Search Engine Optimization

A A R O N   M A T T H E W   W A L L

Search Engine Optimization Book

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Chapter 3 covers many non search related Internet topics. I included this because if you do well with many of the "non search" related topics it becomes far easier to build a linking campaign and achieve top search engine placement. **For competitive phrases link popularity and the words in those links are the single most important part of SEO**. But to get the right types of people to want to vote for you your site needs to do many things well.

With most websites conversion and profit are more important than the shear amount of traffic you get. Making small changes within your site can double or triple your conversion rate. If you do everything else correctly you do not need to put as much effort into SEO.

If you already know the topics covered in chapter 3,feel free to skip over them. More than trying to answer all questions about the web, chapter 3 is there to help point you toward answers to other Internet business related questions you may have.

Before getting too heavy into S.E.O., think if the idea you have is one that will be easy to spread. If it is not, think of how you can transform that idea into an idea that is easier to spread.

It is usually far easier to create an idea worth spreading than it is to spread an idea not worth spreading.

Disclaimer: Since search engines are constantly changing and keeping their algorithms as closely guarded secrets, there is no way to know the exact algorithms at any given time. This information was compiled from my

observations of search engines over the past few years. Hopefully, this book teaches you how to make informed observations as things continue to change.

With enough experience and observation one can deduce patterns and figure out pieces of the puzzle. This guide was created to help you solve that puzzle in much the same way others have.

While following this guide should help improve your rankings, the author of this book shall not be held responsible for damages because of the use (or misuse) of this information.

How to Read this e-book

There are many sections in this e-book. Most of them relate to search marketing, although some of them relate to other aspects of the web.

While I actively market this book as being about S.E.O., it is actually more about everything I know about the web. While there are many guides to how and where to start on the web, most of them are laced with affiliate links and bogus recommendations. The goal of this guide is what I had wished I read when I jumped on the web a few years ago. I also reference the most useful resources I found in each field so that if you are interested in learning more about those subjects you can see what I recommend.

Some areas might read well, whereas others might be a bit choppy. The reason for this is that I rewrite sections of it frequently. What started off as a 24 page file is, a couple years later, a couple hundred pages long. I try to reread it as often as I can without getting burned out from reading it too much. It is a hard balance to strike to keep learning and keep updating everything I have learned. At the same time, I have to learn about search in depth so that I can also provide better-than-average information about that topic.

If you already know a topic covered in a certain section of this book, well then, you may not learn much, or anything from that section. I don't expect to be able to tell a 20 year professional copywriter how to do her job. The point of the other sections is that S.E.O. works much better as a marketing mechanism if you use it in conjunction with other ideas and do not do S.E.O. on an island.

S.E.O. as a Standalone Product

Search algorithms are still in their infancy. Many people will still be able to run successful businesses doing nothing but S.E.O. for at least a few years to come. When I was new to S.E.O., and only knew a bit about it, I did not have a strong brand or understand marketing well. I did things like rank people for terms worth hundreds of thousands of dollars while charging them a one time $300 fee. Did my efforts pay off? Sure, but due to business ignorance I still almost wound up bankrupt because I undercharged for services.

As you learn more about the value of S.E.O., and how it integrates into the web, you should be able to increase your income or social reach significantly. Only by pairing S.E.O. with other marketing methods or viewing the web through a larger lens will you be able to fully appreciate the value of S.E.O.

If you do not know what P.P.C., C.S.S., S.S.I., C.M.S., or many of the acronyms mean, it does not make sense to try to learn all of them in one day. It took me a couple years to learn the stuff I wrote in this e-book. With that said, in many areas it is adequately sufficient to understand the concept of how or why something works without knowing all the deepest details.

On top of being a book to read, I also wanted this book to act as a reference guide. The index makes it quick and easy to flip through to a specific area if you want to look at something more in depth later.

While some of this guide talks about technical details, they may not be that important for the average webmaster to know. For example, latent semantic indexing finds mathematical patterns in language and determines what concepts a page represents using mathematics to represent those words. All most people

really need to know about latent semantic indexing is that those types of algorithms would favor natural writing over unnatural keyword stuffed gibberish.

There are many other algorithms and ideas driving search, but at the end of the day, the end goal of all the algorithms is to favor useful content so the results are relevant, which, in turn, allows the engines to make more money serving ads.

Content has many meanings though, and there are different ways to make content useful to different people. As much as this is an exact guide for what you should do to promote your site, some of the ideas in this e-book are also there to spark your creativity to help you think of ways to gain strong advantages over your competition.

Any internet marketing method that is exactly formula based misses the social aspects of the web, and falls into at least one of the following groups

- Leaves footprints that are easy to detect and discount

- Leaves footprints that are easy for competitors to duplicate

- Does not consider your strengths and weaknesses, and thus has you waste time focusing on a formula instead of working off your strengths and shoring up your weaknesses.

- Is easily beat in the search results when an open minded creative competitor leverages the social aspects of the web.

The goal of this book is to help you think up unique ideas that help you build real value, social / business relationships, and competitive advantages that are hard to duplicate.

Questions, Comments, & Concerns

Some people ask for me to do ten hours worth of competitive analysis for free. Generally I can't do hours of consulting for free, but if you have a quick question or do not understand something please make sure you e-mail me so I can try my best to help you.

You bought this book hoping to get useful and easy to understand information, and that is my goal. I have probably read millions of forum posts and web pages, so many of the random thoughts scattered throughout this e-book might not make a bunch of sense to someone who has not done the same. Some of the ideas came from errors I made on my sites, and some of them came from errors friends made.

Most sites do not end up getting banned or penalized from search engines without reason, although on rare occasion it does happen. Sometimes engines are quick to respond, and sometimes they do not care much. As you learn more about **why** they do certain things and **how** the business aspects play into the algorithms it becomes easier to evaluate where they might go and how they might try to go there.

S.E.O. is both reactive and proactive.

If a section of my e-book is not clear to you, or does not make sense then that is my fault and I should explain it to you. Feel free to send me an e-mail if you have ANY questions.

This book is primarily my voice and how I understand the web. To help give you a broader perspective beyond my own I also interviewed many search, marketing,, and web experts. I recommend you also read the interview bonus at http://www.seobook.com/seo-interviews.pdf

Best of luck with your sites,

-Aaron

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Chapter

1

Why Search?

S earch engines take advantage of reverse broadcast networks to help save time and money. They are instant answer systems that provide ultra targeted advertising.

Search allows you to "sell what your customers want, when they want it!"

Finding Prospects

I had just finished reading Permission Marketing when I exchanged in one of the most interesting chat sessions of my life. A random kid from California instant messaged me to say hello. In much the same way as other marketers do, he scouted the web to find his ideal client. This guy searched through Yahoo! profiles and found that on my profile I wrote that I collected baseball cards.

He wanted to know if Barry Bonds was my favorite player. He told me he had over 16,000 Barry Bonds cards. I told him that I had an autographed serial numbered Barry Bonds rookie, but baseball cards did not mean much to me anymore.

I asked if he did business over the Internet. He, of course, said no. It was clear to me why. He had no way to display any of his cards, and he was using spam to contact people. I asked him if he wanted to have a website on which to sell his cards.

He told me he couldn't afford it. He said that it was too expensive. **What is a fair price for limitless distribution**?

Baseball cards, like many collectible commodities, usually drop in value rather sharply once a player retires or that collectible goes out of fashion. Not only does the price drop, but demand plummets. It's a logarithmic loss of value. I have picked up Robin Yount and Dave Windfield rookies for $5 and $8 each (both cards went for $100 or more in their heyday.)

This kid wanted to buy my autographed Barry Bonds rookie card to add to his 16,000 Bonds cards. Even though he'll never sell them, he thought he was doing business. I sold baseball cards back in high school, and I knew how to do it well. I did not learn it well the first day either. I was trying to sell expensive cards to people who did not want to spend much money. What solution did I learn? "Sell what your customers want, when they want it!"

With search you do not hunt for your customers. While they are actively interested in your products or services they hunt for you.

I still displayed some of my $400 and up baseball cards, just to get the 'Oohs' and 'ahhs.' I learned that once you have a crowd, many people follow just to see what is going on, and then you can make sales. I knew I would not sell these cards. So what did I change?

I created a display case with stacks of all the major stars and local popular players. Each card was $1. It did not matter if the card was worth 25 cents or $4, I just put $1 on each of them. I kept up with whom was doing well and would buy up cards of players that were about to become popular. Buy-price ranged from 3 cents to a quarter a card. Most of the cards I bought were considered 'junk' by the sellers, yet I re-sold most within a month or two.

By taking the time to go through their junk and making ordering simple I made money. That $1 display case was a gold mine. Usually, that case sold more cards than my good cases did. Also, I had very little invested -- other than taking the time to organize the cards.

So, I decided I would do this kid a favor and send him a free book on marketing from my favorite author. When I asked him if he wanted a free marketing book he spouted off Eminem lyrics. He got angry when I was trying to help him. He stated a few of the lines around

> "...I'd rather put out a mother **** gospel record..."

All of his frustration he felt, all of his anger, and all the time he wasted were unnecessary. That is why search is powerful. You do not hunt for your customers, they hunt for you. You pick the keywords and the customer picks you. You not only "sell what your customers want," but you also sell it "while they are actively looking for it."

The $1 baseball card case is a good analogy for effective search engine optimization. Imagine the cards in that case as being web pages. It is great to rank well for a term like SEO, but by ranking well for various small volume searches you may be able to make far more money in the long run. Longer search phrases have more implied intent, thus are far more targeted, and convert at a higher rate.

Having a social element to your site or business is like having the $400 baseball card in the case. The people who reference the interesting parts of your site build up your authority. Based on that authority, search engines learn to trust other parts of your site and send visitors to many pages on your site.

You can think of web traffic in a similar way as I thought of baseball cards. Due to the vastness of the market and market inefficiencies there will always be many ways to make money. If you learn how to spread ideas and build an audience you can make a windfall of profits.

Interactive Elements

Resources cited:

Permission Marketing (by Seth Godin) is a book about how to make many micro sales gaining permission with each sale. If that topic interests you then you may want to check out that book sometime down the road.

(http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0684856360/)

Some Notes

- List 5 problems your products solve. Which of these problems are most important to your target audience?

- Is there a problem your product solves that no other products do?

- Do you have a UNIQUE value proposition that will help you stand out in the crowd? (This could be being better targeted, more up-to-date, faster, more reliable, safer, etc.). What do you do better than anyone else?

- List 10 terms or phrases your target audience would search for to find your products.

- Calculate the time you spend prospecting clients and the value of that time.

- Calculate the money you will save if you cut that time in half by ranking well for a few of the terms you listed.

Brief History of the Web

T he web has became a direct marketers dream. In its infancy, the web was based around the core idea of sharing knowledge. The closer your ideas are in some way aligned with this idea the easier it will be to promote your site.

The Goal of Search Engines & How they Work

Search Engine Relevancy:

Many people think search engines have a hidden agenda. This simply is not true. The goal of the search engine is to provide high quality content to people searching the Internet.

Search engines with the broadest distribution network **sell the most advertising space**. As I write this, Yahoo! and Google are considered the search engines with the best relevancy. Their technologies power the bulk of web search.

The Problem Listing a New Site:

The biggest problem new web sites have is that search engines have no idea they exist. Even when a search engine finds a new document, it has a hard time determining its quality. Search engines rely on links to help determine the quality of a document. Some engines, such as Google, also trust websites more as they age.

The following bits may contain a few advanced search topics. It is fine if you do not necessarily understand them right away. The average webmaster does not need to know in depth search technology. Some might be interested in it, so I wrote a bit about it. **If you are new to the web and disinterested in algorithms you may want to skip past this mumbo jumbo right to page 19.**

I will cover some of the parts of the search engine in the next few pages while trying to keep it somewhat basic. It is not important that you fully understand all of it (in fact I think it is better for most webmasters if they do not worry about things like I.D.F. – as I ranked well for competitive S.E.O. related terms without knowing anything about the technical bits of search), but I would not feel right leaving the information out.

Gerard Salton:

The phrase 'vector space model', which search algorithms still heavily rely upon today, goes back to the 1970's. Gerard Salton was a well-known expert in the field of information retrieval who pioneered many of today's modern methods.

If you are interested in learning more about early information retrieval systems, you may want to read *A Theory of Indexing,* which is a quick 50 page book by Salton, which describes many of the common terms and concepts in the information retrieval field.

Mike Grehan's book, *Search Engine Marketing: The Essential Best Practices Guide,* also discusses some of the technical bits to information retrieval in more detail than this book. My book was created to be a current how-to guide, while his is geared more toward giving information about how information retrieval works.

Parts of a Search Engine:

While there are different ways to organize web content, every crawling search engine has the same basic parts. Each consists of:

- a crawler

- an index (or catalog)

- and a search interface

Crawler (or Spider):

The crawler does just what its name implies. It scours the web following links, updating pages, and adding new pages when it comes across them. Each search engine has periods of deep crawling and periods of shallow crawling. There is also a scheduler mechanism to prevent a spider from overloading servers and to tell the spider what documents to crawl next and how frequently to crawl them.

Rapidly changing or highly important documents are more likely to get crawled frequently. The frequency of crawl should typically have little effect on search relevancy; it simply helps the search engines keep fresh content in their index. The home page of CNN.com might get crawled once every 10 minutes. A popular rapidly growing forum might get crawled a few dozen times each day. A static site with little link popularity and rarely changing content might only get crawled once or twice a month.

The best benefit of having a frequently crawled page is that you can get your new sites, pages, or projects crawled quickly by linking to them from a powerful or frequently changing page.

The Index:

The index is where the spider collected data is stored. When you perform a search on a major search engine, you are not searching the web, but the cache of the web provided by that search engine's index.

Reverse Index:

Search engines organize their content in what is called a "reverse index." It sorts web documents by words. When you search Google and it displays 1-10 out of 143,000 website it means that there are approximately 143,000 web pages which

either have the words from your search on them, or have inbound links containing them.

Search engines do not store punctuation, just words. The following example reverse index is overly simplified for clarity. Imagine each of the following sentences is the content of a unique page.

The dog ate the cat.

The cat ate the mouse.

Word	Document #	Position #
the	1,2	1-1, 1-4, 2-1, 2-4
Dog	1	2
Ate	1,2	1-3, 2-3
Cat	1,2	1-5, 2-2
Mouse	2	5

Storing Attributes:
Since search engines view pages from their source code in a linear format it is best to move JavaScript and other extraneous code to external files to help move the page copy higher in the source code.

Some people also use CSS or a blank table cell to place the page content ahead of the navigation. As far as how search engines evaluate what words are first, they look at how the words appear in the source code. I have not done significant testing to determine if it is worth the effort to make your unique page code appear ahead of the navigation, but if it does not take much additional effort, it is probably worth doing. Link analysis (discussed in depth later) is far more important than page copy to most search algorithms, but every little bit can help.

Google has also hired some people from Mozilla and is likely working on helping their spider understand how browsers render pages. Microsoft published visually segmenting research which may help them understand what page content is most important.

As well as storing the position of a word, search engines can also store how the data is marked up. For example: Is the term it in the page title? Is it a heading? What type of heading? Is it bold? Is it emphasized? Is it in part of a list? Is it in link text?

Words which are in a heading or are set apart from normal text in other ways may be given additional weighting in many search algorithms.

Keep in mind, it may be an unnatural pattern for your keyword phrases to appear many times in bold and headings without occurring in any of the regular textual body copy.

If a page looks like it is aligned too perfectly with a topic (ie: overly focused so as to have an abnormally high keyword density) then that page may get a lower relevancy score than a page with a lower keyword density and more natural page copy.

Proximity:
By storing where the terms occur search engines can understand how close one term is to another. Generally, the closer terms are together, the more likely the page with matching terms will satisfy your query.

If you only use an important group of words on the page once try to make sure they are close together or right next to each other. If words also occur naturally sprinkled throughout the copy many times you do not need to try to rewrite the content to always have the words next to one another. Natural sounding content is best.

Stop Words:
Words which are common do not help search engines understand documents. Exceptionally common terms, such as *the*, are called stop words. While search engines index stop words, they are not used to determine relevancy in search algorithms. If I search for *the Cat in the Hat* search engines may insert wildcards for the words *the* and *in*, so my search will look like "* cat * * hat".

Index Normalization:
Each page is standardized to a size. This prevents longer pages from having an unfair advantage by using a term many more times throughout long page copy. This also prevents short pages for scoring arbitrarily high by having a high percentage of their page copy composed of a few keyword phrases. Thus, there is no magical page copy length which is best for all search engines.

The uniqueness of page content is far more important than the length. The three best purposes for page copy are:

- To be unique enough to get indexed and ranked in the search result..

- Create content that people find interesting enough to want to link at.

- Convert site visitors to subscribers, buyers, or people who click on ads.

Not every page is going to make sales or be compelling enough to link at, but if in aggregate many of your pages are of high quality over time it will help boost the rankings of nearly every page on your site.

Keyword Density, Term Frequency & Term Weight:
Term frequency (T.F.) is a weighted measure of how often a term appears in a document. Terms which are frequently occurring within a document are thought to be some of the more important terms for that document.

If a word appears in every (or many) documents then it tells you little about how to discern between documents. Words which appear often have little to no discrimination value, which is why many search engines ignore common stop words (like the, and, & or).

Rare terms, which only appear a few or limited number of documents, have a much higher signal-to-noise ratio. They are much more likely to tell you what a document is about.

Inverse document frequency (I.D.F.) can be used to further discriminate the value of term frequency to account for how common terms are across a corpus of documents. Terms which are in a limited number of documents will likely tell you more about those documents than terms which are scattered throughout many documents.

When people measure keyword density they are generally missing some other important factors in information retrieval, such as I.D.F., index normalization, word proximity, and how search engines account for the various element types. (Is the term bolded, in a header, or in a link?)

Search engines may also use technologies like latent semantic indexing to mathematically model the concepts of related pages. Google is scanning millions of books from university libraries. As much as that process is about helping people find information it is also used to help Google understand linguistic patterns.

If you artificially write a page stuffed with one keyword or keyword phrase without adding many of the phrases that occur in similar natural documents you may not show up for many of the related searches, and some algorithms may see your document as being less relevant.

The key is to write naturally (using various related terms) and structure the page well. I will cover more of the details of search engine optimization later in the book.

Multiple Reverse Indexes:
Search engines may use multiple reverse indexes for different content. Most current search algorithms tend to give more weight to page title and link text than page copy.

For common broad queries the search engines may be able to find enough quality matching documents using link text and page title without needing to spend the additional time searching through the larger index of page contents. Anything that saves computer cycles without sacrificing much relevancy is something you can count on search engines doing.

After the most relevant documents are collected, they may be re-sorted based on interconnectivity or other factors.

Around 50% of search queries are unique, and with longer unique queries there is greater need for search engines to also use page copy to find enough relevant matching documents (since there may be inadequate anchor text to display enough matching documents).

Search Interface:

The search algorithm and search interface are used to find the most relevant document in the index based on the search. First the search engine tries to determine user intent by looking at the words the searcher typed in.

These terms can be stripped down to their root level--drop *ing* and other suffixes--and checked against a lexical database to see what concepts they represent. Terms which are a near match will help you rank for other similarly related terms. For example, using the word swims could help you rank well for swim or swimming.

Search engines can try to match keyword vectors with each of the specific terms in a query. If the search terms occur near each other frequently the search engine may understand the phrase as a single unit and return documents related to that phrase.

WordNet is the most popular lexical database. At the end of this chapter there is a link to a Porter Stemmer tool if you need help conceptualizing how stemming works.

Searcher Feedback:

Some search engines, such as Google and Yahoo! have toolbars and systems like Google Search History and My Yahoo! which collect information about a user. Search engines can also look at recent searches, or what the search process was for similar users to help determine what concepts a searcher is looking for and what documents are most relevant for your need.

As people use such a system it takes time to build up a search query history and a click through profile. That profile could eventually be trusted and used to

- aid in search personalization

- collect user feedback to determine how well an algorithm is working

- help search engines determine if a document is of decent quality (ie: if many users visit a document and then hit the back button the search engines may not continue to score that document well for that query)

I have also spoke with some MSN search engineers, and watched a video about MSN search. They too strongly believe in the importance of user acceptance. If a high ranked page never gets clicked on or if people typically quickly press the back

button that page may get demoted in the search results for that query (and possibly related search queries).

As people give search engines more feedback and it has a larger corpus of data it will become much harder to rank well using only links. The more satisfied users are with your site, the better your site will do as search algorithms continue to advance.

Real-Time vs Prior-to-Query Calculations:

In most major search engines, a portion of the relevancy calculations are stored ahead of time, and some of them are calculated in real time.

Some things which are computationally expensive and slow processes, such as calculating overall inter-connectivity (Google calls this PageRank) are done ahead of time.

