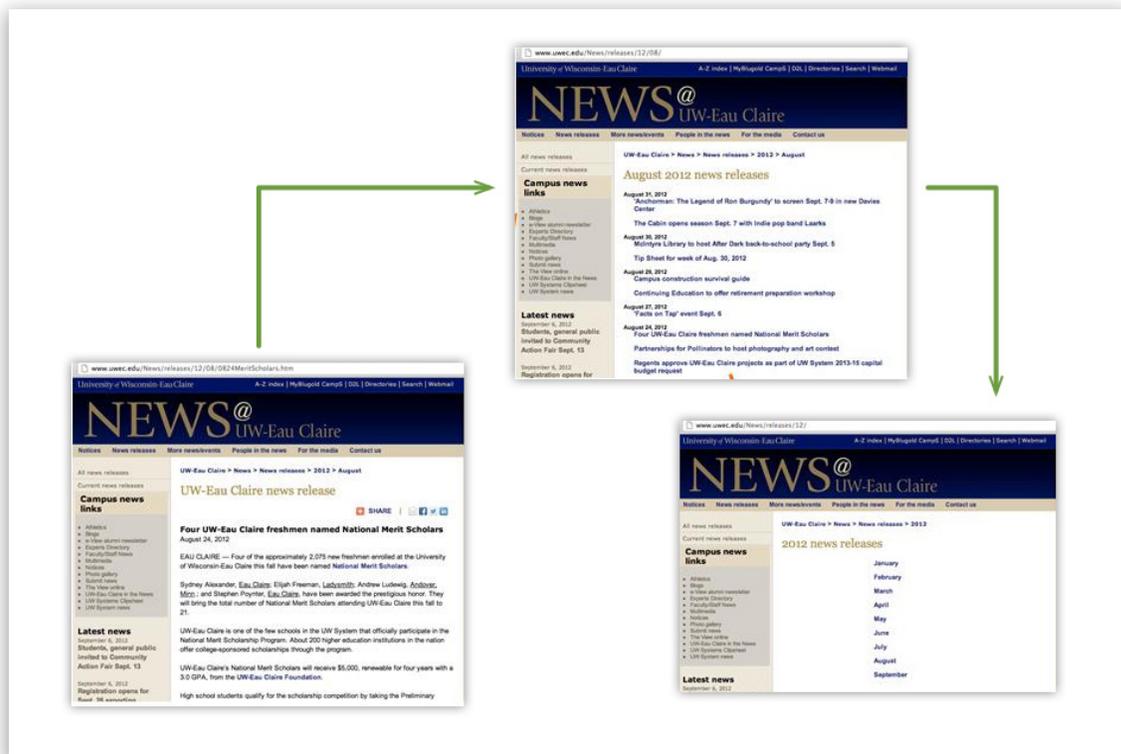
For example, if someone is on www.example.com/white-papers/this-is-a-white-paper.html and they delete “/this-is-a-white-paper.html”, they’ll probably find themselves on a page that displays a list of all white papers on the site. This is often faster and easier than going through the menu structure to figure out where the list of white-papers is.

You’ll need to work with your webmaster to get this structure configured in your system and the directory-level pages (e.g., a list of all white papers) will need to be created, but it is well worth the effort. It gives your interested visitors more ways to choose their own path through your site to access your content...and you’re providing search engines an additional source of links.

The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire does a nice job of this in their news section. If you go to <http://www.uwec.edu/News/releases/12/08/0824MeritScholars.htm> you can read a news article about four of their freshmen being named National Merit Scholars.

If you delete the page name “/0824MeritScholars.htm” from the URL, you get <http://www.uwec.edu/News/releases/12/08> where you can see all of the news articles from August 2012.

Delete the “/08” and you get <http://www.uwec.edu/News/releases/12>, which displays all 2012 news releases and allows you to select a month. You can continue the process back all the way to the home page.