Many search engines have different data centers, and when updates occur they roll from one data center to the next. Data centers are placed throughout the world to minimize network lag time. Assuming it is not overloaded or down for maintenance you will usually get search results from the data centers nearest you. If those data centers are down or if they are experiencing heavy load, your search query might be routed to a different data center.

Search Algorithm Shifts:

Search engines such as Google and Yahoo! may update their algorithm dozens of times per month. When you see rapid changes in your rankings it is usually due to an algorithmic shift, a search index update, or something else outside of your control. S.E.O. is a marathon, not a sprint, and some of the effects take a while to kick in.

Usually if you change something on a page it is not reflected in the search results that same day. Linkage data also may take a while to have an effect on search relevancy as search engines need to find the new links before they can evaluate them, and some search algorithms may trust links more as the links age.

Relevancy Wins Distribution!

The more times a search leads to desired content, the more likely a person is to use that search engine again. If a search engine works well, a person does not just come back, they also tell their friends about it, and they may even download the associated toolbar. The goal of all major search engines is to be relevant. If they are not they will fade (as many already have).

Search Engine Business Model:

Search engines make money when people click on the sponsored advertisements. In the search result below you will notice that both Viagra and Levitra are bidding on the term *Viagra*. The area off to the right is also sponsored advertisements for the term Viagra. Google gets paid whenever a searcher clicks on any of the sponsored listings.

The white area off to the left is the organic search results. Google does not get paid when people click on these. Google hopes to make it hard for search engine optimizers (like you and I) to manipulate these results to:

- keep relevancy as high as possible

- encourage people to buy ads

Later in the e-book we will discuss both organic optimization and pay-per-click marketing.

Image of Search Results:

Origins of the Web

The web started off behind the idea of the free flow of information as envisioned by Tim Berners-Lee. He was working at C.E.R.N. in Europe. C.E.R.N. had a somewhat web-like environment, in that many people were coming and going and worked on many different projects. This helped lead some of the ideas behind his eventual World Wide Web creation.

Tim created a site which described how the web worked and placed it live on the first server at info.cern.ch. Europe had very little backing or interest in the web back then, so US colleges were the first groups to set up servers. Tim added links to their server locations to his directory known as the Virtual Library.

Current link popularity measurements usually show college web pages typically have higher value than most other pages do. This is simply a function of the fact that the roots of the WWW started in lab rooms at colleges. It was not until the mid to late 1990's that the web became commercialized.

Early Search Engines

The web did not have sophisticated search engines when it began. The most advanced information gatherers of the day primitively matched file names. You had to know the name of the file you were looking for to find anything. The first file that matched was returned. There was no such thing as search relevancy. The lack of relevancy is what lead to the early popularity of directories such as Yahoo!.

Overture was launched as a pay-per-click search engine in 1998. While the Overture system (now known as Yahoo! Search Marketing) was profitable, most portals were still losing money. The targeted ads they delivered grew in popularity and finally created a functional profit generating business model for large scale general search engines.

Many search engines such as AltaVista and later Inktomi were industry leaders for a period of time, but the rush to market and lack of sophistication associated with search or online marketing prevented these primitive machines from having functional business models.

Commercialized Cat & Mouse

Web = Cheap Marketing:

As the Internet grew in popularity, people realized it as an incredibly cheap marketing platform. Compare the price of spam (virtually free) to direct mail (~ $1 each). Spam fills your inbox and wastes your time.

Information retrieval systems (search engines) must also fight off aggressive marketing techniques to keep their search results relevant. Search engines market their problems as SPAM, but the problem is that they need to improve their algorithms.

It is the job of search engines to filter through the junk to find and return relevant results.

There will always be someone out there trying to make a quick buck. Who can fault some marketers for trying to find holes in search systems that leverage other's content without giving them any kickback?

Becoming a Resource:

Though I hate to quote a source I do not remember, I once read that 1 in 3 people believe the top search result is the most relevant document relating to their search. Imagine the power associated with people finding your view of the world first. Whatever you are selling, someone is buying!

I have been quoted as a source of information on Islam simply because I wrote about a conversation I had with a person from Kuwait who called me for help on the web. I know nothing about Islam, but someone found my post in a search engine...so I was quoted in their term paper. I have also had college professors source some of my sites which I am a bit embarrassed to even admit I own.

Sometimes good things happen to you and sometimes the competition gets lucky. Generally the harder you work, and the more original and useful your site is the more often you will get lucky.

Business Links:

As easy as it is to get syndicated with useful interesting and unique ideas, it is much harder to get syndicated with commercial ideas. Often times links associated with commercial sites are business partnerships.

Many people do well to give information away and then attach a product to their business model. You probably would have never read this e-book if I did not have a blog associated with it. On the same note, it would also be significantly easier for me to build links into this site if I did not sell this e-book on it.

Depending on your skills, faults, and business model sometimes it is best to make your official voice one site and then sell stuff on another, or maybe only add the commercial elements to the site after it has gained notoriety and trust. Without knowing you it is hard to advise you which road to take, but if you build value before trying to extract profits you will do better than if you focus too heavily on doing it the other way around.

Ease of Reference:

If my site was sold as being focused on search and I wrote an e-book or book about power searching it would be far easier for me to get links than running a site about S.E.O. For a variety of reasons, by default, the concept of S.E.O. is hated in many circles. The concept of search is much easier to link at.

Sometimes by broadening, narrowing, or shifting your topic it becomes far easier for people to reference you.

Primitive Search Technology:

As the web grew, content grew faster than technology did. The primitive nature of search engines promoted the creation of content, but not the creation of quality content. Search engines had to rely on the documents themselves to state their purpose. Most early search engines did not even use the full page content either, relying on page title and document name to match results. Then came along the meta tags.

Meta Tags:

Meta tags were used to help search engines organize the web. Documents listed keywords and descriptions that were used to match user queries. Initially these tags were somewhat effective, but over time marketers exploited them and they lost their relevancy.

People began to stuff incredibly large amounts of data (which was frequently off topic) in these tags to achieve high search engine rankings. Some porn and other high margin type websites would have strings in their meta tags like "free, free, free,

free, Disney, free." Getting a better ranking simply meant you repeated your keywords a few more times in the meta tags.

Banners, Banners, Banners:
It did not help anything that during the first web bubble stocks were based on eyeballs, not profits. That meant that people were busy trying to buy any type of exposure they could, which ended up making it exceptionally profitable to spam search engines to show random banners on your site.

The Bubble Burst:
The internet bubble burst. What helped cause such a fast economic recovery was the shift from selling untargeted ad impressions to selling targeted leads. This meant that webmasters lost much of their incentive for trying to get any kind of traffic they could. Suddenly it made far greater sense to try to get niche targeted traffic.

In 1998 Overture pioneered the pay per click business model that most all major search engines rely on. Google AdWords enhanced the model by adding in a few more variables to the equation (the most important one is factoring ad click-through rate into the ad ranking algorithm).

Google extended the targeted advertisement marketing by delivering up contextual advertisements on small and large publisher websites via the Google AdSense program.

More and more ad spend is coming online because it is easy to track the return on investment. As search algorithms continue to improve, the value of having well cited original useful content increases every day.

Advancing Search Technology:
Instead of relying on page titles and meta tags search engine now index the entire page contents. Since search engines have been able to view entire pages, the hidden inputs (such as meta tags) have lost much of their importance in relevancy algorithms.

The best way for search engines to provide relevant results is to emulate a user and rank the page based on the same things the user see (do users like this website? do they quickly hit the back button?), and what other people are saying about the document (for example: does anybody link at this page or site? what is the link text? etc.).

What is Search Engine Spam?
Search engines make billions of dollars each year selling ads. Most search engine traffic goes to the free organic listed sites. The ratio of traffic distribution is going to be keyword dependent and search engine dependent, but I believe about 85% of Google's traffic clicks on the organic (free) listings. Most other search engines display ads a bit more aggressively than Google does. In many of those search engines organic listings get around 70% of the traffic.

Some sites rank well on merit, while others are there due exclusively to ranking manipulation.

In many situations a **proper S.E.O. campaign can provide a much greater ROI than the paid ads do**. This means that while search engine optimizers – known in the industry as "S.E.O.'s" -- and search engines do have business models which may overlap, they may also compete with one another for ad dollars. Sometimes S.E.O.'s and search engines are friends with each other and, unfortunately, sometimes they are enemies.

When search engines return relevant results they get to deliver more ads. When their results are not relevant they lose market share.

I have had a single page that I have not actively promoted randomly send me a commission check for over $1,000. There is a ton of money in manipulating search results. There are ways to improve search engine placement that go with the goals of the search engines, and there are also ways that go against them. **Quality S.E.O.'s aim to be relevant**, whether or not they follow search guidelines.

Many effective SEO techniques may be considered somewhat spammy. Like anything in life, you should make an informed decision about what S.E.O. techniques you want to use and which you should not (and odds are you care about learning, or else you wouldn't be reading this).

You may choose to use highly aggressive crash and burn techniques or slower more predictable and less risky techniques. Most industries will not require extremely aggressive promotional techniques. Later on I will try to point out which techniques are which.

Using Overtly Manipulative Techniques:
While there will always be ways to manipulate the search engines, there is no telling if you will eventually get caught and lose your rankings if you optimize your site using overtly deceptive techniques. In any business such as S.E.O. there will be different risk levels.

Search engines try hard not to flag false positives (label good sites as spam), so there is usually a bunch of slack to play with, but many people also make common mistakes like incorrectly using a 302 redirect, or not using specific page titles on their pages, or allowing spiders to index multiple URLs with the same content. If you are ever in doubt if you are making technical errors feel free to ask me and ask at multiple S.E.O. forums.

The search engines aim to emulate users. If you design good content for users and **build a smart linking campaign**, eventually it will pay off.

New aggressive techniques pop up all the time. As long as they are available then people will exploit them. People will force the issue until search engines close the loophole and then people will find a new one. The competitive nature of web

marketing forces search engines to continuously improve their algorithms and filters.

In my opinion the ongoing effort of keeping up with the latest S.E.O. tricks is usually not worth for most webmasters. Some relational database programmers or people with creative or analytical minds may always be one step ahead, but the average business owner probably does not have the time to dedicate to keeping up with the latest tricks.

Tying ethics to S.E.O. techniques is a marketing scam. Either a technique is effective, or it is not. There is nothing unethical about being aggressive though. You probably do not want to take big risks with domains you can not afford to have blacklisted.

Following Google's Guidance:

Some sites that are not aggressively promoted still fall out of favor on occasion. As a webmaster who follows Google's guidelines you still can not expect Google to owe you free traffic. You have to earn it by making others cite your website.

S.E.O. Feedback Loop:

The effects of S.E.O. do take time to kick in. At any given time, with how dynamically the web changes, there will be some holes in search algorithms which make certain S.E.O. techniques exceptionally effective.

I have spoken with current search engine engineers working at major search engines in regard to this e-book. I also have spoken with database programmers who later became some of the world's most technically advanced S.E.O.'s.

Some of those programmers have told me what some would consider tricks that work really well, but only work really well because few people know about them.

I do not try to promote the latest search spamming techniques in this e-book because:

- They are the most likely to quickly change. Some things that are cutting edge and effective today can become ineffective and actually hurt you tomorrow.

- Some of them can be damaging to your brand.

- Aggressive techniques are the some of the most likely techniques to get your site banned.

- Some things are told to me as a secret, and if they are made openly available to anyone (including search engine engineers – some who have read this e-book) then they lose their value and I lose my friends and resources.

- I do not have a ton of experience with exceptionally aggressive promotional techniques, as I have not needed them to rank well in most the markets I worked in.

- People who use aggressive techniques are not evil or bad, but I can't possibly put accurate, current, useful, and risky information out to everyone in an e-book format and expect it to not cause problems for some people.

- To me, effective web promotion is balancing risk vs reward. This site got on the first page of Google for "SEO" within 9 months of making this site, with less than $5,000 spent on promotion. Most sites do not need to use overtly aggressive and risky promotional techniques. S.E.O works so well because most sites on the web do not actively practice effective S.E.O.

Choosing a Domain Name

Optional Business Models:

Many web based businesses fail because they do not have a functional business model. Before you even chose a name for your site you should know your target audience, what you intend to sell to them, and what will make your business idea unique or different than everything else that is already on the market.

> Before you pick a domain name it helps to know your target audience, what you intend to sell to them, and what makes your site unique or different than everything else that is already on the market.

You can still make significant profits without being sure what you want to sell if you can solve large problems and make life easier for a group of targeted people. At any level, you still have know the goals and reasons why you are creating a site.

My first few sites failed because they had no functional business models. They added little value to the web. That is not to say that I didn't learn from them, because I did. But they led me to creating this one. If you are uncertain of yourself don't be afraid to create multiple channels just to try them out, but if you know you want to do something for the long run you may want to spend a bit of time watching the marketplace before pouring too much effort into making a huge site that is hard to update.

SEO Book.com has done exceptionally well, and it has even revived the value and business models of some of my other sites. The single biggest thing I have going for me is the social currency my blog has created.

A Horrible Domain Idea:

Some people think it is super important to have keywords in a domain. People purchase domains like look-4-buy-cheap-discount-viagra-online-pharmacy.com. This is a horrible domain name!

Keywords in the domain name may help some (as people tend to link at websites using their official names as the link text), but if I were going to create a longterm business I would put brand above keyword rich.

If you are creative you usually can get keywords in the domain while keeping it short, memorable, fairly brandable, and free of hyphens.

Dashed Domain Names:

Search engines do not read the words in your URL if they run together. Many webmasters separate the words in their domain names using dashes. In the past the domain name itself was a significant ranking factor. As search engines have advanced it is not as significant in most cases.

Direct marketing mail campaigns usually peak in effectiveness around the third exposure to a marketing message. Many shoppers look around. If you want them to come back you want to have a domain name which will stick in their heads. It can (and in some cases should) have keywords in it, but the thing you want more than anything else is a name that sticks.

If the option between having the dash in the domain and not having a dash exist you are probably better off going without the dash as it looks more professional and would most likely be more memorable.

It is branding suicide to only have users find your site via search engines. If you are hoping to make sales on the first view in search engines you will need very strong copy writing and usability which is second to none.

If you are just using quick buck lead generation type websites then you may want to use a keyword rich dashed domain for the small benefit it may offer, but in most cases I do not recommend a dashed domain name for long term websites.

Long vs Short URLs:

People will forget the words in a domain which is exceptionally long. Another problem with exceptionally long URL's is that they get cut off in e-mails and some other data transmission types. If you make the idea hard to spread then your site will most likely limit its potential income.

TLD Domain Selection:

Some regional based search engines or indexes will only list sites which are registered in their country code. If your site exclusively or primarily caters to a specific country then you will most likely want to register a domain using the local country code.

Some search engines will still show your site in regional based search results if your site is hosted within that country or have your address and phone number in the page text, but many directories are extremely picky and will only list regional domains.

As search progresses localization of results will become more common. Some of the major search engines already give sites a regional ranking boost based upon where the site is hosted and the domain extension.

If you place your site on your regional domain (.co.uk for example), I also suggest buying the .com version of your domain if it is available and forwarding it to the regional domain you registered.

By buying the .com version and forwarding it your site you help retain traffic you may have lost by people forgetting to put your region specific domain extension in their address bar when they type the website address directly into the address bar.

I prefer to use a .com version of a URL over other generic TLDs. People may assume your site is a .com even if it is .biz, .org, or .info. Using a .com makes it easier to advertise your website off the web.

It is a good idea to place your business location on your web pages. If you are in a country where the search technology is primitive, frequently local searchers will add the country or city name to their searches, and if you have them on your pages you stand to be returned as a relevant result for more searches.

Have a Site for Each Language:

Many hucksters sell some translational cross submission type products that are complete bunk. Essentially you pay them money to accept your check and nothing more. Search engines typically do not translate text on the fly when people search – it is too computationally expensive.

If you use automated software to copy your text into a different language it is likely to read clumsily and turn people off. You are better off not having the text visible on the web if you do not have a person fluent in that language proof the final page copy.

If you have significant content and target audiences in different languages then usually you will want to have a different subdomain or site for each language or major market. This will make it easier to get links from the different geographic or ethnic communities you are interested in without losing focus of your site. It also makes it easy for engines to understand the clear divisions in your site.

Subdomains are best to use if you have a small amount of content about each market. If you have significant content for each market it may make more sense to create a site for each market.

> Using your keywords in your domain name can increase click through rates on search engine listings and paid ads, as well as make it easier to get keyword rich inbound links.
>
> You want to consider the effect on brand and your long term goals before deciding what name to use.

If your site is in an exceptionally competitive category and you have many links that would be hard to replicate, then you might want to use folders (or possibly subdomains) on your main site for each language, instead of trying to build up the link popularity of many different sites.

UK English is much different than English in the United States. Even within the same language you may need multiple versions to cater to different dialects, customs, and tastes.

Branding Your Name:

You may want to get a keyword in your name. By having a keyword in your domain, it will be an easier sale to webmasters that in fact you are "Discount Viagra Online." It only goes so far though!

Any more than about two or three words in the domain name and it becomes less memorable. Some of the most memorable websites do a great job of branding by creating their own word. eBay, Skype, Paypal, Yahoo!, Expedia, Slashdot, Fark, Travelocity, Google...

Most successful businesses are soft innovations though; they may not be able to afford the time, money, and effort required to create, brand, and add a new word to our language. You can create a name which is well related to something people already know. It is easier to market "corn sugar" than it is to market fructose.

Using keywords in your domain name give you a strong competitive advantage over your competitors. Having your keywords in your domain name can increase click through rates on search engine listings and paid ads as well as make it easier to get keyword rich descriptive inbound links.

If your brand is exceptionally strong and your content quality is second to none you still can rank well in the search results after enough related resources reference your site, even if most references do not mention the keywords you want to rank for.

Branding Your Site:

A keyword-rich domain name will make it easy to get inbound link text with your primary keywords in them, but don't forget that your domain name also plays a role in your branding. Your domain name should have your branding in mind as it can help reinforce the ideals of your brand.

On the web there are many different business ideas or business models. If low cost is your business model then you will find people who are willing to work for half your wage that will slash throats to get by on razor thin margins. It is not a way to enjoy life.

Branding is one of the most important parts of building any website or web based business and it is what allows you to establish healthy profit margins. Every Monday Rob Frankel holds free branding clinics on his website. I recommend going to at least one of them and asking a question or two. He also wrote a great branding book by the name of *The Revenge of Brand X.*

Leaving the Keyword Out:

I lived on a submarine for a few years of my life and then was broke for a few years after that. I slept on really bad beds for close to a decade. After I started to do well I wanted to create a website about sleeping. The site is not seriously launched yet, but the domain name I chose was LikeABaby.com.

Using a creative name makes it easier to build a memorable brand than just focusing on keyword phrases.

Branding to an Audience Segment:

A guy I met did not have a large marketing budget but wanted to market a video clip idea. I thought that it would be a great idea to use the viral nature of blogs to market the initial product. I came up with the name BlogFlix.net. The site later went under after some technical errors, but within a few months of being finished it was featured on popular sites such as Smart Mobs.

The Right Domain Name:

I either make my domain names define themselves exactly or I think of a creative way to state its purpose – either way I try hard to get their primary keywords in the domain name. At less than $10 each, you can have multiple domains directed to the same site.

Your best bet is to think of a name that is an extension of who you are.

Another reason to make a domain smaller and easier to remember is word of mouth marketing. Would you feel better referring a friend to seobook.com or seo-search-engine-optimization-marketing-e-book-book.com? Which would be easier to remember and say? If you make a message hard to spread then it will probably spread at a slower rate.

Here is an article about the effect of domain names on anchor text http://www.search-marketing.info/newsletter/articles/domain-name.htm. Since I originally wrote that article Google has got a lot better at detecting natural linkage data, so it is important to ensure you mix your inbound link text. Tips on mixing anchor text are located in the link building sections of this ebook.

Buying Multiple Names:

Often times it is worth it to buy multiple domain names, even if you do not use them all. By securing multiple domain names you can decide to use some of your secondary domains to cover similar thematically related topics AND prevent competitors from purchasing the name.

Within 6 months of me starting the SEO Book.com website someone was already spamming me trying to sell me SEO Books.com. I should have spent the additional $8 to register that domain from the start. You also may want to buy a generic name and the domain name that matches your business and direct them both to the same location.

Example of Breaking Ideas Down into Niche Sites:

I do not recommend buying multiple domain names exclusively for deceptive practices. Most of my sites are about SEO, but you can break ideas down to their core and make useful sites in less competitive markets.

- Search Marketing Info – this site is similar to the contents of this e-book (although the site is somewhat dated). That site is not a well branded name.

I had many concepts on that site which later were extracted and made as their own sites.

- I had a blog on Search Marketing Info. The blog was not successful. I moved the blog from that site to SeoBook.com and it has likely became one of the top half dozen most popular blogs in the SEO industry.

- I had a directory list on Search Marketing Info. I decided to turn that list into a directory of directories and created that idea at Directory Archives.com.

- I listed some bad SEO practices on my Search Marketing Info site. I decided to turn that idea into Black Hat SEO.com.

- Each of the last three sites occasionally spikes in popularity and helps give me a multi brand approach. I would not be anywhere near as successful if I kept all of those ideas inside my first site.

When you spin out micro domains they allow you to try to be humorous or different without necessarily having as much impact on your root brand as if you said and did the same things on your main business site.

There are also tactical business reasons for using multiple sites. If what you are doing might get you sued it may make sense to put it on a non income generating site to try to make it easier to get free legal help if the lawsuit is bogus.

Generic VS Unique Names:

Some businesses will require brand development to become successful. Being a branded SEO makes it far easier to charge a fair rate for my services than if I was unbranded. My original website http://www.search-marketing.info is really a weak brand and was a huge mistake.

There is more than one way to skin a cat, and the same idea can be said for picking a domain name. If you aim to extract long term profits, and want to make the site you are working on become your career then you want to pick a name that is not overly generic.

If you are going to make a generic travel site and are just looking to extract short term profits then an extremely generic keyword rich domain name is the way to go.

I like the idea of creating things that I think add long term value to the web, so I usually opt for branded names over generic names, but either way it is a big help in SEO to get your keywords in your domain name.

Before you pick a name or start building sites you should decide what your goals are with the site. If you are unsure what type of site you want to make or why you want to make it, you may want to participate in web communities to find problems that need solutions and create a personal site until you find what you want to do.

Creating a Topical Website Network:

-- This is an advanced SEO technique most webmasters do not need to do. --

With how many pages there are on the web, quality will usually win over quantity. With that being said, sometimes it will make sense to have multiple similar websites covering slightly different topics. Doing this can help you create topically authoritative inbound links to different sites in your network and give you a multi-branded approach to marketing.

You want to make sure your sites are all different and unique though. If your sites are extremely similar, then your sites may receive a spam penalty or have the nepotistic link popularity discounted. Even worse is that if you interlink them all then all of your sites could get penalized at the same time.

Those using strong brands and good ideas can usually do well without creating a topical network. **If you create a topical network expressly to deceive search engines then you are taking a risk and your sites may get removed from the search indexes**.

Many of the more aggressive techniques are used by people who create crash and burn domain names. They use a site until it gets penalized and then use a new one. They actually start building up multiple other sites and networks before the first even gets penalized. If your brand and domain name are important to you then make sure you use caution to protect them.

Most sites will not need to do this to be successful, but if you do this there are a few tips or guidelines I would suggest using to maximize the benefit of creating a small link network.

- How you wrap (or sell) the content is important. Many blog networks seem to be able to get away with murder right now because they are called a blog network. Other publishers that have tried similar network approaches have got banned for it. Over time how blogs are treated may change though, and any way you slice it you still need to get links from outside your network.

- **Make unique sites:** Make sure each site is unique enough that it can stand on its own merit.

- Only cross link the sites where it is logical. Blogs being part of a blog network might be considered legitimate cross linking if it does not look like it was primarily done to spam the engines.

- **Use various hosts:** This way if any of your sites go down not all of your sites are down. Also some search algorithms can devalue links that come from sites hosted on the same C block IP address. Some hosts also provide random C block IP addresses for each of your sites for a rather reasonable price on a single account.

- **Get inbound links from external sources:** Register your sites with directories and other topical sites to make sure you have plenty of inbound links into your link network. This will help prevent your sites from looking like an island or link farm.

- **Use various link sources:** Each of your sites should not have most or all of its inbound links coming from the same sites as the other sites in your network.

- Do not interlink hundreds of domains together unless you are actively trying to get penalized.

- If you are creating and interlinking sites exclusively for the reason to manipulate search results then you stand a good chance to eventually be penalized.

- You probably do not want to use the same WHOIS data on a large number of sites if the sites are made with deceptive intent. Additionally you may want to register sites at a variety of registrars so there is no discernible pattern. Also if you register a ton of your domains via proxy that too can look somewhat suspicious.

Registering Domains:

I usually register my domains at http://www.GoDaddy.com because they have reasonable prices. Please note that GoDaddy has a shady policy of holding domains hostage if they suspect you of using the domain to spam. It has not hit me yet, but many of the more aggressive search marketers recommend Moniker.com.

If you know you want to stick with a domain name for an extended period of time it makes sense to register the domain for a number of years.

Many low quality crash and burn type sites are not registered for a number of years, so some search systems may give a small amount of additional trust to domain names that are registered through many years.

Domain Registration vs Hosting:

Whenever you **register** a domain make sure you register it at an ICANN accredited **registrar**. Whenever you **host** a domain use a **reliable host**. It is usually a bad idea to cross the two.

When people register a site at a host, it may be hard to renew registration if you want to change hosting providers. Buy hosting from a host and not a registrar. Many registrars do not have good technical support and do not place enough value on their hosted clients, either.

I like keeping hosting and registration separate.

Hosting

Problems With Bad Hosting:

There are a ton of unreliable hosts on the web. Hosting is one thing I recommend spending good money on. If your site is down you may lose customers and spiders may not be able to spider your site.

Some extremely low quality hosts will place hundreds or thousands of domains on a single IP address on a single server. This may cause system lag and overload the server.

Bad hosting prevents customers from finding you and may prevent your site from getting and staying fully indexed in the search engines.

Some hosts will not let you change some of your files or configurations that you need to change when running your site. If you run into those sorts of problems then it may be best to change hosting providers.

Less Common Hosting Problems:

It is not common, but some hosts may be configured incorrectly with the wrong clock time or sending DNS errors that prevent your site from being indexed. You can use a server header checker to ensure your clock time is not way off (like months or years) and your home page provides a 200 code and non existent pages provide a 404 error code.

You also can use Web Bug or the Firefox Live HTTP Headers extension to check your HTTP headers. See the references section at the end of this chapter for a list of online tools.

Some hosts also offer misconfigured servers or place spammy subdomains on sites. Be careful if you use a host like iPowerWeb, as some of their clients noticed spammy subdomains appear out of nowhere. Search engines may penalize your site for this sort of activity. That is yet another reason to go with a reputable host.

Recommended Hosts:

Most of my good sites are hosted by Dreamhost or Pair. Both have provided me with reliable hosting and responsive customer service. Dreamhost allows you to host unlimited domains on a single account for $7.95 a month. Pair costs a bit more for their developer account, but it allows you to host sites on different IP addresses.

Dedicated vs Shared Hosting:

I have found shared hosting to work well for me, though some people recommend using dedicated hosting (which is typically far more expensive). Shared hosting places many domain names on the same IP address & same server, whereas dedicated servers allow you to place just your stuff on a server.

Search engines such as Google usually place spam penalties on domain names and not IP addresses. Although it does happen, rarely does a hosting network get penalized. I believe the SearchKing network is one example where a whole hosting network got penalized, but this is extremely rare.

If you are going to be making major investments into the web then it may be worth it to buy a reliable dedicated server. Off the start I could not afford one, so I used shared hosting. As my business model progressed I later bought a dedicated host for SEO Book.com. Most of my other sites are still hosted on shared hosting accounts.

Free Hosting:

I do not recommend free hosting. With the plague of garbage on the web many people may not be willing to link to sites that reside on a free host. Free hosts usually use your content to build link popularity or put some ugly banners on your site which ruin the page flow and make it look exceptionally unprofessional.

A commercially oriented website needs to show significantly greater quality for me to want to link to it if it resides on a free host.

I have seen some blogs do ok which were hosted at Blogspot, (Blogger's free host) but that exception is based on the fact that blogs are generally more personal in nature and not so commercially driven. Even those blogs would likely be better off if they used a more feature rich blogging engine. Plus if they ever want to move their site it is hard to consolidate the link popularity they built up.

If you create a subdomain from a free site and eventually want to move your site, it may be hard to move some of that link popularity or aged domain trust you developed to the new location.

Cheap Hosting:

There are many risks with bad cheap hosting, but decent cheap hosting of secondary type sites can help diversify your business model and lessen the risk if your main site goes down. Each site you create should be focused on a certain idea or question. One cheap host I have used is 3.75 hosting.

Once I renewed my credit card and forgot to give them my changed credit card details and **my sites immediately went down without warning**. That is just one example of the type of things you can expect from cheap hosting providers.

If you are unsure how reliable your host is you may want to use a tracking service such as Internet Seer.

Host in Your Country:

Many major search engines give sites a relevancy boost if it is hosted in the same location as the local search market. In some locations local hosting may not be economical, but if you are promoting a site primarily geared toward the UK you would want to host that site in the UK.

Interactive Elements

Resources cited:

- Gerard Salton's A Theory of Indexing (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0898710154/)

- Mike Grehan's Search Engine Marketing Book (http://www.search-engine-book.co.uk/)

- Porter Stemming Algorithm (http://www.tartarus.org/~martin/PorterStemmer/)

- WordNet – lexical database (http://wordnet.princeton.edu/)

- The effect of domain name on anchor text: (http://www.search-marketing.info/newsletter/articles/domain-name.htm)

- Rob Frankel's free branding clinic (http://frankelbiz.com/conf/CNFcalendar.php?m=conf)

- GoDaddy domain registrar (http://www.godaddy.com)

- Moniker domain registrar (http://www.moniker.com)

- ICANN domain registration information (http://www.icann.org/)

- Internet Hosting Report (http://www.internet-hosting-report.com/)

- Server Header Checker (http://www.searchengineworld.com/cgi-bin/servercheck.cgi)

- Web Bug (http://www.cyberspyder.com/webbug.html)

- Firefox live http headers extension (http://livehttpheaders.mozdev.org/)

- Dreamhost hosting (http://www.dreamhost.com)

- Pair (http://www.pair.com)

- $3.75 hosting (http://www.3.75-hosting.com)

- Internet Seer – host tracking (http://www.internetseer.com/)

Some Notes

1. Why do you want to build your website? Why should people buy off your site and not Salesman Steve's Super Site? What makes you different?

2. Who is your target audience?

3. Is your goal to play cat and mouse with advancing search engines to extract quick profits, or are you investing for the long term? Neither model is wrong, it

just makes sense to chose one or the other and act accordingly. Sites stuck somewhere in the middle will likely perform poorly. Whatever you do, do it well.

4. List 5 websites you think are amazing and/or you visit daily? Why are they amazing? Why do you visit them often?

5. Create 5 different potential domain names. Make at least 1 of them funny. Make at least 1 of them serious. Tell them to a half dozen people and see which ones are the most memorable. You will get more honest feedback if the people do not know you well.

6. If available buy the domain name with your name in it. As you change you can change this site to be whatever you want.

General Internet Topics

T here is much more work to creating a successful web based business than just S.E.O. Focusing exclusively on S.E.O. is a BAD CALL. Most sites w become more successful from using S.E.O. techniques, but most sites will not become successful based exclusively on S.E.O.

This chapter is dedicated to some other web tips I learned from my personal experiences and lists many of the books people recommended to me.

Learning Your Subject

Good is bad on the web. To be successful you should do something that has not been done before, or do it in a way that is better than what anyone else is doing.

Quantity VS Quality:

Most Internet Businesses Fail:

Many people are in a rush to build, thinking they are ready to cash in on the next gold mine. A ton of money changes hands on the Internet, yet **most Internet businesses fail.** Why? People think they can make something rather large that is pretty good. Logic such as "If I can make a dollar a day off each page and have 200 pages, I would not need to work."

The low cost of content creation can lead to poor document quality. If you say one incorrect thing you may lose the trust of a prospective customer, sometimes for life.

Making information which just turns out to be more clutter rarely makes a long-term successful website. If you don't have passion for what you do, it is much harder to be successful in a completely open environment, especially if workers who have a lower living cost in third world countries can duplicate your work.

Long Term Investment Strategy:

Bambi Francisco asked Mike Moritz (of Sequoia Capital) how he chooses what companies to invest in. He replied, "It's the idea that the founders are doing something that they think is useful for themselves, And, then, eventually perhaps, coincidentally, perhaps accidentally, they discover that the product or service that they have built because they wanted to use something like this is that of great interest to lots of other people."

If you create something that you enjoy which is exceptionally useful, you stand a good chance of being successful.

Cutting Through Clutter:

Numerous people have asked me to promote their 'clutter' sites. The correct answer has been no, no, & no. The whole reason search has become such a successful market is because it helps people **cut through the clutter**.

Each page on a website already has billions of alternatives a click or two away. Each page is important. The most important thing to do is focus on a specific niche...something you are truly interested in.

Be Useful:

Many successful websites are successful because they are syndicated. There are many ways you can work to get your site syndicated, but an often overlooked 'trick' is to simply be the most useful site in your niche.

Amazon is successful because they built features that make it more useful than most other shopping sites. They added value to their product or service by allowing user feedback, related suggestions, used book sales, and "so you want to" collection guides to their pages.

Why did I Make Search Engine Sites?

I am fascinated by search engines. I can build a site about search engines only because I am extremely interested in them. Reflecting back upon my decisions I would probably be more successful today if I would have picked just a specific engine (most likely Google) or a specific type, and expanded from there.

My general rule of thumb is to search for what you want to promote, using your favorite search engine. Click on the first listing. If it is not good enough, then you should be there. If they know more than you, learn from them. If you devote yourself to becoming a guru on a topic that you already love, there is no reason that you can't eventually be the first listing. You are only limited by your own courage, creativity, and efforts.

You can't learn too much about something that interests you. If someone wanted to make a network of local sites I would tell them to research Craigslist. You need to know what worked and where your topic has been to be able to do well with it going forward.

Tragedy of the Commons & Being Worthy of a Subscription:

The Tragedy of the Commons is a story based upon farmers sharing a plot of land, with each owning a few too many cows. As the plot exceeds usable capacity each farmer fights back by adding a few more cows. Eventually the land is destroyed.

Nothing of value can be universally accessible and free. Since it costs virtually nothing to create information (or have a machine generate code for you) a ton is lost on the web if we trust everything we read.

As more and more information is created more and more unoriginal information is duplicated. It gets to the point where sorting through the mess becomes more than most desire to do. This is part of the reason why people use and trust search engines so much.

The solution to the information overload problem is to be so remarkable and interesting that you capture the attention of the audience. R.S.S. and newsreaders (such as Bloglines, Google Reader or FeedDemon) make it easy for people to subscribe to select news channels or websites while blocking out redundant or useless noise.

If you cover a news topic which is saturated you may want to use a news reader to help you organize your news and get the scoop on the latest news as it happens.

The people who are subscribing to RSS feeds are also the most likely to be people who comment on the contents of those sites. If you can figure out a way to get those people to desire to give you their attention, you quickly and cheaply reach the most influential voices.

If you did not own your site is there any reason you would want to visit it multiple times each week? If you figure out how to make that answer "yes", then you are ahead of over 95% of competing webmasters.

In most industries most people will fail or barely get by while there are a few hyper successful voices. Those people who gain many subscribers, and have other people talking about them, will be successful. Competitive markets are largely a game of mindshare.

Tagging Search Results:

Both Yahoo! and Google allow users to sign into accounts and search. Searchers can also tag, or label, the results. Readers might tag my site, using a tag like 'seo', 'search' or 'seo blog'.

Here are examples of tags people used to describe my site

 I do not believe the data is being heavily used to influence search relevancy algorithms, but eventually it may carry some weight.

As the user search history builds and search engines can cross compare search histories between users the tag data may be used to help understand what concepts and other documents a particular document is related to. For example:

- If searchers tag my site as being about 'S.E.O' or 'internet marketing' then search engines may believe my site is about those topics.

- If the same users frequently tag SearchEngineWatch.com and SeoBook.com then a search engine may think that the two websites are related.

- When people tag or link to documents on their own they are likely to use a variety of terms to describe a document. This type of somewhat random and sloppy information organization is known as a folksonomy.

- Yahoo! My web allows you to share what sites you are tagging with your friends.

- Google created a program called Google Co-op, which allows groups of people to create a topical search engine by tagging relevant sites. Google users can then subscribe to allow those results to appear in their search results.

- Yahoo! and Google both have feed readers which they can use to see how popular your site is and how frequently readers visit it.

- If my site ranks well in search results and many users never click on the listing search engines may want to demote my site. If most people who click on my listing immediately click the back button search engines may want to demote my site or flag it for human review.

- Search engines will be able to cross compare user acceptance data (as described in the point above), what sites are being tagged, how those sites are being tagged, and linkage data to determine if the popularity of a site is natural or being manipulated by human intervention.

- If you can think of a way to create a site that people interested in your topic would want to tag then you will be better off than 95% of your competition.

- Tagging somewhat relates to link building. Much later on in the book I cover link building in depth.

Changing Your Site

My Trial & Error:

I was a 'hack and go' sort of person off the start. I have re-made thousands of web pages, most of them by inefficient means. Some of my worst mistakes are: using

frames, trying to become an affiliate of over 1,000 websites, free money scams, and generally creating garbage without learning about the web.

Business & Change:

The Internet is a highly responsive, track-able medium. You should want to change to evaluate consumer response. Successful businesses evolve. Successful entrepreneurs keep learning. Few sites stay on top forever by being stagnant. It's hard to think of change before you even start building your site, but right now, I have hundreds of pages which are reminding me of changes I still need to make.

Creating a Site Design:

Seth Godin offered me some great advice for site design. He said "The best way to make a web page is to steal an outlay idea from another website **that is not directly competing with you**." When you go to make your first web page, do so as a sketch. After you have a good idea, (which is at least slightly different than the site you got your idea from) recreate your home page as a picture in an editor such as Adobe Photoshop. From there, you can pay a design firm to create your page or, create it yourself using a program such as Macromedia Dreamweaver.

If you do not mind using an already existing template OSWD.org is a website which has a bunch of free web designs you can chose from. You can start with one of the designs and modify it to make it look unique. If your site is a blog there are many free blog template sites on the web as well.

Crafting Easy Site Wide Changes:

C.S.S: Cascading Style Sheets

How do you make it easy to change your site? One simple solution is to use cascading style sheets to control the display of your information. When the web was created, the idea was to keep layout and information separate from one another. Using external style sheets allows you to change virtually every aspect of your site by making changes to one file. To do this, put the layout in a sheet called yourchosenfilename.css and reference it in your other web pages. A code similar to the following would go in the head section of your pages.

```
<link href="/style.css" rel="stylesheet" type="text/css">
```

For an example of how powerful CSS is take a look at the CSS house. A couple of the more popular resources on the web about cascading style sheets are the CSS Zen Garden, and W3 school's CSS tutorial page. You may also want to view the official W3C CSS guidance page.

Effects of Change on Branding:

On a daily, weekly, or monthly basis you can choose to change your font type, layout, colors...just about anything. You can do it in minutes and track the results. Some branding experts, however, such as Rob Frankel, believe that changing too frequently could hurt your brand.

Make sure you have a distinct idea of why and how you want to change before you change things randomly. If you realize many things are completely broken then a

Using CSS and SSI or dynamic programming languages is not necessary if you aim to have a small website. If you are making a large site, these technologies can save you many hours in site maintenance.

complete makeover might be in order, but typically it is best to change and test only one thing at a time so you know **the exact effects** of any change.

How C.S.S. Saves Time:
You can link each page of your site into an external style sheet to control the display. Many of the repetitive changes that would be made on every page can be done simply by changing one file. This may not seem like a big deal while creating page five or six, but if your site had 200 pages you would be glad that you used C.S.S.

Cascading Style Sheets are not necessary for smaller sites, but are a great idea if you are building a large content based site. They also can help to improve the content to code ratio.

S.S.I.: Server Side Includes
'Server Side Include' is an Apache server technology which allows you to include pages or parts of a page within another page without the negative side effects of using a framed-based navigation system. To include another file inside of a page, include the following code where you wanted the included page to appear.

```
<!--#include virtual="/includedfile.htm" -->
```

The use of server side includes for common elements such as navigation or advertisements work well to allow you to control your entire site by making simple changes to a single file. Between C.S.S. and S.S.I., you can save literally hundreds or thousands of hours in your site design or re-design.

Server Side Includes also let you include the date last modified or current date in the page. This is often how many of those generic one page sites have the current date in their sales letters.

On my Search Marketing Info site, I use server side includes for the page footer, navigational tabs, local left column navigation, and right side page ads.

You can learn more about SSI by viewing the Apache SSI Tutorial located at http://httpd.apache.org/docs/1.3/howto/ssi.html.

S.S.I. Without Breaking Filepaths:
Webmasters often start out with a smaller site and later decide that they should start using Server Side Includes or a dynamic content management system. To use Server Side Includes many people change their filepaths from .html or .htm to .shtml or .shtm. The problem with doing this is that it can break inbound links. You can get around this by modifying your .htaccess file. To learn more about .htaccess files view the Comprehenvise Guide to .htaccess located at: http://www.wsabstract.com/howto/htaccess.shtml.