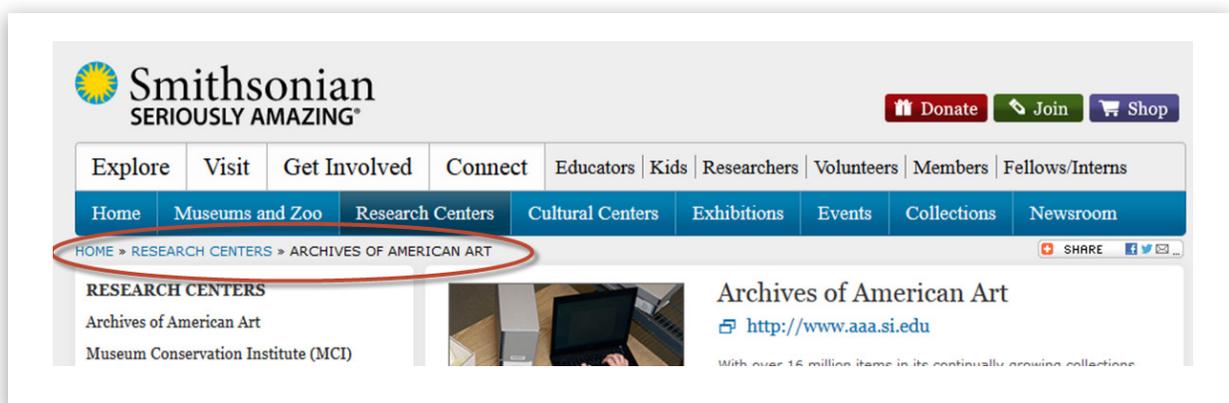
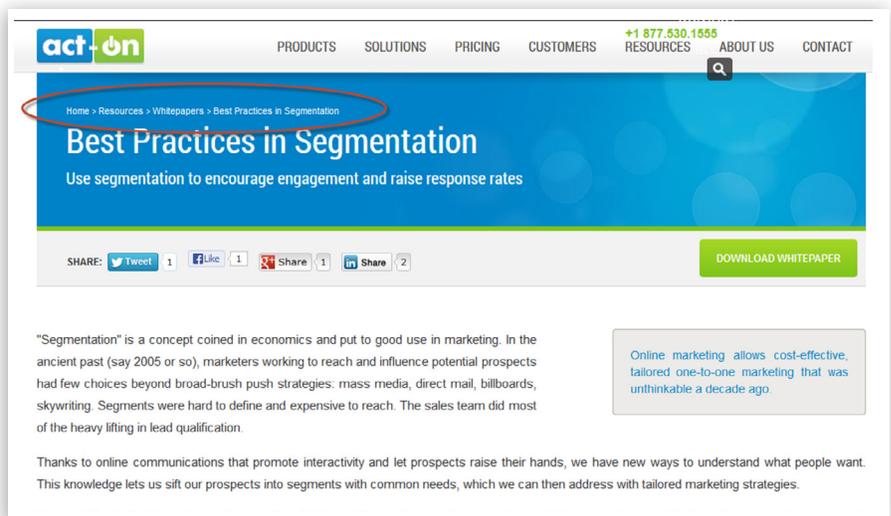


Breadcrumbs

Like most of the other suggestions in this eBook, breadcrumbs are a useful tactic to help both your site visitors and the search engines crawling your site. Breadcrumbs take their name from the Hansel and Gretel story, and are useful for helping your visitors find their way. They differ in a significant way; they are not a literal representation of the path your visitor took to get to the page they are on. Breadcrumbs are instead a representation of where the current page lives in the site hierarchy.

Breadcrumbs typically live in the upper left corner of a page (below the primary navigation) and are an easy way to both set the context of where the content lives in your site and help your site visitors navigate to higher level content. This is usually similar to the results your visitors could get from URL hacking, but it's more obvious and accessible, something you provide rather than making your visitor do the work. Since these are standard links, search engines will follow them, so breadcrumbs increase the odds that a search engine will discover your content.

Google believes breadcrumbs are important to help visitors understand the structure of the site and how the specific page fits into the site hierarchy. It will include breadcrumb navigation in search results when it can.



Social media and SEO

Along with optimizing your content and your pages, you should have a social strategy for SEO. Social media can include keywords that drive traffic to your website.

Social signals increasingly impact how websites rank in the search engine results pages. According to Moz:

- Social signals are very important in the early stages of ranking. If your article gets shared by many influential people you get a higher exposure for a limited amount of time.
- Social signals are not enough to keep that article ranking well, but the exposure may encourage people to link to your article, which does help in the long run. Google will pick up those links and add ranking signals to your article.

Pay attention to structure

Make sure you include social channel buttons that link to your various social networks on every page of your site, and also add social share buttons to every blog post and press release, and in all your outbound communications. This makes your content easier to share and so more likely to be shared, which encourages higher rankings. Once again, publishing good content is the best bottom-line strategy for getting people to visit your website.

Pick the right channels

Know your audience, and focus on the channels they use. The goal is to position yourself to be found, in the places you know people are looking, and leverage the keywords that work for you. You're better off to do a thorough job in just one channel rather than make a poor showing in three.

- Share content that has value for your contacts.
- Be a real person with broad interests and catchy ideas, not just a sales machine.
- Listen well, and engage. Retweet others' content, and thank people when they retweet yours. Generosity looks very good socially.