C.M.S: Content Management Systems:
Another technique to control the look and design of a site is to use a content management system. There are many dynamic languages people use such as PHP,

Writing an interesting blog ensures you have fresh content available which keeps traffic coming back to your site. In addition blog software can be used as an exceptionally cheap content management system.

ASP and Coldfusion. Most people do not need an expensive content management system though. Before you invest heavily in a content management system or design you should know what the goals of the website are. Make sure any content management system you would consider using produces search engine friendly pages. (More about making a site search engine friendly later.)

Blogs as Content Management Systems:

In my future site designs I will be organizing content with weblog programs such as Wordpress or Movable Type. Movable Type costs $199 (as of writing this) for a commercial license and provides many of the features of expensive content management systems. Movable Type also offers a free one month trial of their web based software by the name of TypePad. If you like TypePad you can host your blog there for a low monthly fee. Blogger, owned by Google, is a 100% free blogging software platform which is rather limited on the feature front. Wordpress is free a downloadable software program which is easy to install.

If you want to give blogging a try, I suggest going to Blogger.com and signing up for a free account. If your site is personal in nature or you like the blog content management system you may not even need to pay for design beyond a site logo. If you are serious about using a blog as part of a business I would recommend using Wordpress or MovableType.

I wrote a couple articles on why I think using blog software is often an outstanding idea for both search engine placement and ease of site design. You can find them at: http://www.search-marketing.info/newsletter/articles/articles.htm#blogs

Professional Looking Design:

It is worth it to pay someone to make a professional looking design for your site. It is very affordable easy to use a default blog template and pay a logo designer $50 - $200 to design a logo for you. My original SEO Book site design was not overly simplistic because I am a minimalist; it was overly simplistic because I am a bad designer. For the first two years it was a default MovableType template with a $99 logo at the top. I eventually paid a few thousand dollars to get a new crisp clean design.

It is very easy to find shoddy logo design, but there are some good ones. Recently I purchased logos from The Logo Company for $75 each. A few times I have been disappointed, but some of their logos came out better than expected. My SEO Book logo was created by EZY Logo, and while their customer support sucks, they do make good logos. I would recommend sending an email prior to making any purchase from EZY Logo, as their customer support has been a bit random. I never got some of the logos I paid for. If you need an exceptionally cheap logo you may want to run a contest at a forum or try to buy a logo from a site like Elance.

I purchased AAA logo design software for $50. I think it is fun to play with, but if you are not graphically inclined, you probably will want to pay someone else to design your logo. Buying a good original logo is an exceptionally cheap one time investment.

Professional Looking Design (Part 2):

Making a site accessible and usable and professional looking might cost you $10,000 or more. If you are low on funds it might make more sense to spend that money on brand building and marketing, but if you want designers and the like to link at you it is much easier to get links if your site looks professional.

Off the start I did not believe that coding errors or design mattered that much, but if you want technical sites to link at you then your site has to pass the sniff test. That consideration is much more important if you write a tech blog then if you run a fairly static ecommerce site.

Copy Writing

Humans do the Buying:

Inevitably, it will be human eyes that see your web page. For example, if my first six chapters had no good advice, you would not read chapter seven.

I am unaware of any automated buying bots which just surf the web to buy things. (There are automated clicking agents which fraud people, and the people who create them should be shot.)

Copy Writing Books:

How do you write for human eyes? I recommend investing in a copy writing book. Some of the books I have read are *Net Words by Nick Usborne*, *The Online Copywriter's Handbook by Bob Bly*, and *Persuasive Online Copywriting by Bryan Eisenberg*. Of the three, I most highly recommend the third. Persuasive Online Copywriting contains a ton of information packed into small convenient chapters, which works out well if you ever need to look at the information again.

Copy Writing Bible:

The above books are a great introduction to copy writing type books, but if you are looking for thorough copy writing and advertising advice, I could recommend no better book than Tested Advertising Methods by John Caples. It is more like an encyclopedia of advertising knowledge from one of the world's best copywriters. It is a bit dated and speaks primarily of print ads, but if you are primarily writing sales copy this is a great book to read.

The above books will also enlighten you with coverage of subjects such as the sales process and different personality types.

Horrible Copy writing:

> We here at XYZ Corporation know what it means to be successful. In fact sometimes we forget that at one point a long long long time ago we weren't the premiere information distribution technology enhancement resource agency facilitator. Times have change though, and we have transfused our corporate mission to account for the discrepancies in the post-modern publishing phenom. We are....us greatest best us us us selfish, etc.

When you create your pages make sure they read well to people versus writing them for robots.

You will need good copy to have a decent conversion rate and to encourage natural linking into your site.

Basics of Online Copy writing:

- Use varying style. Lose corporate speak.

- Be yourself.

- Make it a conversation.

- Make your point up front.

- Don't use jargon.

- Use shorter text. Or, as E.B. White would say, "Omit Needless Words"

- Break up text using headers, sub headers, bulleted lists, and other text breaking devices.

- Stress benefits before features (unless it is a tech heavy product).

An Audience of One:

It is a great idea to sell information. If your copy can connect with a person and get them to feel as though they are working with a person instead of a screen, the sale process is much easier. You do not know who is on the other end of the computer.

People are generally distrusting toward the unknown. If site visitors sense a person is writing **just for them,** they will not want to click away.

Include a Call to Action:

Many beautiful websites have no call to action. It is a great idea to guide the user. Some people use flashing text, <mark>**excessive red coloring or highlighting**</mark>, or other over-the-top techniques which distract the user away from what you want them to do.

Sales pages may want to play off of the emotions certain colors bring out, but with informational or general product pages, the focus should be on ease of use. I recommend avoiding using random misplaced bright colors on most web pages; instead, **make it obvious what action you want the user to take**.

The one exceptionally large blue button on the page…

APPLY NOW

The one that is centered inline in the content area…that's it, that's what I want you to do. Users should be able to do the action you want them to **without even thinking**! Both *The Big Red Fez by Seth Godin* and *Don't Make Me Think by Steve Krug* are books largely devoted to this simple concept.

Page Layout Error:

Even if the sales copy is the exact same, using a slightly different page layout can result in a tremendous increase in profitablility.

For example, when I first started the S.E.O. Book site I only promoted this e-book off to the side. I switched to promoting this e-book on every page right below the page content posts and overnight the sales more than tripled.

Another good example of how page layout can really make a difference in a web campaign, is Howard Dean's presidential campaign. During Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign, they used their blog to cast a vote on whether or not their campaign should accept matching funds. After people voted, they were sent to a landing page. The first day saw 100,000 voters and raised **$248,000**.

They looked at the vote return landing page and noticed that the donate button was at the bottom of the page. They moved it to the top of the page. On the second day, another 100,000 people voted, but they raised **$4,500,000**.

Make it Flow:

Small sentences and paragraphs with common words make writing flow easily. In addition you can make the text easy on the eyes by setting a line height (the area of a line of text and the space above or below it) to at least 120% of the text height, and by using the maximum contrast between your text and background.

The text is the sales person since you have no sales person on your site. It needs to answer questions and arouse appeal toward your products.

Sell Upward:

McDonald's asks "would you like fries with that." Most major corporations know it is easier to sell again to a person than it is to find a new prospect. After a person contacts you or orders something, send them to a thank you page.

Give them small free gifts, strengthen their bond with you, make them feel good about their decision, or try to sell them something else. It does not need to bring in money to be a gain. If they subscribe to your mailing list, you have increased your exposure FREE. Consider giving them options to read other journals which cross promote you.

Or, you could reference affiliated companies. These links can hold discounts which appear as gifts, when in actuality, they make you money. I recently purchased ink cartridges and got 5% off for adding their site to my favorites list. It is much cheaper to give me 5% off than to try to find me again later. The possibilities are endless.

Focus on The User:

The user focus must be on benefits offered to them. Writing the word "you" instead of "we" is a must. The simpler and easier it is for the user to see benefits from her action, the better off they are, and the more conversions you make.

Some techies might like features, but to general audiences it is usually best to place:

1. the audience first

2. benefits second

3. features third (if you are selling to a techie audience they may want the features before the benefits)

Make it a Conversation:

All the above tips pale in comparison to the following tip:

> Write in a conversational tone as a person, not a company.

Fake fluffery does not go well on the web. People can smell it a mile away. Since the web started as a non-commercial entity, there are certain etiquettes (or netiquettes) which dictate how we should act. When we go outside these basic ideas, we not only avoid conversion, but also likely offend our readers.

Many of the people who have bought this e-book told me they bought it because I sounded honest and real. Some of my blog posts are somewhat random, personal or humorous, and some people like that.

GapingVoid.com is a weblog – that some might find offensive for cursing and being blunt – but it talks about creating smarter conversations, and I find his cartoons and copy refreshing for their bluntness.

You can get away without being the best copywriter if you are honest.

Rapid Feedback Loops:

Blogs and websites such as Epinions and Planet Feedback make it easy for customers to see what others have to say about you. Google Groups, Yahoo! Gruops and MSN Groups are additional heavens for complaints. A large portion of the value of the Amazon experience is user reviews and the "X people recommended bla instead of this" area. People have told me they have bought my book due to it being mentioned on book lists on Amazon.

Just be honest. If you are not the best, work to improve! Work from your strengths and focus on something you are the best at. You should also occasionally look and see what others have to say about your service by checking search results. If you solve problems and turn complainers into happy customers you lower your marketing costs.

Customer interaction should be personal, not corporate speak driven. Sometimes you will fall short (as I have many times), but honesty goes a long way. If you find your way into the conversation and are human about it you curb the rants, and may even spurn on a few people who believe in you. An amazing book on how markets are conversations is called *The ClueTrain Manifesto by Christopher Locke, Rick Levine, Doc Searls, David Weinberger* (*ClueTrain* is available free online).

Quality Content:

Lots of people will tell you to create lots of quality content without ever giving a legitimate definition of what quality content is. The web is a big social network, and the trick is to **get your messages to spread further and faster than your competitors**. Usually, creating more pages does not do this as well as creating a better idea.

The web was designed to save people time or give away useful information. The closer you can align a portion of your business model or website with those concepts, the better chance you have at achieving extreme success.

While many S.E.O.'s hold back their secrets so they can profit from them, I give this e-book free to charities and post most of what I learn to my blog. I not only help people, but my syndicated network grows. I have been found by prospective customers from word-of-mouth in forums I have never heard of. One day I got a thank you email from a person from a religious forum and about 10 minutes later got a thank you from a pornography forum.

Multiple Customer Types:

I need some people to want to buy my e-book. Buy my stuff is not an easy message to spread though. I also need other people to link at my site. Just like I need to sell my e-book to people who buy it, I also need to give others a reason why they would want to link at my site.

Working From Your Strengths:

I am typically a bit goofy in the things I say or do. It is why I have created many funny or fun-type websites. It is far easier to be myself than to pull off some sort of act.

I am not the best copywriter and I do not write the best sales letter pages. If you read the *33 Days to Online Profits* e-book that comes as a bonus, it will include lots of content about copy writing. Many of the links are not worth buying from for most people. Much of his information in his report about search engines is inadequate or incorrect.

However, I still note this document because it shows some copy writing techniques that may be helpful. You only need to be great at one thing to be extremely successful on the web. Yanik Silver is good at selling people stuff with compelling copy writing. I do not suggest that you buy most of the stuff he links to in *33 Days to Online Profits*, but I do recommend you glance at how he writes copy.

Write Content to Target the Ideal Prospect:

When you write content, you do not want to create something that makes everyone happy. You want to write to the ideal target customer, because your writing will have the greatest effect on the people you are trying to target.

If you write too broadly, or try to make too many people happy, then your ideal prospects will not convert as well, as they may become disinterested or offended by

attempts to write to less targeted prospects. The lower quality prospects are going to convert poorly no matter what you do.

The reason many hyper focused sales letters are still a mile long is because the people who are most interested in the topic are more inclined to want to keep reading.

I did S.E.O. for a customer. We increased his monthly sales from $3,000 to around $12,000. I then tuned his page copy for his ideal client. With the same marketing spend and same rankings we increased his sales from $12,000 to over $40,000. Even better yet, he was making greater profit from less customers.

Sales Letters:

Some websites are exceptionally transparent in that you can tell they are all about making as much money as they can possibly generate. By reading through the sales letters of various written to sell websites you can see some of the tricks they use to sell.

A hard sell does not make sense for all people (and may offend some of your customers), but I could probably still increase my income by about 50% if my sales letter was harder selling. Sometimes it is a bit hard to balance profitability and being easy to link at.

Usability

Real Life Example:

 Memorial Day weekend of 2003, I was a little risky. I drove my car until the gas was just about gone. The engine was sputtering when I pulled off at a gas station near no others and went to fill up. I pulled up to the first pump and it had a "credit cards do not work" sign on it.

I went into pay cash and the cashier explained it was full service. There was no service man out there. I got rather angry seeing the long line of cars waiting to use the few pumps that worked.

I drove off to find another gas station. I then realized there were no other close gas stations. I went back. I almost got into a wreck on my way back to the gas station. Now I was enraged.

I arrived at the gas station and waited in line again. The car in front of me would not back up and to let the person who just finished pumping out. I had to wait until the van on the other side was done. I then had to wait for the guy who would not move to finish.

Negative Advertising:

I was finally ready to pump my gas. I tried to use my credit card...after about a minute of processing: "please see cashier... system down." On the pump it stated "pump then pay." So I tried to pump. It did not work.

I went inside and asked the cashier what was up. While snacking on his food he said, "crunch...Sorry I had not got around to turning your pump on yet." Mind you it said pump THEN pay. I had been trying for a few minutes at this point.

I went back outside and pumped my gas. I left vowing never again to visit that gas station. It was a Mobile in Mystic Connecticut (just off the interstate) and I still vividly remember the sign in my head as well as the cashier who was snacking while he should have authorized my pump.

If that Gas Station was a Website:

That was a big tangent...that occurred while I was reading the book "Designing Web Usability" by Jakob Nielson. If that gas station was a web site I would have left. There is no page that is so important that I can't go elsewhere.

Many people find your website through search engines. Other sites may link to your inner pages. There is no way to tell where traffic will come from.

I never see the shopping cart on many sites because they make it a challenge just to get there. I have abandoned many shopping carts. Most websites have miserable usability. I must admit some of my sites needs some work in this area too...it is one of the most neglected aspects of web design.

Web Example:

This comes from a usability / design example story found on page 69 of *Taking Your Talent to the Web by Jeffrey Zeldman.*

> I left my baby daughter in the car while I went to buy dope. Then I drove away. I'd gone about five blocks when I realized my daughter wasn't in the car anymore.
>
> That was in the main content area of the Narcotics Anonymous website. At the end of it there was another linear link to more stories. The site also had a passive navigation menu.
>
> A large part of usability is quickly connecting with people and then making it easy for them to do whatever you want them to. In this example it would be to perhaps read more stories, to see there were other people like them, to find hope, and seek treatment.

A person is more likely to listen if they feel they belong on your site, if they feel the page was written just for them.

Good Usability:

Take with a grain of salt warning: bear in mind that my own website does not currently follow all of these examples, but most of them are worth following if you can.

As far as usability goes the old Amazon.com was quoted time and time again as far as how to do it right. Some of the tips which help for site design are

- Allow users to control their experience.

- Do not place excessive text inside images.

- Keep a consistent site design.

- Have clear navigation.

- Use alternative text tags with images.

- Use standards where applicable.

- Keep file sizes small.

- Have search or a link to site level search on every page. On smaller sites (where site search may typically leave visitors empty handed) a link to a sitemap will work better than site level search.

- After about a decade online Amazon.com changed many of their features. Jakob Nielson wrote an article about how Amazon.com no longer follows some important usability guidelines.

Allow the User to Control Their Experience:

While creating text elements, it is important to remember various people and the means they will use to view your site. Some people are looking at the web through a phone, some can hardly see, others have text read to them.

> Some of the best opportunities to improve your bottom line are done by improving conversion rates by making your site easier to use.

When specifying the text size or pallet size, it is best to use relative, not exact values. If you set the text at 8 pixels and a guy has large text turned on, he will see your site at 8 pixels (which can be hard to see on larger monitors, especially to a blind guy). He will not see your site.

Setting the page width to 800 pixels might make a PDA user immediately switch to another site. Setting width using percentages or keeping the page narrow makes the content accessible on more devices. Exception to that rule: if the bulk of your income comes from ads then you may want to use a fixed width design to better control the ad integration into the site.

When you design for different types of users, you not only avoid offending these people, but you also are given extra consideration since you are one of the few who addressed their needs.

Placing text in an image is typically a bad idea since it may appear illegible or overly large when the user sees the page on a different platform than it was designed on. Think of search engines as visitors with exceptionally poor vision. They can't read the text in images.

Consistent Site Design:

People expect to see things in certain places. The upper left corner usually has a logo, and a link to your home page. (Often times the logo is the link.) Search is either right beneath it or in the upper right hand corner. The most important thing to remember is, people like to feel comfortable.

Usually most successful ideas are just re-packaged successful ideas from the past. Clear navigation also makes it easier for the user to develop comfort and go where you want him to go. Even if you try something risky, at least be consistent with it from page to page.

Site Level Search:

There are hoards of people who love to search for information. It is well worth it to include a small search box on every page **if you have a larger content web site.** If you do not know anything about dynamic coding you can get a third party search engine from Atomz or FreeFind. Many popular content management or blog software providers also have free built-in site level search.

On small sites, you **should not** have a site level search, as many of the searches will fail to find the desired information and frustrate the searcher. It is **far easier** to actively guide site visitors than to let them enter random text in a search box.

On top of helping visitors navigate your site, a site level search can also help you find out what terms and ideas your visitors are interested in that your site may not yet have content about. You can create content around their desires and use these terms for for refining your pay-per-click keywords.

With large sites, especially large forums, it may be helpful to highlight the search terms on the page if site visitors arrived from a search engine.

Many sites fail because they do not create substantial value and appeal prior to trying to extract profits.

Many non commercial sites make greater profits than commercial sites because it is far easier and cheaper to build links into non commercial sites.

Use Standards Where Applicable:

People know 'blue underline' means 'it's a hyperlink.' Whenever possible, it is a good idea to follow standards. Sometimes deviations may be necessary for site design, but use them sparingly. It makes it easier for people to do what you want them to without needing to think.

Some webmasters may be more likely to link into a standards compliant site. If your site is focused toward a geek or techy market, you will likely want to make it validates and standards compliant. Most sites do neither.

If your target audience does not care much about standards, and the time and money it would cost to make it accessible are too expensive, then it may not important to address design and accessibility anytime soon.

JavaScript & Active Client Side (Browser Based) Scripting:

Approximately 3-5% of web browsers are not JavaScript enabled for one reason or another. I recommend minimizing the number of pages using JavaScript whenever

possible. In addition you should place your JavaScript in its own external .js file and link to it from within your pages. This can decrease page load time and improve usability. You can link to the external .js file by placing the following code in your page head.

```
<script language="JavaScript" src="filename.js"> </script>
```

If your entire page is in a JavaScript, some people will not see it. If your entire page is JavaScript many search engines will not index it properly, either. Ensure you use NoScript tags to define what was in the JavaScript to users with that feature disabled. NoScript tags look like this, and should be placed just after a scripts location:

```
<noscript> java description and related links </noscript>
```

Hacks:

There are ways to use C.S.S. and other technologies to do many of the things which people used JavaScript to do. Additionally, there are some technologies which give more advanced presentations while still using fairly lean code that search spiders can follow. For example, you can use unordered lists to make DHTML menus.

Keep File Size Small:

The back button is one of the most used buttons on web browsers. If your file takes a long time to load you may be kissing your user goodbye before she even gets to see your full hello.

Specify Image Details:

To allow quick loading, it is a good idea to specify image sizes on the page so the text can load before the image is rendered.

```
<img src ="/images/bla.gif" alt="Bla picture."
title="Picture of Bla." height="300" width="200">
```

If an image is simply part of the design or navigation, you can just use a blank alt tag as the image does not contribute to the page theme. Also, stuffing 100 words in the alt tag does not likely add much to your S.E.O. Efforts and could make your pages seem spammy.

If you are unsure whether a page is using text or images you can view the page source, or hit control A to highlight the text and images.

On linked images, many search algorithms treat the image alt text similarly to how they treat link anchor text (which is described in more detail in the linking section of this e-book). Most S.E.O.'s recommend using the Alt tag but do not mention the title tag. Search algorithms try to use whatever they find useful;

thus, if people are not stuffing the image titles full of junk some search engines may eventually want to use this data.

I have yet to use it, but some people use Dynamic Text Replacement to replace images with their associated text when site visitors have images turned off. Learn how to do this here: http://www.alistapart.com/articles/dynatext/. As long as it is not overtly manipulative search engines should not penalize you for using dynamic text replacement.

Using CSS to Minimize Page Load Time:

Using an external style sheet will keep many of your design elements on a single common page. This prevents pages from looking jagged due to slightly altering layout specifications from one page to the next. In addition, keeping layout code separate from content will decrease page load time.

When users navigate from one page to another they will not need to reload the design elements of the page again since the stylesheet will already be in their cache. Most typical web users expect pages to download within 8 to 10 seconds at the max. The longer a person waits for a page to download, the more likely they are to have their stream of thought interrupted.

Flash is Evil:

Many reasons huge flash files are evil:

- Those who view a flash intro are usually not interested in seeing it every time they come to your site.

- Flash development is an expense which is rarely justified and is rarely focused on the needs of the site visitor. Some flash developers also protect their flash files to prevent others from editing them, which means you may need to hire them to make changes or design a new site if the flash file has errors.

- Search engines struggle to index, navigate, and classify flash. Flash typically offers little descriptive content, so even if engines could index it most won't care to.

- Flash files take a while to load, while the user may be hitting the back button (kiss, kiss, good bye).

- Even if search engines can determine the content of flash programs, most flash designers place all the flash in one program, which would make it hard for search engines to want to refer people to it.

- Some people use meta refreshes and other arbitrary Flash detection technologies which disable the browser back button. Google AdWords will not allow you to advertise sites which have the browser back button disabled.

- A flash designer disabled the back button on one of my client's website. He wanted to charge her $4,000 to fix problems cause by his own incompetent behavior. It took me 10 minutes to fix it, and he no longer does design work for her.

If you do use flash, try to keep your files small, embed the flash files in HTML pages, and use <noembed>what the flash represents</noembed> to write what the content in the flash represents.

Flash also has an S.D.K., which can aid in search engine indexing, but it is usually recommended to avoid Flash.

SWFObject http://blog.deconcept.com/swfobject/ is probably the best way to do XHTML valid Flash detection.

I am not a usabiliy expert by any means. If you are interested in the topic I recommend Jakob Neilson's site and books or buy Kim Krause's inexpensive downloadable usability checklist found at http://www.cre8pc.com/ringbell.html.

Generating Revenue

Create Value and then Extract Profits:
You want to earn money from your site, right? It's easy if it is a hobby, and not the exclusive goal of the site. Many sites fail because they place a ton of ads on their site before they even get a loyal following.

By creating value without placing much emphasis on early profits you can later make a larger sum of money when the site has a large valuable user base.

Links have value. You need to gain link authority to build a large profitable audience.

Non-Commercial Profits:
Even if you are only trying to sell your opinion, you can still earn money from it if you work hard or are creative or outspoken. If you are selling advertising space, you first need to win great distribution. You do not win that distribution by throwing too many ads up too early! Offer something worthwhile, and then try to extract value, in that order.

I made a personal blog about losing weight which was accepted into DMOZ and the Yahoo! Directory both absolutely free. After the site aged and gained authority I placed ads on it.

It is easier to get links for a non-commercial site than a commercial site. After the links are in place, you can use that link popularity to do whatever you want to do with it.

Some people may consider it bait and switch, but so long as your site does not deviate too far from its original purpose most of the links will likely stay.

Banners vs Contextual Ads:

Many web surfers have become banner blind and ignore the top part of a page. Banners have horrible clickthrough rates.

I do not usually use default banner sizes unless I feel it fits well with the site design. The best revenue options are link rentals, sponsored content or context-based text ads. **Good advertising does not look like advertising.**

One site that I work with sells links for $500 a month per link and only made about $30 a month off AdSense. Other times AdSense can make far greater profits. Depending on the market, it may be best to use one or the other or a combination of both.

Reviewing Products:

If you read a book you like, tell people about it. Give them the opportunity to buy the book from your web site. Review products you like. Successful affiliate marketers know it is much easier to sell products if they provide what appears as **personal unbiased reviews**.

Mike's Marketing Tools is a site which sells a ton of internet marketing books and software. Some of the stuff he recommends is great **and** some of it is junk. No matter what Mike thinks of the product, he gives the appearance of an honest unbiased positive review of just about everything listed in his directory. It usually highlights more benefits than downsides. In doing that, and ranking well for numerous product names, he makes a good amount of money.

If you do review products in-depth, make sure you give each product its own review page.

Point of Action Marketing:

If you are trying to sell your service, drive people toward it. A good technique for improving subscriptions, for example, is to place a "We Value Privacy" statement near the sign-up form. This is called "Point of Action Marketing."

Assure people that it is safe for them to do what you want.

Recently Bryan Eisenberg (author of Persuasive Online Copy writing) made the statement that placing a secure checkout symbol near the checkout typically improved conversion rates between 5 and 15%.

Establishing Trust:

Unbiased reviews and "We Value Privacy" help to build a strong trust element to your relationship with your site visitors. In addition logos from companies such as the Better Business Bureau, TRUSTe, and the Public Eye can help build trust.

If you have a secure part of your site in frames, the lock (secured) symbol may not show in the browser. When you are performing online transactions, it is a good idea to avoid frames, and display the VeriSign or Thawte secure symbols (as applicable).

Revenue Generating Programs:

Some popular revenue programs are Google AdSense, Amazon Associates program, other major affiliate program networks (such as Comission Junction, Linkshare, & Performics), and perhaps CafePress for smaller personal websites.

ClickBank is an affiliate program which works well for selling electronic information. PayPal is also an easy to use third party payment processor. Affiliates Alert tracks new ClickBank products for sale.

All of these websites are listed in the resources section at the end of the chapter.

AdSense is rather selective about what partners it will accept, which is yet another reason you want to focus on creating quality content. However, usually after people have one site in the AdSense program, they let them run screen scraper and other exceptionally low quality spam sites on that same account.

If you monetize your site using AdSense, it may be worth it to limit the number of ads that appear on the page, as more ads means you will be showing cheaper ads, and in some markets the cost per click quickly drops off. I also believe the first AdSense unit called from your source code will display the most expensive ads possible.

Some topics may make next to nothing from pay per click ads, while other industries (such as California mortgage) may earn over a dollar a click.

If you can create an idea that generates a decent amount of syndication and attracts a few good links, you may be able to make money selling text link ads or leveraging that authority to get pay per click contextual ads indexed.

If you know your industry well then you should have a few friends in it. If your site directly sells ad space, it is best to place a link or a few links to some of the top sites in that space. Most people are afraid to take a risk and do not see value in something until some of their competitors do. Why not show a few fake ads so people assume the ad space is valuable. After you gain a few advertisers, you can take the fake ones down. It is important to understand who the important players and aggressive ad buyers are in a market before doing this type of technique.

Affiliate Marketing Tips:

Many people create huge affiliate sites using product feeds. The problem with generic well-used feeds is that many other people will have the exact same content. Since Google does not desire to show multiple copies of the same content, most of the affiliate feed sites end up not getting indexed, or quickly removed from the search results if they are indexed.

Some people end up adding RSS or other content to the pages to make them look somewhat unique, but Google also employs remote content raters to evaluate sites. If the site looks like it would not have a functional purpose outside of the affiliate program, Google does not want it in their index. The instructions Google gave remote content raters for determining if an affiliate site was useful was "is there a

value added service that would make users **want** to visit this site instead of the original merchant site."

People do not usually buy from affiliate banners. A better way to create affiliate sites is to create unique original content with what looks like unbiased reviews.

Whether you are affiliate marketing or creating your own merchant site, each unique item or idea should have its own unique page with sufficient unique content on it. If the only difference between items is size or color then you might run into duplicate content issues (if pages are too similar then Google may assume they offer little value or are of poor content quality).

Lots of people just give people sales letters, but if you create what looks like an original, thoughtful, and honest review, you can send people to the official sites using text links from within the reviews that convert exceptionally well. The less automated your site and S.E.O. techniques are, the greater chance it will do well longterm.

Many large affiliates also hide the affiliate links to make it harder for people to steal their affiliate commission. Instead of pointing at www.merchant.com/?aff=123 they would use .htaccess or link to a simple redirect script on their own site and point www.seobook.com/merchant to the merchant site using an affiliate link.

Some people think Google hates affiliate marketers. They do not necessarily hate affiliates, but they hate unoriginal or useless content cluttering their search index. Most affiliate marketing sites are thin sites featuring duplicate content and other useless garbage.

If you are new to the web and do not have much money to work with, one good way to save money is to sell things to yourself using your own affiliate link. Some merchants may not like this (it may violate some affiliate terms of service), but when I was new I frequently did it, and I occasionally still do today. If you save $50 for 10 only minutes of work why not?

Google AdSense:

Since Google automates so much of the ad sales process and has such a large user base, some people can make good money just by selling AdSense ads. Here are a few tips for getting the most profit out of your AdSense ads:

- Good advertisements do not look like ads. Blend AdSense ads with the site design, using similar fonts and colors.

- Usually the banner ad format is not good unless is looks exceptionally similar to the site design. Different format types will have different CTRs and earnings. The 160 tall skyscrapers and ad blocks work well for me.

- Some people place many ad units on each page. This may work, but many times this hurts earnings since you are selling more ad inventory to cheap

ads, which may end up getting clicked instead of the more expensive ads that would display if you ran fewer ad units.

- Default blue with underline is good at getting clicks.

- Some people place visual cues next to their AdSense ads, although you can't tell people to click on the ads.

- If you are running a somewhat spammy AdSense site that is just there for AdSense revenue, you want to limit users options by not giving them many other links to click on. Either do not use site navigation above the fold or visually depreciate the navigation links.

- Google AdSense has channel tracking and URL tracking which will show you how various channels and sites perform. Additionally there are a variety of third party programs which sell for around $50 to $100 that provide additional details.

- Google offers AdSense optimization tips on their site at: https://www.google.com/support/adsense/bin/static.py?page=tips.html Notice how placing ads where navigation typically goes increases earnings.

- JenSense.com is a good blog about contextual advertising. Jen is also branded as an AdSense expert. She sells consulting services to help people optimize their accounts and is also a moderator at Search Engine Watch forums.

- Your ad click-through rate is going to be highly dependent on your audience profile. More sophisticated people tend to click fewer ads.

- Yahoo! is beta testing a publisher contextual ad program similar to Google's, but Yahoo! does not have as much ad network depth as Google does. Also Yahoo! tends to focus on expensive ads, whereas Google focuses more on ad relevancy.

When using AdSense, the CTR and earnings can be much higher if you make a couple small changes. The key is to test different things to see what is most effective for your site design and setup.

Some sites place the ads in such a way that it hurts their ability to gain links. If you are actively trying to promote a site and build an audience, make sure the ads are not so prominent that they end up causing people to question the purpose or usefulness of your site.

Many blog posts are generally short, targeted, and quick to make. Many blog networks are used as AdSense keyword nets. Reporting topical news can build a large number of pages quickly. Weblogs Inc. is one of the more well know blog networks that aggressively integrates AdSense ads.

Google also offers AdLinks, which is another ad format that has helped some publishers. A new contextual ad program by the name of Chitika has been gaining praise from a number of bloggers, although some have been absolutely frustrated by their ad auditing.

Example Google AdSense Integration:

That is the upper left corner of an AdSense site. For the screenshot I changed the topic of the site to Illinois dental because I didn't want to point out the vertical the site targeted.

Notice:

- Under Illinois Dentists in an area that looks like subnavigation there are Google Adlinks.

- Where left hand navigation normally goes there is a 160 wide by 600 tall AdSense block.

- The AdSense link color is default blue.

- The AdSense URL color is the same color as other page elements to integrate it into the site design.

- The color flag in the upper left draws attention toward the upper left. If the eye moves down or to the right from there people find ads.

Other AdSense tips:

- Inline ad blocks also get a great clickthrough rate.

- Typically I place fewer ads on the home page than inner pages to make my AdSense sites seem less ad cluttered than they are. Some pages sell the linkability of the site. Other pages sell ad clicks. It is a balancing act.

- If you make the content look ugly enough the ads can look relatively appealing, but that is probably not a good approach for sites you are looking to be long-term earners.

- Centering content and using fix width designs makes it easy to control the ad placement and ad to content ratio.

- Many high traffic low cost per click sites can greatly increase their income by placing Google search boxes on their site.

Value Added Packaging:

In any arena, there will only be a few people who make lots of money packaging or repackaging information. Coming up with value added packaging ideas will help guarantee the success of your product. I sold more books than I ever thought I would have, based primarily on the fact that the book was attached to my blog. Most other S.E.O.'s selling a book do not have a search engine news blog where they give away free tips.

If you sell things like jewelry, the visual appearance of the site is exceptionally important. Design and copy help develop trust. People do not pay want to pay for what something is allegedly valued at; **they want to pay what they feel it is worth**.

Price and Value:

In the past I sold my e-book for half of its current price. Some people assumed that it must have low value based upon that price point. Since then I have done thousands of hours of research and writing, which likely greatly increased its value.

Few affiliate marketers wanted to make a small share of $40 when they could recommend other products and make $50 - $100 commission per sale.

From what I have seen, affiliate marketing is not usually honest, and most affiliates recommend what makes them the most money, **not the best value or best products**. For example, many affiliates promote software in fields where better free software exists. The newest beta version of Internet Explorer makes free PDFs. So does OpenOffice. People still market a bunch of junky PDF generator software because it is easy money and the search engines deliver poor relevancy for many PDF related queries.

I doubled the price of my e-book and later switched to hosting my own affiliate program. Within a couple months, I had over 100 new affiliates, and ads for my e-book appeared on thousands of pages.

If this e-book gives some successful marketers only a couple useful tips, then it has more than paid for itself. Others who are newer would expect much more since they still have much to learn.

The more business experience people have, the more reasonable their expectations are. Raising my price filtered out most of the worst potential clients. Some people will never be happy no matter what you do. **The more you try to use price as your competitive advantage, the lower the quality of your customer base and the more hate and fraud you deal with on a daily basis.**

I have ranked clients at #1 in Google for terms worth over $10,000 a month, while charging them less than a $1,000 one time fee for the service, and they still were angry at me. That is what you get when you accept commodity clients and sell yourself as a commodity. People are rarely appreciative.

You are only a commodity if you think of yourself as one. If you sell your product at commodity prices you will attract commodity clients who may never be pleased with the amount of value you may deliver.

Being Published, Gate Keepers, & Profit Margins:

A major book publishing company read this book and wanted to publish it. I was all for it if I could keep electronic distribution rights. They wanted me to give that up, take a huge pay cut, and hope they did a good job marketing the book, but for most authors that is not the case.

I have sold more copies of this e-book than the average physical book sells. If my business model revolved around a physical book the slim margins would mean I could not afford to compete in the pay per click market and affiliate marketers would market inferior products to my book because they paid a higher commission.

Do not let others fool you into thinking you need their help, or that you need to be part of their network to succeed. A few years ago I knew nothing about the web or marketing, was kicked out of the military for using drugs, had few social connections, and had to backdate a credit card to have money to live on. A few years later money is of no concern to me.

To be honest I could probably make at least 5 times as much as I do just by writing smaller & quicker e-books on a wide variety of topics and marketing them via strong sales copy and pay per click ads. If you look through the Clickbank marketplace you will see there are thousands of internet marketers making far more money than I do by doing just that - creating dozens of similar information products in various markets.

Business Model & Visitor Value:

Some people are good salesmen and know how to create more value out of their site visitors. When you learn how to increase your visitor value (by increasing the amount they are willing to buy or how often they convert) you allow yourself to receive far greater exposure. For example, at $40 I had maybe 20 affiliates. After I

doubled the price of my e-book I could afford to pay a high enough commission to interest more good affiliates.

Once you know the value of an average site visitor, then you know how much you can afford to spend on leads, which helps you be able to feel comfortable marketing more aggressively. Don't try to compete directly against more profitable business models in hyper-saturated pay per click markets. For example, link brokers have better business models than I do, due largely to recurring revenues.

Capturing Leads vs Sales:

When selling expensive items over $100, many marketers prefer to get the prospects primary email address before trying to sell the item. Direct response marketing usually peaks in response rate around the third exposure so many marketers want to get prospects on an autoresponder series.

Many marketers also have the shopping cart page open in a new browser so the prospect has to close two browser windows to leave the site.

How Well Does My Item fit the Web:

Some items make no sense to sell over the web. Heavy commodities that are easily accessible cheaply are bad items.

Other items fit the web perfectly. For example, something where people would be ashamed or embarrassed is a likely candidate for a topic to write an e-book about. E-books about genital warts or beating a DUI ticket are likely to fit the web well because many people would be embarrassed to buy those types of items in person.

If you had a problem and your book, software, product, or idea helps others solve the same problem you can use yourself as an example. In a sense, you are selling yourself and your own experiences. Authentic sounding voices and stories can help owners make money. Dating guides and weight loss products push testimonials hard.

What emotions will people have when searching for your ideas? How can you connect with their desires or sense of empathy?

Researching Demand for a Product:

Alex Mandossian created a concept he calls the ask database. For niche ideas you can market an e-book or product before you complete it. Using AdWords you may be able to find targeted leads for a nickel. For example, you can send people to a page telling them you are just about done writing an e-book on a topic. Tell them you are looking to add a little more information. Ask them what they feel is important. Offer them the e-book free in exchange for their e-mail address and feedback. Over time, you will collect the most important topics the e-book should cover and you can pay a copywriter to write covering those topics.

Instead of paying for a complex customer feedback database you can send the feedback email to a gmail account which you can later search trhough.

You can also use a similar technique to price a new e-book. Tell people they qualify as a pre-reader and ask them what they would be willing to pay for the information. Some small percent of people will type in 20 cents or $1, but those would be the same people who are not interested, or would immediately want to return your product just to try to get it free. Ignoring those numbers, you can then look at the remaining prices people offered and determine a good price from there. If your product does not cost you much for each incremental sale then you are not out much finding exactly what people would want and the exact price they are willing to pay for it.

Price Points:

I do not sell lots of various products, but I read and listen to many marketers.

Many people believe that ending a price on the number 7 is a good thing because many consumers are taught that 7 is good due to religion, gaming, and other ideas. If your price is going to be somewhat cheap you can usually end the price in $9.95 without seeing a huge drop in sales. If you are going close to $100 or over, then you may also want to try ending the price with a 7. Usually the only time to end a price on round numbers (like $250 or $500) is if you are trying to appeal to people who are trying to buy something for its extravagance.

Value & Price Disconnect:

If you look on the Amazon.com marketplace, sometimes a brand new hard cover version of a book will sell for far less than a used copy of the soft cover version. I find it interesting in a marketplace of that size that there would be large price disconnects with items so close to one another.

In any market there will be price disconnects. Many of which will make no logical sense. If your longterm business model is being the cheapest then you may want to re-focus on brand building or other aspects, or your business model may be doomed from the start.