Pay attention to Google+

As of March 2013, Google's share of the search market stood at 67.1, a position that hasn't vacillated much in the past. Google has made it very clear that social signals play a role in its algorithm. Since many search results from Twitter and Facebook are restricted, the social network that can affect page ranking the most is Google+.

- Make sure a number of your employees, especially those who blog, tweet, or post, have Google+ profiles that are connected to your website.
- Share your good content on Google+, and make sure you've got a Google+ button wherever you publish social icons.

SEO Glossary

301 redirect: A redirect which lets search engines know that the content which formerly could be found through a particular link has been permanently moved to a different page.

404 page: The “Not Found” error message. It’s most commonly displayed when site visitors follow a link or do a URL hack to a missing or non-existent page. It’s also an opportunity to help the visitor find what they’re looking for, by offering links to a sitemap or other pages.

Alt text: Text used with images and other non-text contexts to describe what the image/figure/etc. shows. Used because search engines can navigate only on text.

Analytics: Purchase, survey, and panel data collected through demographic studies, customer segmentation, campaign results, and other techniques. Used to understand and communicate marketing strategy, as well as to evaluate the outcomes of campaigns or efforts and to guide decisions for investment and targeting.

Anchor text: Text that’s visible to users and hyperlinked. Anchor text gives both the reader and search engines relevant descriptive information about the content of the link’s destination

Authority: The amount of trust with which search engines credit a site for a certain search query. It’s derived from related incoming links from other trusted sites, as well as from verified online profiles.

B2B: Business-to-business.

B2C: Business-to-consumer.

Back link: A link to a page or site, from another page or site.

Body content: The main content of a page.

Bounce rate: The ratio of users who enter and leave a website on the same page, without viewing any other pages.

Breadcrumbs: A list of words separated by a symbol, often the “greater than” sign (e.g., Home > Products > Inbound), that represents where the current page lies in the site’s page hierarchy. Usually found in the upper left corner of a page, below the primary navigation.

Canonical URL: The link element in a URL that webmasters use to specify the preferred version of a webpage. This helps search engines recognize which page is authoritative in the case of duplicate content.

Conversion: Completion of a quantifiable website goal. Examples: Ad clicks, sign-ups, sales.

Google authorship: Google has begun to include authorship in determining the authority and quality of a page; it uses Google+ profiles as “verified online profiles”. Content creators need to claim the content they produce, on Google+ and on the other websites to which they contribute.

H1 headline: The main headline of a page.

H2 headline: A subheading.

Head word: A general key word (or phrase) intended to attract the buyer who is early in the buying process and doing broad research. An old search engine marketing adage: "Use head keywords to generate volume and long tail keywords to generate profit."

HTML site map: A bulleted outline text version of a site's navigation, displayed as a public-facing webpage. Intended to be read by people rather than search engines (see "XML sitemap").

Impression: A unique exposure of a page (or ad, etc.) to a viewer.

Index (verb): To add a webpage to a search engine index.

Keyword: The word or phrase for which you want searchers to find your page via a search engine.

Keyword density: The ratio of keywords to content. High keyword density copy may read as awkward and unnatural.

Link: Something on a web page that when clicked on causes the browser to move to another page, or another section of the current page. Usually text or an image.

Long tail keyword: A keyword that contains multiple words, often five to seven or more. People looking for something very specific tend to use long tail keywords. Example: "Goldfish" is a head keyword (31+ million results); "can I make my own goldfish crackers at home" is a long-tail keyword (128,000 results).

Meta description: The description that appears in your listing in search engine results, under the title tag. Use it to set the reader's expectations.

Organic results: Results retrieved by search engines and ranked purely by their relevance to the search query. There is no advertising in organic search results.

Paid results: Pay-per-click (PPC) ads placed by advertisers or third-party advertising networks and displayed according to a formula that includes how much the advertiser pays, how relevant the ad is to the keyword, and the quality of the landing page.

Panda: A 2012 Google algorithm update designed to lower the rank of low-quality sites, advertising-heavy pages, and duplicate content.

Penguin: A 2012 Google algorithm update that looks for and devalues link spam.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): The process of making a site and its content highly relevant for search engines and searchers.

Target audience: The people your content is written for; the ones you want to visit your site because you believe them to have the potential to take an action you desire, such as make a purchase.

Title tag: A title which describes a page. It is displayed when someone bookmarks your page, in search results, and at the top of a browser window.

URL hacking: When web visitors edit your URL to access parts of the site, rather than using a site map or going through navigation menus.

XML sitemap: A file written in computer code (Extensible Markup Language) that's written only for search engines and is not public-facing (see "HTML site map").