Interactive Elements

Resources Cited:

Literature:

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  (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0071380396/)

- The Online Copywriter's Handbook - Robert W Bly's online copywriting book. (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0658020994/)

- Persuasive Online Copywriting - Bryan Eisenberg's conversion based copywriting book.
  (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0971476993/)

- Tested Advertising Methods – advertising & copywriting bible by John Caples (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0130957011/)

- Taking Your Talent to the Web (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0735710732/104-7658529-2666358)

- The Big Red Fez - Seth Godin's quick web design tip book. (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0743227905/)

- Don't Make Me Think - Steve Krug's call to action based usability book. (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0789723107/)

- The Cluetrain Manifesto - Anti corporate speak copywriting book. (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0738204315/) You may also wish to read it free. (http://www.cluetrain.com/book/index.html)

- Designing Web Usability - Jakob Nielson's usability book. (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/156205810X/)

- UseIt Alertbox - Jakob Nielson's usability newsletter. (http://www.useit.com/alertbox/)

- Kim Krause's Usability Checklist (http://www.cre8pc.com/ringbell.html)

- What is Quality Content – an article I wrote about what it actually means to create quality content (http://www.v7n.com/quality-content.php)

Software:
- Adobe Photoshop – awesome image software. (http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop/main.html)

- Macromedia Dreamweaver - top of the line web page editor. (http://www.macromedia.com/cfusion/tdrc/index.cfm?product=dreamweaver)

- AAA Logo – logo design software. (http://www.aaa-logo.com/)

- Wordpress – my favorite blog software (http://wordpress.org/)

- Movable Type - my second favorite blog software. Seobook.com uses MT. (http://www.movabletype.org)

- TypePad - Movable Type's web based blog software. (http://www.typepad.com/)

- Blogger - 100% free, easy to use blog software. (http://www.blogger.com)

- The Logo Company (http://thelogocompany.net)

- EZY Logo (http://www.ezylogo.com/)

- Atomz - free site level search. (http://www.atomz.com)

- FreeFind - free site level search. (http://www.freefind.com)

- SWFObject – XHTML friendly flash detection (http://blog.deconcept.com/swfobject/)

Websites:
- Tragedy of the Commons (http://dieoff.org/page95.htm)

- Seth Godin - blog by one of the more creative marketers on the web. (http://sethgodin.typepad.com/)

- Google Co-op – Google's vertical social search product (http://www.google.com/coop/)

- OSWD – free website designs (http://www.oswd.org/)

- GapingVoid – free weblog talking about the concept of "smarter conversations" (http://www.gapingvoid.com/)

- Why I think using blogs is a great idea for many websites (http://www.search-marketing.info/newsletter/articles/articles.htm#blogs)

- CSS House - online demonstration showing how powerful CSS is. (http://www.designdetector.com/tips/3DBorderDemo2.html)

- CSS Zen Garden (http://www.csszengarden.com)

- CSS @ W3 Schools (http://www.w3schools.com/css/default.asp)

- W3C CSS Guidance (http://www.w3.org/Style/CSS/)

- Rob Frankel - one of the best branding experts in the world. (http://www.robfrankel.com/)

- Apache SSI Tutorial (http://httpd.apache.org/docs/howto/ssi.html)

- Sample SSI website. Search Marketing Info. (http://www.search-marketing.info/)

- Comprehensive Guide to .htaccess (http://www.wsabstract.com/howto/htaccess.shtml)

- Dynamic Text Replacement article – how to replace images with text (http://www.alistapart.com/articles/dynatext/)

- Macromedia Flash SDK
  (http://www.macromedia.com/software/flash/download/search_engine/search_engine_faq.html)

- GrokDotCom - conversion marketing tips. (http://www.grokdotcom.com/)

- Google AdSense (http://www.google.com/adsense)

- AdSense Optimization Tips
  (http://www.google.com/support/adsense/bin/static.py?page=tips.html)

- JenSense - contextual advertising blog (http://www.jensense.com)

- Yahoo! Publisher Network – Yahoo!'s version of AdSense
  (http://publisher.yahoo.com/)

- Weblogs Inc – large blog network (http://www.weblogsinc.com)

- Amazon Associate Program (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/subst/associates/join/associates.html)

- ClickBank – affiliate program and payment processor for electronic goods and services. (http://www.clickbank.com)

- Affiliates Alert – tracks new ClickBank products for sale
  (http://www.affiliatesalert.com/)

- PayPal - nearly universal payment processor. (http://www.paypal.com)

- CafePress - sells Tshirts, clothing, and other small material which is good for sites with a cult following. (http://www.cafepress.com/)

- Other Affiliate Programs - my list of top affiliate directories.
  (http://www.search-marketing.info/business/affiliate-programs.htm)

Some Notes

1. Search for your topic. Find the #1 result on your favorite search engine. If you know more than them you will eventually replace them. If not, consider further focus of your topic or buying books and reading websites to better learn your topic. Eventually you will be #1.

2. Decide what type of editor would be logical to use for your site. I strongly encourage the use of blog software if it makes sense.

3. If you believe you are weak in the topics of Copywriting or Usability buy a book which covers the topic you are weak in.

4. List three ways you can generate revenue from your site without making it look like the sole purpose of the site.

5. If your site is an ecommerce site list three reasons or features that would make people talk about your site.

Chapter

4

Writing for Search Engines

P resumably man's spirit should be elevated if he can better review his shady past and analyze more completely and objectively his present problems. - from *As We May Think* by Vannevar Bush.

Finally...What was all that other junk? What do the spiders want to see? What are the best words to use? Where do I place them?

Don't worry, the above chapters are not a complete wash. The more you learn about the web, the more you will learn how ideas overlap. Good usability is usually good search engine optimization.

Some people stress search engine optimization so much that they forget about their visitors needs. S.E.O. is just one part of the site building puzzle. Ultimately, it is your social impact or cash in the bank that is a measure of success, not where you rank for some random search query.

In the *Tipping Point,* Malcolm Gladwell shows how **small changes can bear amazing results**. If you can learn to include some of those little extras which make your site better than your competition you will find that others will do your marketing for you. That is why I think it is more important to understand the concepts of the web and the goals of search engines versus just learning flavor of the moment optimization. If everything else is good then you do not need to worry as much about optimization.

Plus, knowing the above in addition to doing search engine optimization will allow you to draw lots of visitors and have a higher conversion rate. On the web, when you lose a customer, it is usually forever. The last thing you want to do is draw prospective customers into a minefield they are sure to regret.

Each and every page is a chance to capture or lose customers.

Focusing a Site & Combining Site Ideas:
One time, a person contacted me asking for a bit of help with their site. They wanted me to submit their site to directories. When I looked at their site it sold handmade hemp jewelry and S.E.O. services.

In the real world, you would never see people do something like this, but many people think it is fine on the web.

On the web there are even more alternatives to your business than in the real world. **You need to focus on the consumer that much more**.

It is fine to have many unique ideas and revenue streams, but each site should cover its own specific niche. If you cross industries within your site you weaken your brand and may offend many people. What are the odds that someone is looking for S.E.O. services while shopping for hemp?

Even within the specific niche of S.E.O. I can have a site for linking, one for keyword research, one for pay per click…the list goes on. Most websites fail because they fail to properly focus, not because they are too focused.

Keywords

What are Keywords?
Keywords are phrases which you want your website to be found under in search engines. Keywords are typically two to five word phrases you expect people to search for to find your website. Often corporate climates force people to refer to things using special phrases. Keywords are not about what you call your stuff. Keywords are what Joe average surfer (or your prospective site visitors) may type in a search box.

How do You Learn Best?
Some people learn better from video than reading text. If you like video you may prefer to look at the Dan Thies keyword research video he mentions near the end of his post on this page:

http://www.seoresearchlabs.com/blog/2005/10/seo-controlling-entry-pages.html

Focusing a Keyword:
When people tell you to target the word "free" they are out of their minds. The single word is too general and has too much competition. I just did a search on Yahoo! for "free" and it returned 749,000,000 results. That is over 10% of the web trying to use free as a sales pitch.

I am not saying that free should not be on your page, it is on most of mine. I am saying that keywords should define the product or idea. Free alone just does not get this done

Keyword Phrases:
If free isn't a keyword, then what is? Keywords are typically two to five word phrases you expect people to search for to find your website. What would you expect people to type in the browser to find your site? If you were looking for your product, what would you type? What type of problems does your product or service solve? Those answers are likely good keyword phrases.

Single word keywords are usually not well targeted and are hard to rank for.

Longer keywords are easier to rank well for and typically have better conversion rates.

Keyword Length:

A longer search phrase is typically associated with better targeting and increased consumer desire. Some people say shorter keyword searchers are shoppers and longer keyword searchers are buyers.

As you add various relevant descriptive copy to pages you are more likely to appear in search results similar to your keywords which do not exactly match your more generic root term keywords. Most good keyword phrases are generally 2 to 5 words.

Keyword Value Pyramid:

One of the most fatal flaws of many S.E.O. campaigns is that people think they need to rank well for one term or a few generic terms. Generic terms may occasionally convert, but most strong converting search terms are specific.

If you read S.E.O. forums you often hear many posts about a San Diego real estate agent no longer ranking for a generic term such as 'real estate'. Since the term is too generic for most of his target market (and his service would not be fitting for most people searching for that term), it makes sense that search engines would not want to show his site in those search results. As search continues to evolve, it will get better at filtering out untargeted or inappropriate sites.

Targeting generic terms outside of your area it means that you need to use aggressive techniques to try to rank. Problems with being too aggressive:

- Targeting exceptionally generic terms may not add much value since the leads are not strongly qualified. Paying extra to rank for more generic terms may not be a cost that is justified unless you can resell those leads at a profit.

- Being exceptionally aggressive raises your risk profile and makes your site more likely to fluctuate in rankings when new search algorithms are rolled out.

Here is a search value pyramid:
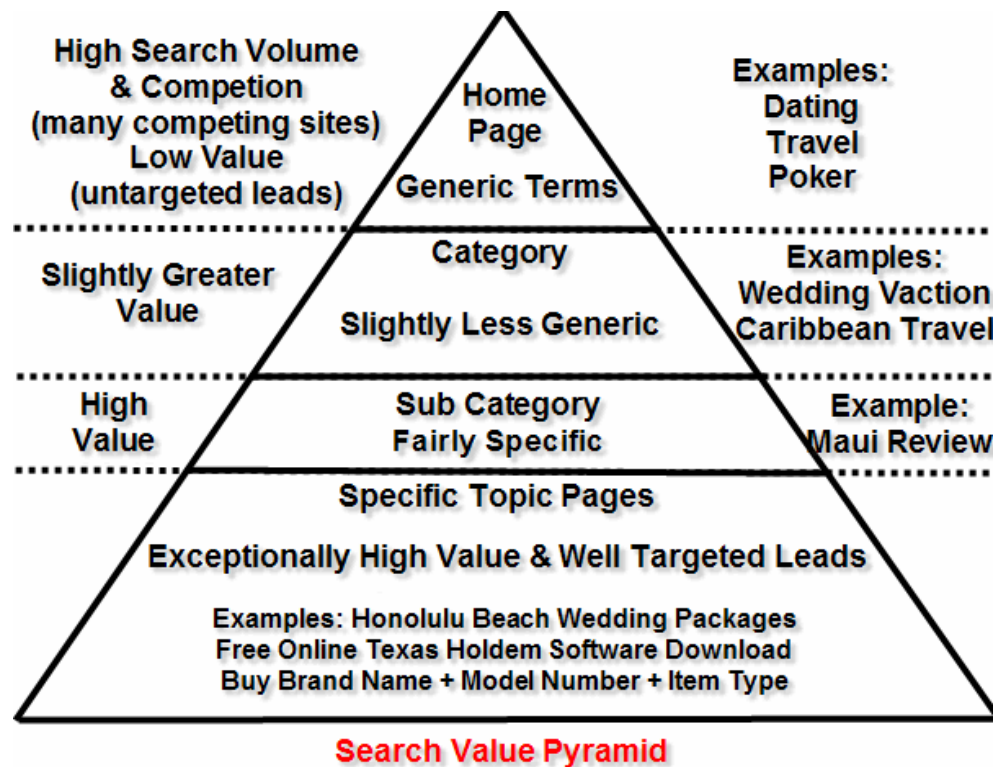
As you can see from the image, the more we target on our specific market the greater value we can extract from our sites. I am not suggesting always trying to use *free online Texas holdem software download* over and over again, but by scattering those various words throughout your copy you may be able to rank for many related phrases.

Where on the Pyramid do I start?

Usually, most sites are designed from the top down, starting with a generic concept and working their way down through specific topics. Another way to look at the pyramid concept is to look at where the top of your pyramid should start.

Some people will always start at the top with a term like travel, but in doing that they have to work a long way down to get to the specific categories. If you are not well funded that may be impractical.

If you start your pyramid with more specific terms at the top, your site will have a stronger theme and it will be easier for you to dominate your niche market. As your link popularity spreads from the home page it does not have to go far to reach Honolulu beach wedding packages if your site is about Hawaii weddings or Honolulu.

I am not suggesting that most webmasters should make hundreds of 3 to 5 page websites, but what I am saying is that it is better to have 100 useful quality pages about Jamaica than to have 1,000 lower quality pages about travel in general.

You have to be able to evaluate how competitive your market is, what resources you have available, and whether you can compete in that market. A large reason many websites fail is being too broad or unfocused. If the top sites in your industry are Expedia, Orbitz, Travelocity, Hotels.com, and other well known properties you need to have a large budget, create something fundamentally innovating, or look for a more niche opportunity which you can dominate.

Keyword Density:
Keyword density analyzers end up focusing people on something that is not important. This causes some people to write content that looks like a robot wrote it. That type of content will not inspire people to link at it and will not convert well.

In March of 2005 Dr. Garcia, an information retrieval scientist, wrote an article about keyword density.

His conclusion was "this overall ratio [keyword density] tells us nothing about:

1. the relative distance between keywords in documents (proximity)

2. where in a document the terms occur (distribution)

3. the co-citation frequency between terms (co-occurrence)

4. the main theme, topic, and sub-topics (on-topic issues) of the documents

Thus, K.D. is divorced from content quality, semantics and relevancy."

Later on in the e-book I will discuss how to structure page content, but it is important to know that exact keyword density is not an important or useful measure of quality.

Why Focusing on Keyword Density is a Waste of Time:
About half of all search queries are unique. Many of the searches that bring visitors to your sites are for things you never would have guessed. If a site is not well established most search traffic will be for long muti word search phrases.

When webmasters start thinking about keyword density many of them tend to remove descriptive modifiers and other semantically related terms. Since some of those terms will no longer appear on the page the "optimized" site no longer ranks for them.

People write, search, and use language in similar ways. Thus if you write natural you are going to be far better optimized for long tail searches than some person who wastes time on keyword density will be.

If the content sounds like it was designed for engines instead of people then less people are going to want to read it or link at it.

Time spent tweaking keyword density would usually be better spent creating additional useful original content.

Internal Speak:
A major cell phone company refuses to use the term 'cellular phone' or 'cell phone' on their site because, in their words, "We don't just sell analog phones, we sell digital phones as well. 'Cellular' is old technology." In engineering speak; a 'cellular phone' is a phone that uses 'cell towers' to move voice back and forth via analog frequencies. They didn't seem to understand that most customers refer to their mobile phone as a 'cell phone' or 'cellular phone', and they don't give a rip about the technology that makes the phone work.

Make sure you research how customers search. Do not rely on how the company prefers to call things.

Finding Keywords:
There are many different ways to find keywords for your website. Some good keyword ideas are:

- Words people would search for to find your product

- Data mine your site level search information if you have a site level search.

- Problems your prospective customers may be trying to solve with your product or service (even if they do not know you exist)

- Keyword tags on competitors websites

- Visible page copy on competitors websites

- Related search suggestions on large search engines (such as Ask or Yahoo!)

- Related term suggestion at smaller engines such as Gigablast, Vivisimo, Become.com and Snap.

- Keyword groupings via tools such as Google Sets or the MSN clustering technology preview

- Lexical FreeNet – helps find related terms and ideas using a large database of related terms. The Lexical FreeNet is well beyond the scope of needs for most people trying to do S.E.O.

- Tag Cloud – free Folksonomy tool showing related terms. If your product name or brand are related to other common terms in your market, then you are doing a good job working your brand into the semantic language. For example, when I search Yahoo! for 'seo book' sometimes they show a see also result for 'seo book aaron'. Sometimes Yahoo! recommends 'seo book' when I search for 'seo'.

- Keyword suggestion tools (which are covered in the next section)

Keyword Selection Tips:

The goal of keywords is to choose terms that will bring well targeted traffic to your web site. Each page on your site can be targeted for a few different keyword phrases. Typically I like to just do about 1 to 2 primary phrases, and at most 2 to 3 secondary phrases.

Overlapping Keyword Phrases:

It makes sense to optimize the same page for keyword phrases that share some of the same keywords. A page that ranks well for 'search engine marketing' should easily be able to rank well for 'professional search engine marketing' or 'search engine marketing services.'

Only Use a Few Keyword Phrases per Page:

A note of caution is that you can not optimize a page for 20 different keywords. As you add more keywords to the mix, you lessen the focus of the page. The page can start to sound robot-created if you optimized for too many terms. Remember that converting eyeballs is what matters. People are not likely to link to or buy from a page that reads like rubbish.

Misspelled Keywords:

You usually do not want to use misspelled keywords in your body copy or page title on sites you want to do well longterm as they will look somewhat unprofessional. It can, however, help you to add misspelled keywords to the meta keywords tag (which is explained in further detail in the meta keywords section).

Some sites use "Did you mean…" pages, focusing the page title and heading tag on the misspelled versions of the keyword and then underneath it say "Often times Internet searchers searching for xxx misspell the word as bla or bla. If you are looking for xxx you are in the right place. Learn more about our bla bla bla…"

Search spelling correction will get more sophisticated over time. Search engines want to correct for misspellings in the search results pages before the users get to your site. I spoke with a search engine product manager who stated that misspellings can flag pages for relevancy reviews and usually misspellings for S.E.O. are not recommended for most websites.

If you are using throw away domains in competitive environments then misspellings might help you get some targeted traffic without requiring as much effort. Also, if you have a community driven site, it will naturally include many misspellings from various bad-spelling authors.

About.com includes 'common misspellings' in their page copy in a way that does not sound or seem spammy. On definition pages they define a word, give its pronunciation, link to related resources, have a section called also known as, and a section titled common misspellings.

> I frequently optimize for overlapping terms so I can rank well for multiple terms without losing the focus of the page or sounding robotic.

Many of About.com's sections are probably more useful to bots than humans, but they help draw in traffic. Their site is established enough and the format is legitimate enough that few people question it.

Plural Keyword Versions:
Some search engines do use stemming, but usually the search results for singular and plural search phrases are at least slightly different. It is recommended that you optimize for common versions of your popular keywords, while occasionally using other versions of the words throughout your copy.

Capitalized Keywords:
Most major search engines are not case sensitive. 'Cars' is usually treated the same as 'cars'.

Hyphenated Keywords:
Most search engines treat hyphens as a space. E-mail is different than email. If a word is split in half by a hyphen then you should check to see which version is used more frequently and optimize for whatever versions are commonly searched upon.

If one version of a term is more commonly searched for but is hyper competitive, it may make sense to optimize for the less competitive term first.

If a hyphen is sometimes placed between two words then using either version (with or without a hyphen) will cause your page to rank better for both versions.

Localized Keyword Research:
People use different terminology in different countries. In the U.S., we want 'taxi cabs'. In London, they look for a 'car hire'. Make sure if you are not from the country of your target market you know what common words are used to describe the products or services you are promoting there.

Common Keyword Problems:
There are a few common problems with keyword selection.

- Some people use their internal corporate catch phrases versus focusing on what people actually search for.

- Sometimes words have a more commonly used different meaning which elevates the estimated traffic and competition level without actually bringing in any more sales. This especially holds true for acronyms (examples: pics, cams).

- Some people use really generic words that are not very relevant and are extremely competitive. Optimizing my site for "search engine" would be a good example of this. Lots of competition to attain traffic disinterested with my services.

Keyword Selection is a Balancing Act:

You want the words to be descriptive enough for you to qualify the person and describe your product. You also want the search term to be general enough to be something that is frequently searched for. The definition of 'frequently' changes depending upon industry and the value of a lead, but common sense should help guide you in finding what keywords are the right ones to target. Sales usually are far more important than just the quantity of traffic you get. The power of keywords is in their targeting.

Sure you can list well for a really long search term that is only present on your site, but you want it to be something your prospects are searching for. On the flip side of the coin, it is usually hard to list for a single word such as "outsourcing." Selecting keywords is a balancing act. Most good keywords are between 2 to 5 words long.

Use your home page to target your primary keyword and use the other pages to target other keyword phrases. The keyword phrases targeted on each page should also be terms that describe the contents of that page and terms that are likely to yield conversions.

Frequently Asked Questions:

A great way to find targeted prospects is to find what ideas and concepts are important to them in the buying cycle. Why do they buy? Why did they choose you? What are common questions they may have during the buying cycle?

You can create a page focused around each of the common buying questions to show up in the search results when people are about to buy and are focused on those ideas. Answer the questions as best you can and then place your ads near the answer.

Ignoring Keyword Research? When to:

For some pages, like customer support pages, it makes sense to optimize them for the problems people might have with your products, but you want to make sure that in the attempts to optimize the pages you do not hurt the readability.

Not every page needs optimized for keywords. Others may be optimized more for client usability or linkability.

If you can spread a great idea that other people will link at and reference then that is a good thing. Sometimes you can get keywords in great article headlines, but if making the title keyword rich means that few people will link at it then I suggest choosing to go with the story that spreads over the story that ranks. You could always go back and change the title later AFTER the story spreads.

Keyword Suggestion Tools:

There are a variety of tools on the web which do a good job of helping you find which keywords get searched for and how frequently they are search for. I will cover a variety of them, although for the most part I think if you use the free SEO

Book Keyword Research tool and the Google AdWords keyword suggestion tool you probably do not need to spend money on any of the other tools.

I typically use keyword suggestion tools just to help find common phrases and common modifiers. I do not look at the search volume numbers on any of them as being quantitative, just qualitative. This is especially true when you consider that much of the relevant search traffic is going to be 3, 4 and 5 word queries you might not think of which may not show up on any of these tools.

SEO Book Keyword Research Tool:

http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword/

Overture Suggestions	Overture Bid Price	Monthly Search Volume estimated	Google estimated	Yahoo! (Overture)	MSN estimated	Yahoo! Suggest
seo	top bids	163,667	93,524	46,762	23,381	Y! Sugg
seo services	top bids	37,853	21,630	10,815	5,408	Y! Sugg
seo company	top bids	34,472	19,698	9,849	4,925	Y! Sugg
seo firm	top bids	24,325	13,900	6,950	3,475	Y! Sugg

My tool is a free keyword research tool based on the Overture search term suggestion tool. My keyword research tool pulls keyword data from Overture and then provides links to many related tools. When you first look at it the tool may look a bit overwhelming, but all it does is make it easy to cross reference all the best keyword tools on the market, and the related search results for each term. My tool has about a dozen columns. Above is the first half dozen or so.

At the bottom of the keyword search results it also links to blog search, news search, tag search, and some other vertical search types to help you find related content, resources, and ideas to write about. This can prove exceptionally useful if you need 1 or 2 more resources to reference to prove a point or complete an article.

The Overture keyword tool can show inflated search volumes for commercial queries, due to automated bots.

WordTracker also will be off on certain searches as well.

The free Digital Point tool shows both of their results side by side so you can see a couple different search volume "opinions."

Google Suggest results may also be organized in order of search volume, and Google offers a variety of other useful keyword research tools. I created my tool to make it easy to cross reference all of them.

News Search	Directories	Blog Search	Tag Search
Topix: seo	DMOZ search: seo	Technorati: seo	Wink: seo
Google News: seo	Google Directory: seo	Technorati Blog Finder: seo	Yahoo! My Web: seo
Yahoo! News: seo	Yahoo! Directory: seo	Google Blog Search: seo	Del.icio.us: seo
MSN News: seo	LII: seo	Yahoo! Blog Search:seo	Technorati: seo
Newsvine: seo	Business.com: seo	Technorati Trend:	Furl: seo

I created a free video explaining how my tool works here http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4731142191695956676. Please don't hate me for my need to improve my video skills though.

Google AdWords Keyword Suggestion Tool:

https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal

To the right end of my tool I link at the Google AdWords keyword suggestion tool. Google's tool is free to use.

On top of suggesting related keywords to a word you enter they also can spider your site or a competing site or page and return a keyword list based on that.

Since Google has more search volume than anyone else the odds of them recommending frequently searched for high value terms are pretty good.

This tool approximates competition and gives 12 months of historical data. At the top of the inserted image you can see they allow you to sort through different data sets, which include keyword popularity, advertiser competition level, and cost per

click estimates. They also make it easy to add keywords to a spreadsheet, which you can use to organize your S.E.O. or pay per click advertising campaigns.

Yahoo! Search Term Suggestion Tool (Formerly Branded as Overture):

http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/

Free tool based on prior month's Yahoo! Search Marketing ad distribution. Please note the Yahoo! tool combines singular and plural versions of a word (car and cars would both appear as car). Since Yahoo! makes money by selling ads and many automated bots search through their distribution network, their search volume results may run high (some highly broad and highly competitive commercial terms are off by a factor greater than 10 fold).

If you find the term '*barber shop*' gets 15 monthly searches and you find a term like '*Seattle barber shop*' gets 137 monthly searches then likely some Seattle barber shop owner is frequently checking his rankings.

Yahoo! has local keyword databases as well. If you search for 'Overture suggest UK' you should be able to find their UK interface, for example.

Yahoo! also offers a view bid tool, which will show you what some of the top bids for a keyword are.

http://uv.bidtool.overture.com/d/search/tools/bidtool/

Google Suggest:

http://www.google.com/webhp?complete=1&hl=en
Google Suggest auto-completes search queries based on search volume.
You can use this tool to help you find many of your deeper keyword phrases after you find some of your broad keywords. Dave Naylor also created a scraper tool which queries Google Suggest.

WordTracker:

WordTracker is more robust than most keyword research tools. WordTracker takes sampled data from a couple meta search engines. The data pool WordTracker uses offers better data than what is offered by something like Overture, since it separates plural listings from singular versions and also tracks meta search clickthroughs, versus tracking search engine ads. WordTracker also provides lateral and thesaurus searches, which means that they will return many keywords like 'search engine promotion' when you search for 'seo'.

Since WordTracker makes money by providing accurate statistics versus selling keywords, their traffic tends to be a fair representation of actual web traffic. Keep in mind that their meta search user breakdown might be different than the cross section of normal web surfers and very low search counts will likely produce many anomalies.

WordTracker is a tool well worth trying if you plan to do in depth keyword analysis. You can buy a year subscription for a few hundred dollars or use it for a day for under $10. They also offer a variety of subscription options between those two time frames.

Like any other keyword research tool WordTracker data can be spammed by competitors. For example, if you find the phrase 'golden nugget' to convert really well, then you can go to Dogpile and Webcrawler and search for an alternate version (like gold nugget) to make unimportant terms look like important ones and hide the good ones. I do not think many people do this, but it can be done, and is more likely to happen in competitive markets.

WordTracker has a free informational guide on their site you may want to read before using there service so you can get the most out of WordTracker.

WordTracker also has a competition feature (called KEI) which aims to determine how competitive a phrase is, but the KEI tool is no longer very useful in my opinion. KEI looks at the number of competing pages to determine how competitive a market is, but that has long been a poor measurement of competition. Later in this ebook I will give you my tips on how to determine how competitive a phrase is.

Keyword Discovery:

Keyword Discovery is a similar product to WordTracker with a few more features and a deeper database. WordTracker is believed to have a cleaner database, but Keyword Discovery offers historical search data and a deeper database.

Keyword Discovery also allows free access to the top terms by category in their keyword directory, which shows some of the terms which drive traffic from some smaller engines to sites listed in the various DMOZ categories.

Keyword Intelligence:

Keyword Intelligence is HitWise's keyword research product. It is a bit more expensive than the other tools, with a subscription fee starting at $89 a month.

HitWise partners with Internet service providers and search engines that allow them to track user behavior of 25 million users. In tracking the behavior and clicks from various sources, this data is likely to be cleaner than most of the other tools. Additionally, they track the actual click through rate of the completed searches to know what percent of searchers were happy with the results of their search queries.

Having tried Keyword Intelligence, it does not offer a thesaurus and seems a bit top heavy (only listing most of the more generic type terms). The only keyword research tools I usually use are Google Suggest, Google's Keyword Tool, my keyword suggestion tool, and Wordtracker. Some of the other tools may be useful for some, but I get the most value using all the free tools from the engines and also Wordtracker. What makes Wordtracker well worth its price is the lateral search and thesaurus features, which help you think a bit broader about keyword terms.

Another great option for figuring out keywords is to use a broad match Google campaign and use negative words to filter out obvious bad traffic. As you collect the various search referrals you can mine that data for deeper keyword sets.

Google Traffic Estimator:

https://adwords.google.com/select/TrafficEstimatorSandbox

Maximum CPC:		Daily budget:		Get New Estimates	
Keywords ▼	**Search Volume**	**Estimated Avg. CPC**	**Estimated Ad Positions**	**Estimated Clicks / Day**	**Estimated Cost / Day**
Search Total		$4.06 - $5.60	1 - 3	150 - 191	$590 - $1,030
search engine marketing		$7.35 - $10.42	1 - 3	22 - 28	$170 - $290
seo		$3.32 - $4.50	1 - 3	128 - 162	$430 - $740
seo book		$4.83 - $6.04	1 - 3	0	$2 - $3

Estimates for these keywords are based on clickthrough rates for current advertisers. Some of the keywords above are subject to review by Google and may not trigger your ads until they are approved. Please note that your traffic estimates assume your keywords are approved.

The Google Traffic Estimator helps estimate how much traffic you might get from Google AdWords at a given bid price. If you do not enter a bid price they will suggest a price that will make an ad rank #1 85% of the time.

These numbers are exceptionally rough, but it should help you determine if there is much value in a market. If you are creating a site monetized by contextual ads it is hard to make much money from ads going for a dime a click when you consider content ads typically are cheaper than search ads and Google gets a large share of the click cost.

Google Trends:

http://www.google.com/trends

This chart compares the volume for search engine optimization and pay per click.

Most of the free (and paid) keyword tools only provide keyword data for the last month or last few months. Google Trends shows years worth of data. It also cross references this with news mentions; and cities, areas and languages frequently associated with a search term.

Google Trends only works for popular queries. While the charts do not show volume numbers they do allow you to compare keywords, and the trend lines between multiple terms on the graph at the same time appear to be scaled relative to their search volume. This tool is great for seasonal queries.
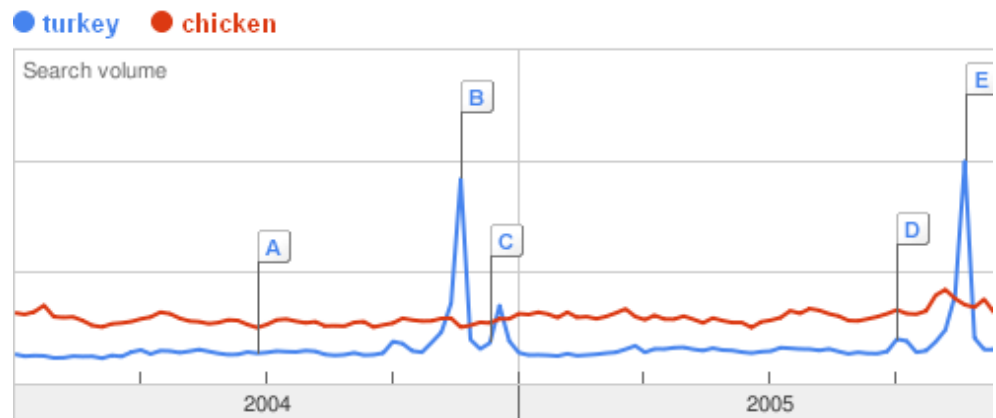
Competitive Intelligence:
Alexa is widely tooted as a must use tool by many marketing gurus.

Daily Reach (per million)
seobook.com
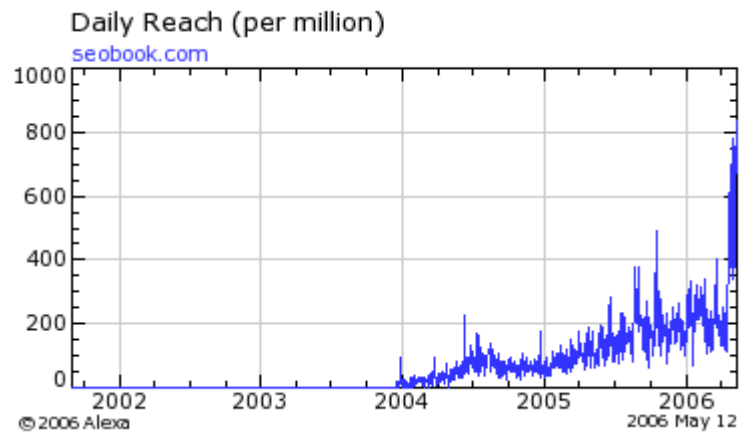
The problems with Alexa are:

- My site is not as important as the above graph shows. If it were I might be retired by now. ☺

- Alexa does not get much direct traffic and has a limited reach with its toolbar

- a small change in site visitor count can represent a huge change in Alexa rating

- Alexa is biased toward webmaster traffic

- many times new webmasters are only tracking themselves visiting their own site.

Why do many marketing hucksters heavily promote Alexa? Usually one of the following reasons

- ignorance

- if you install the Alexa toolbar and then watch your own Alexa rating quickly rise as you surf your own site, it is easy for me to tell you that you are learning quickly and seeing great results, thus it is easy to sell my customers results as being some of the best on the market

- if many people who visit my site about marketing install the Alexa toolbar then my Alexa rating would go exceptionally high

- the marketers may associate their own rise in success with their increasing Alexa ranking although it happens to be more of an issue of self selection than a direct correlation

A lower Alexa number means a greater level of traffic, and the traffic drops off logarithmically. You can fake a good Alexa score using various techniques, but if it shows your rankings in the millions then your site likely has next to no traffic.

Alexa by itself does not mean much. It simply provides a rough snapshot of what is going on. It can be spammed, but if a site has a ranking in the millions then it likely has little traffic. It is also hard to compare sites in different industries. For example, if I created a site about weight loss there would be many more people searching for it than a site about knitting. Also, you shouldn't forget the webmaster bias the tool has, which means my site will have a higher Alexa rating than it should. Many days my site has ranked in the top 2,000 sites on Alexa while other sites I own that get more traffic are not in the top 10,000. Looking at my traffic stats I can tell you those stats are bogus.

What is Alexa good for? Just like how Google shows historical data via Google Trends, Alexa shows historical traffic trends for websites. That should help you key in on key marketing mechanisms they used and when they used them. Alexa breaks down the visitor ratio between the root domain and subdomains, so you can see what parts of competing sites are heavily trafficked. Alexa also shows other sites owned by a company. This can be useful data for niche discovery.

See other sites owned

- linkhounds.com
- search-marketin...
- directoryarchiv...
- blackhatseo.com
- myriadsearch.co...

HitWise is another competitive analysis tool, which has partnerships with many search sites and Internet service providers to track user behavior. I believe Alexa is installed on about a million computers and HitWise tracks about 25 million users.

The HitWise data is rather expensive to access for the small site webmaster, but has great competitive analysis data, showing historical figures, terms that drive the most traffic to competing sites, and what other sites competitors traffic came from.

As referenced above when mentioning their Keyword Discovery tool, I think some of the HitWise data is likely going to be a bit top heavy.

Ontology Tool:
Finds related words using the Google ~ search. Logically using related terms in your text may help boost your relevancy in latent semantic indexing type algorithms. http://www.gorank.com/seotools/ontology/

Lexical Database:

WordNet - a lexical keyword database for the English language. I have not used it yet, but if you are technical in nature it is probably pretty interesting and useful.

Digital Point's Keyword Suggestion Tool:
http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/suggestion/

How many times is this phrase searched for?	
Wordtracker Check out what else Wordtracker can do for you.	**Overture**
seo — 2,230.0 /day	seo — 1,537.4 /day
seo services — 1,099.0 /day	seo services — 355.6 /day
seo company — 986.0 /day	company seo — 323.8 /day
seo firm — 948.0 /day	firm seo — 228.5 /day
	expert seo — 181.9 /day

Digital Point created a free tool which combines the Yahoo! tool and the free version WordTracker.

The three things it lacks compared to using WordTracker are lateral and thesaurus search and it has limited search depth. The Digital Point tool can also estimate localized keyword traffic at the national level from Yahoo! Search (although those numbers are biased by rank checkers and bid management software).

Downloadable Keyword Software:

I usually do not recommend many downloadable software tools, but Good Keywords is free and offers some useful features. I do not use it often, but it saves you keyword searches and can be well worth the free download for doing preliminary keyword research.

Is it Worth Buying Keyword Research Information?

Most of the major keyword databases are used by various marketers. Since many people look at the same data, it is likely that these terms are bid higher in pay-per-click engines and are also more competitive in the regular search results. By accessing smaller and lesser used databases, you may find data that other marketers may not be using, but having said that, most of the tools are a bit top heavy and do not show you many of the deeper terms. I like to use WordTracker for the lateral and thesaurus features.

Checking Keyword Competition:

Many people will look at the number of pages listed for a phrase and think that is a fair estimate of competition level. **It is not**. That is just a measure of how many pages have those words somewhere in the content or in links that are pointing at their pages.

> The best way to look at the competitive nature of a keyword is to look at the link profiles of the top listed sites.

A better measure of competition is to search for "keyword A keyword B," as that will at least give you the number of pages which have that phrase on it. You also can further target your competition estimation by searching Google for *allintitle: keyword allinanchor: keyword*. Pages which have your keyword phrases in their title

may be optimized, and pages which have them in their inbound links stand a good chance of being fairly well optimized.

The best way to know what your competition level is though is to look at the quality of the top few sites and their link profiles. Are their sites .edu sites or other highly useful sites? Are they using keywords in their anchor text? How many unique domains are linking into their site?

Later on in the ebook I will talk about link analysis in detail.

Google primarily relies upon site age and link reputation to determine relevancy for competitive terms. Post Trades is an SEO forum which has a free tool in the upper right corner which tells you how many unique linking domains are pointing links into a site. That tool will not tell you whether or not they are using keyword rich anchor text, but it is another good way to estimate how competitive a keyword is. The Post Trades tool only analyzes the first 1,000 backlinks in Yahoo!, so if your competitors have more than 1,000 backlinks it may not be accurate.

Jim Boykin created a free tool which lists all unique linking sites (of course this tool is also be limited by the search engines search depth limits). Jim also created a tool which quickly shows the number of unique C block IP addresses linking at a website.

I also created a free tool called Link Harvester, which uses the Yahoo! API and surveys past the 1,000 back link limit. It shows unique linking domains, .gov links and .edu links. Some algorithms only allow one vote per site. That is why seeing how many unique linking domains they have can help you see how competitive a marketplace is. Links from government or educational sites are more likely to be well trusted in search results since, typically, it is harder to influence them than the average .com website. Later this e-book will discuss link analysis in far greater detail.

Other Rough Indications of Perceived Value & Competition: PageRank, Top Bid Price & Search Volume

A free tool by the name of Prog shows Google PageRank in search results. Most industries usually have pages around PageRank 5 or so filling up the first page or two of results. If you see many PageRank 7 and PageRank 8 sites on the first page then likely you are trying to compete in a fairly competitive marketplace. Most of the best SEO marketers (heavy link buying examples excluded) usually have a home page PageRank of 5, 6, or 7.

PageRank by itself is only one rough measure of link popularity.

Other signs of a competitive marketplace are when you notice many lead generation type websites, many exceptionally smooth user centric highly converting websites, educational institutions, government agencies, large corporations, or high bid prices on those keywords in the top pay per click search engines.

You can get an extremely rough approximation of the value of a top listing on major search engines for a keyword by looking at the top listings using the Yahoo! view bid and Google Traffic Estimator tools.

The Tail of Search

Many people feel the need to rank for a broad generic term and optimize exclusively for that term.

The problem with this is that around half of all search queries are unique each day. If you were trying to rank well for "used books" you should cater to a variety of terms around that idea, such as: used book store, buy used books, used book search, etc.

By writing naturally and answering questions you will also include many common terms and phrases people search for.

Need Help with Keyword Selection?

If you still need more help understanding keywords feel free to ask me. In addition Dan Thies of SEO Research Labs specializes in doing keyword research reports for S.E.O.'s, web designers, and webmasters.

Meta Tags

When people refer to meta tags, they are talking about the meta description and meta keyword tags. Some search engines may display the meta description as part of the search results, but the meta keywords tags generally does not appear in search results.

What do the Meta Tags Look Like?

The meta keywords tag is typically used for misspellings or synonyms not occurring in page copy.

The meta description tag should be a few sentences to a paragraph of text which use various versions of your keywords and describe the purpose of a given page.

Meta tags are only one small element of current search engine ranking algorithms.

```
<meta name="keywords" content="seo ebook, seo e-book, seo
tutorial, seo tutorial book, search engine optimisation,
search engine optimisation tutorial ">
<META NAME="Description" CONTENT="Search Engine Optimization
Book is a SEO blog which provides daily search engine news.
SEO Book keeps up with the latest trends in search engine
algorithm changes and provides new SEO tips.">
```

Meta Keywords Tag:

If your site does not have meta keyword tags I probably would not recommend spending the time to add them. If you add meta keywords while you are creating pages I wouldn't spend more than a minute on each page. I probably wouldn't list any more than 2 to 6 of them per page.

The meta keywords tag is not supported by many major search engines. While it is important to choose the correct keywords for your page, the meta keywords tag itself is not used by many top SEO experts.

Mike Grehan interviewed Jon Glick (of Yahoo! Search) and asked him about the meta keyword tag. Jon stated that the meta keyword tag is used to include a page among a subset of search results, but is not used in determining the relevancy of that page for the given search term.

If a word does not exist on a page and is not in any of its inbound linkage data then search engines such as Yahoo! may not know to include the page in search results unless it exists in the keyword tag. I usually do not use the meta keywords tag on my pages (as it is not usually very important), but it can help you out some if there are many different ways to say your product names.

If you use the meta keywords tag, it should be unique for each page you place it on. The keywords tag is a good place to put common misspellings, synonyms, and alternate versions of a word.

Sample Uses of the Meta Keywords Tag:

- If you optimized a page for the keyword phrase "drop shipping" you may want to include the word "dropshipping" in your keywords tag, although if the term is that competitive keyword tags are not likely to matter.

- Notice how in my above example meta keyword tag, I spelled the word optimization with an s. I targeted the phrase with a z and am placing s versions in my keywords tag. The term is likely going to be too competitive to compete for using just a meta tag, but most phrases are not going to be as competitive as search engine optimisation.

- Some items are model 15-M or 15M or Cannon 15-M or Cannon 15M.

- *Pre*scription is often mistyped as *per*scription.

If a term is competitive it is going to need to occur in your page copy and / or inbound link text for you to rank well for it.

Meta Description Tag:

The meta description tag has varying levels of relevancy in different search engines. Many search engines still support it and display it in their search results. I suggest trying to get multiple versions of your main keywords, and your main keywords themselves in this tag a few times.

This tag should be between a sentence to a paragraph and not visually appear keyword stuffed. The sentences **should read well to the human eye** since this tag is still used in many search results pages. If you write a compelling description it could boost your click through rates, and thus deliver you more targeted traffic.

Many search engines will use the meta description as part of the page abstract if the exact search term that was searched for is found in the meta description tag. Additionally it sometimes appears in search results if the search engine can not

extract meaningful content from the page copy or if the algorithm feels the meta description will provide a more useful presentation.

A good page title and description within the search results could mean that a number two or three listing gets more traffic than a number one listing. The meta description tag can often be used to help craft a good search presentation for your most popular phrases.

Meta Tags Are Not Art:

Some people try and make meta tags sound like an art form. They are not. There are multiple tags which tell a search engine when to revisit or what language it is in. These tags are usually irrelevant and ignored.

The only useful meta tags other than the description and keywords tags are those tags used to **PREVENT** search engines from indexing your content. Since we usually want our content seen, I have spoke of the only tags I typically use.

The Truth about Meta Tags:

Meta tags are only one small part of search engine algorithms. In major search engines each of the following is typically far more important than meta tags.

- Link Popularity & Link Reputation

- Site Age

- Page Title

- Page Copy

Robots Exclusion Standard:

When primitive robots were first created, some of them would crash servers by requesting too many pages too quickly. A robots exclusion standard was crafted to allow you to tell any robot (or all of them) that you do not want some of your pages indexed or that you do not want your links followed. You can do this via a meta tag on the page copy

```
<meta name="robots" content="noindex,nofollow">
```

or create a robots.txt file that gets placed in the root of your website. The goal of either of these methods is to tell the robots where NOT to go. The official robots exclusion protocol document is located here:
http://www.robotstxt.org/wc/exclusion.html. The robot.txt file goes in the root level of your domain using robots.txt as the file name.

This allows all robots to index everything

User-agent: *
Disallow:

This disallows all robots to your site

User-agent: *
Disallow: /

You also can disallow a folder or a single file in the robots txt file. This disallows a folder:

User-agent: *
Disallow: /projects/

This disallows a file

User-agent: *
Disallow: /cheese/please.html

One problem many dynamic sites have is sending search engines multiple URLs with nearly identical content. If you have products in different sizes and colors or other small differences, it is likely you could generate lots of near duplicate content which will prevent search engines from fully indexing your sites.

If you place your variables at the start of your URLs then you can easily block all of the sorting options using only a few disallow lines. For example:

User-agent: *
Disallow: /cart.php?size
Disallow: /cart.php?color

would block search engines from indexing any URLs that started with cart.php?size or cart.php?color. Notice how there was no trailing slash at the end of the above disallow lines. That means the engines will not index anything that starts with that in the URL. If there was a trailing slash search engines would only block a specific folder.

If the sort options were at the end of the URL, you would either need to create an exceptionally long robots.txt file or place the robots noindex meta tags inside the sort pages. You also can specify any specific user agent, such as Googlebot, instead of using the asterisks wild card. Many bad bots will ignore your robots txt files and / or harvest the blocked information, so you do not want to use robots.txt to block individuals from finding confidential information.

Googlebot also supports wildcards in the robots.txt. For example, the following:

User-agent: Googlebot
Disallow: /*sort=

would stop Googlebot from reading any URL that included the string "sort="
no matter where that string occurs in the URL.

Free Meta Tag Generator:
I offer a free page title meta tag generator here. I wrote general tips on that tools
page to help you create your title and meta tags. Find it here:
http://www.search-marketing.info/meta-tags/make-meta.htm

Page Title Done Wrong

Why the Page Title is Important:
When the web was created, it was created around the idea of **the page and the
link being the fundamental units of data**. The page title is one of the most
important attributes on the page. It is the first thing that search engines show site
visitors about your site, and it is the link that site visitors click on when they visit
your site from search engines. Most search engines place much more weight on
page title than any other on page element.

For some non-competitive terms a good page title alone can land a page a top
search results.

First of all, we will cover bad ways to make a page title.

1. "Get ur drugz here!!!!! paxil, prozac, Zoloft buy now, Internet pharmacy,
   Viagra, pills on wholesales, antidepressants, weight loss, Phentermine..."

2. "untitled document"

3. site > category > sub-category > item

4. "Welcome to fred's store"

5. "Welcome to fred's store"

The goal of the page title is to give search engines and readers a brief description of
what that page is exactly about.

Problems with the Examples:
1. It is true that the page can be about any specific topic (even prescription
   drugs or casino stuff or pornography), but the title should not be a loose
   array of selected somewhat similar terms. You could pick any topic and
   focus on it, but not on a topic range. If you focus too widely with the page
   title you dilute the value placed on each word, and in the rare event the
   page does rank you may be sending visitors to a page that is not relevant to
   their needs.

2. Many pages on the web do not even have a title. Unless one was trying to list well for "untitled document" this title makes it hard to generate any traffic. In the Yahoo! Search index, there are over twenty million pages sporting the "untitled document" title. They would get much more traffic if they titled their documents.

3. Many content management systems are completely terrible for S.E.O purposes. The words near the front of the page title are considered the most important. If the few words of every page are not very descriptive it does not give engines much to determine the difference between pages. Many spam site generators start page titles with the same words in every page title. Make sure your page titles are unique to each page, with the most descriptive words at or near the start of the page title.

4. First of all people probably have no idea what Fred's store is. Is Fred's store a hardware store? A discount shoe store? A Viagra store (going with the pharmacy theme)? You just don't know. Neither do search engines.

   Placing salutations or unnecessary document references in the title kills the keyword weighting of the title. I always say "Welcome to...low rankings". Just for fun I did a search on Yahoo! to show how many sites had the following in their page title:

   a. welcome to (close to 30 million)

   b. home page (over 15 million)

   c. wecome & welcom had thousands of entries each. The misspelled words are even sort of competitive.

5. Notice there is no difference between example #3 and example #4. The title is a **page title** or document title. The title is **not the site title**. If, for branding purposes, you feel you should place the site title in the title of every page it is advisable that you place it at the end of the title. That is, unless you are so big that people are likely to search for your name already (Nike, Pepsi, Coke...)! **The page itself is a fundamental unit of data, not the web site!**

> The page title is a page by page thing, not a site by site thing.
>
> Usually you want to lead your page title with your primary keywords for that given page.

Page Title Done Right

We saw how to do it wrong, so how do you do it right? Well, your title should have your keywords in it. Each page should have its own title. Since different algorithms match for different things there is no such thing as a perfect title. Your target keyword phrase should be at or near the beginning of your page title. Let's pretend this e-book is a page and we needed to title the document. Using the keyword suggestion tools above I would look up some relevant terms.

All searches performed on Yahoo! search term suggestion tool and results are for September 2003.

- seo 101,543

- search engine optimization 56,947

- search engine marketing 14,448

- search engine marketing news 267

- seo book 0 (update: within a few months of creating this domain Yahoo! started serving hundreds of ads a month for this name due in part to me heavily branding the site name.)

- seo tutorial 70

- search engine optimization tutorial 59

Remember that search volume alone does not tell you whether or not the term would bring in targeted traffic. Seo, for example, is a generic term also inflated by rank checkers and is a common Japanese name, so the number of targeted and potentially profitable seo searchers is not as high as the number indicates.

Some S.E.O. experts frequently compare the page title to the title of a book. Most major search algorithms place far greater weight on the page title than on other page content. Adding unique page titles to a trusted site that did not have them can easily double search traffic.

Chose Multiple Keywords:
I was not in much of a rush with this site to achieve top rankings, as I already had other well ranking sites. I am going to think big with the title. Eventually I will want to rank well for "search engine optimization" and "S.E.O." I know that will take a while though (a year or a few years). I should almost immediately be able to rank well for "SEO book." (By the time I was done writing this book I already did.)

A Good Title for This Page:
A good page title for this book would then be "Search Engine Optimization Tutorial e-book - SEO Book.com."

This e-book will never rank well in search results though since I do not want search engines to spider it. If Google gave you a free link to my e-book then you probably would not want to pay for it. I used a robots exclusion tag on it and move it anytime anyone links at it.

This site is going to cover news topics daily too. The page title of my home page initially was "SEO Book.com - SEO e-book, Search Engine Optimization Tips, & Search Engine Marketing News Blog"

In that title I am actually trying to do a good bit of branding. Since the domain name matched exactly what I wanted to rank for and I spent thousands of hours and dollars branding that name I push it hard.

The domain name also matches exactly my keywords without being repulsively long and dash or comma ridden. It is easy and simple enough to remember, plus if this book does well enough more and more people will search for 'SEO Book'.

Title Update:

After about a year with the above title I started getting more search queries for my name and my site name. I eventually changed the home page title to Aaron Wall's SEO Book.com to make the site seem more official and for personal branding purposes.

The original title may have also been a bit longer than necessary. Usually it is best to keep them at or under about 10 words.

Chose Terms of Different Difficulty Levels:

My general rule for the page title is to include at least one competitive and one non competitive term. In less than a month the home page of this site was listed #1 on Yahoo! (Inktomi back then) and #1 on Google for "seo book." Ranking for "Search Engine Optimization" or "SEO" is a much harder task, but maybe I can hope to do well for them within a year. (Update, I was ranking for "SEO" within 9 months, have still not ranked exceptionally well for 'search engine optimization' because most people link to me with 'SEO Book' as the anchor text. Also, I have been investing most of my profits into building tools instead of building links).

Another good trick for the title might be to use two similar overlaying ideas. If it's hard to list well for either of the components of the whole, you typically can still get top rankings for the searches which mix the terms together. Eventually as you build your linking campaign you can hope to pick up one or both of the original terms.

A good example of this might be a site that is selling Dragon Naturally Speaking. Dragon Naturally Speaking is a type of medical transcription software. If you use a title such as "Dragon Naturally Speaking Medical Transcription Software" it can help you rank well for the oddball mixed up searches such as "Dragon Medical Software."

Sometimes you can also place a strong call to action in the title which will help boost click through rate.

Think Along the Buying Cycle:

While it might be good for me to rank at # 1 for "search marketing," it is doubtful that people searching for that term are immediately interested in buying. When a person searches for "search engine marketing service company in San Diego" there is much more express intent implied in that search.

Longer search terms typically have less competition and convert better. This is the real secret to effective on-the-page SEO. Use different pages to optimize for many different terms.

If you are using pay-per-click advertising the long specific keyword phrases will usually be far cheaper than some of the generic untargeted terms. That is why it is

important to focus different pages on different terms versus focusing your site on one generic term. Not only is there less competition, but better consumer appeal on each page which leads to higher conversion rates.

Page Title and Click Through Rate:

A good page title & URL can increase your rankings and double or triple your click through rate. You want to make sure your page title is especially made for human consumption, and not just some random ugly keyword stuffed string. Certainly get your primary keywords in there, but make sure the title is readable too.

Internal Linking

Categories:

Most sites do not usually have more than about a half dozen major categories. Just how I gave the example of a theme pyramid earlier your site should be broken down from the broadest topic on the homepage, to covering more niche topics as you work your way through the site.

You can break the site structure down into categories related by

- product or service type

- problems you solve

- the types of people who have the problems you help solve

Search algorithms rely heavily on internal linking structures to determine the importance of documents on your site. The pages which you link at most frequently are the pages you are telling search engines are your most important pages.

Although it is beyond the scope of knowledge necessary for most S.E.O.'s or webmasters, BlockRank is a well cited research paper discussing using internal linkage patterns for more efficient PageRank computation, if you are interested in deep algorithmic information.

On your homepage you may want to strongly feature your categories in a manner that helps prospects self select their path through your site.

Each category and sub category should have local navigation which helps support its structure.

If you have areas where one category or choice could offend others in that same basket (think gay dating and an option for a group of people who traditionally hate gay people, for instance) then you should not show the options that might offend one group to the other.

If you are trying to get your brand known you may also want to consider creating multiple brands if the friction between consumer sets is too great. It is impossible for one site to appeal to everyone.

Anchor Text:

When linking between your documents you should use the words you want to rank well for in the anchor text.

```
<a href="bla.htm">Anchor text</a>
```

If you can not use descriptive anchor text, it is known that some search engines still place some weighting on link titles (although I believe Google does not). Even if you use descriptive link text you may also want to use a link title too.

```
<a href="bla.htm" title="descriptive text">Click here</a>
```

You also can make up for slightly under descriptive site navigation links by providing descriptive footer text link navigation.

> Descriptive internal text links can help search engines understand what your site is about.
>
> I usually link to the home page of my sites from all internal pages using descriptive text links.

A large criteria in search engine rankings is the text used to link to a document. Sometimes it is hard to control how others link to you, but you can always do a good job of providing great links to yourself using internal site linking.

Use Descriptive Anchor Text:

When possible, you want to refer to your documents using similar words that are expressed in the title. Let's say I have a page about 5 HTP that is linking to a page about the History of 5 HTP. I would not use the word "history" to create the link. I would use the phrase "5 HTP history" or "History of 5 HTP" in the link as it would help the relevancy of both pages.

Click Here:

Sometimes it is necessary to use a "click here" link, but most times you can get around it. You cannot always write a link that helps the relevancy of the page that it's on, but almost always you can write a good descriptive link that contains a keyword or keyword phrase which will help the page the link is going to.

Having a few click here links scattered throughout your site may make your linkage profile look more natural, but most of your links should describe what is on the other end of the link.

Images as Links:

I believe it is usually better to use text as links than images, but if you use an image ensure you place a **descriptive** image alt tag on it.

```
<img src="http://www.site.com/bla.jpg" alt="5 HTP
History." >
```

If you use image navigation links, it is advisable to place descriptive text links at the bottom of the page to help search engines figure out the relevancy of your pages.

Spamming Alt Tags:

Image links are likely not weighted as heavily as text links because they are more susceptible to spam.

```
 <... alt="5HTP 5-HTP 5 Hydroxytryptophan
5hydroxytryptophan 5 HYDROXYTRYPTOPHAN">.
```

Using an alt tag incorrectly, as done above can hurt more than help. The search engines are generally rather liberal, but it also does not look appealing to the eye to see that long string on when someone rolls over the image. What's even worse is some browsers will read that random string to the computer user and your site will confuse the hell out of them.

Yahoo! actively edits their search results. Google employs remote quality raters. If either of them see signs of artificial ranking manipulation they may remove your site from their index, or use your site as an example of why and how the algorithms need to change. Some competitors can turn you in and get you delisted as well.

Linking to Page Anchors:

On longer pages, you can use text to link within the same document. Frequently FAQ pages have links at the top of the page which link to the answers of the associated questions. These links look like:

```
<a href="#anchor1">FAQ Anchor Text</a>
```

You then place the anchor you are linking to somewhere else on that same page.

```
<a name="anchor1"></a>
```

Broken Links in Your Site:

Many directory editors and site visitors will quickly grow disinterested with your site if it is full of broken links. Some directory editors will run a link checker on your site in the background while they review the content. The Internet is dynamic and ever changing, and some of your links may break from month to month. I recommend checking your site for broken links before submitting it to any of the major directories. Xenu Link Sleuth is a free downloadable link checking program which can even help you quickly build a site map.

I try to look through my site for broken links at least once every few months.

When Broken Links are OK:

A good thing about the blog format of this site is that I do not need to go back and fix broken links as they fall into the archives. If your site is a clearly dated news site then you do not need to go back to edit all of your links as sites around the web change.

Broken Links as a Signal of Low Quality:

If most of the links on your site are broken or link to spammy sites then search engines may place less authority on your documents full of broken links. If most of the links are broken then how well can they trust the current page content?

Dangling Nodes:

Most, if not all, of your pages should link at other pages on your site. If a page does not link to other pages it prevents search engine spiders from being able to use that page's link authority to help get other pages indexed.

Relative VS Absolute Links:

Some people link internally using relative links

```
<a href="../">Anchor Text</a>
```

others link using absolute links

```
<a href="http://www.site/page.htm">Anchor Text</a>
```

Search engines convert relative links to their absolute locations prior to assigning the page a document ID number. It is preferable to use absolute URLs, but search engines shouldn't mess up assigning a proper URL to documents linked to via relative links.

The big downsides to using relative links are:

- **Content Theft:** If people steal your content and repost it to their sites it may be worth using absolute links so you get some link credit / value out of them stealing your content.

- **Hijacking:** If someone tries to hijack your site (make a search engine think your site exists at their URL) they can get many pages on your site if all your URLs are relative. If you use absolute links they can't get many pages from your site.

Canonical URLs:

Search engines may index your website or web pages under multiple URLs if your site or internal linkage data is not structured properly. Tips to avoid this from happening:

- **WWW vs Non WWW:** Make sure you use absolute links and point them at a consistent version of the site. If your site is being indexed under the www version and the non www version 301 redirect the less important version of the site at the other location.

- **Page vs Other Sites:** Try not to use too much content that appears on other indexed sites. If your site is new by default you will have less

authority than most other sites with the same content, thus you will not rank for it due to duplicate content filters.

- **Site vs Page:** When you link back to your home page make sure you are just linking at www.site.com, and are not linking at something like site.com/index.html. This will ensure your internal and external link authority focus on one URL. If you split up your link popularity you are splitting your votes.

- **Dynamic CMS Errors:** Some content management systems get the same content or near duplicate content indexed at multiple URLs. There are many ways to look out for this, and I could write 30 pages on the topic, but make sure that as you surf through your site you do not have printer friendly versions or other similar versions of your content getting indexed. Also make sure that you are not adding arbitrary unnecessary variables to your URLs and that you can't access the same page at multiple URL addresses.

- **Error Codes:** Make sure that when you go to a URL that does not exist on your site that it sends a 404 error code. If you use any internal redirects use 301s instead of 302s if you want the pages to get indexed.

Links Within Your Content:

Don't rely exclusively on your site navigation to drive your internal linkage data. People will be far more inclined to follow links in the content area of your site, thus using one article to drive the linkage data for other articles allows you to help control the visitor path through your site. It also allows you to mix up the anchor text you are using to describe the pages on your site.

You may also want to create a new section which is used to point links at pages that are new on your website.

Linking Out to Quality Sites:

Many people are afraid to link out to related resources throughout their copy. Many search engines grade pages not only based upon their copy and inbound links, but also upon the pages that they link to. All of your outbound links should not be link trades in one corner of your site. Try to naturally mix them in your site architecture wherever it makes sense.

Linking out to good sites helps you in multiple ways:

- Linking out to other related sites throughout your copy makes your site look like a more natural part of the web. It will give you a ranking boost in clustering search engines (such as Ask.com). Other major search engines are also believed to factor outbound links into their ranking algorithms.

- Linking out to related quality sites or pages offers your users additional useful information. If you refer them to good information they will be

more inclined to associate you with that good information and many of them will remember where they came from.

- Your site visitors and people you link at will be more inclined to link into your site if you provide a wealth of good information and also link out to additional relevant information.

- By linking out to other relevant sites it does not force you to have to recreate the entire web to have a useful website.

- The people who you link to may end up returning the favor down the road. This is especially true with social sites like weblogs.

Some example sites that are easy to link to:

- Wikipedia article about your topic.

- Useful .edu or .gov pages about your topic.

- DMOZ or Yahoo! category about your topic.

- Some of the better informational or non competitive sites ranking in the search results for your keywords or related phrases.

- Sites that are authorities on your topic or a topic slightly broader. For example SEO Book.com links many times at SearchEngineWatch.com.

Navigation

Effective navigation should let a user know:

- What site they are on.

- Where they are in that site.

- Where they have been.

Navigation and Search Engines:

Good navigation helps the search engines better understand the site structure as well as helping site users. Typically your most important documents will have the greatest number of inbound links.

Often, people will use tabs or images for their links which have a minimal amount of descriptive text in them. You can offset this by using descriptive text links in the page footer. You can see an example of this technique at http://www.search-marketing.info. It is common to have one set of navigation that is used by site visitors and another that is used by search engine spiders.

Proper navigation also gives you descriptive internal links. A popular technique for doing this is using bread crumb navigation

If I broke this book into online pages the navigation for what you are reading now would look as follows: Search Engine Optimization (SEO Book) > Writing for Search Engines > Web Site Navigation

- The first link would be a link to the home page.

- The second link would be to the chapter on search engine optimization. These links would be optimized text links which help define the purpose of my pages.

- The third piece of text would not be a link, but would just be text saying the page where the user is.

Setting up navigation looks professional, helps the user, and helps search engines understand the relationships between pages on your site. Better usability and higher rankings. You can't beat that with a stick!

Dynamic Navigation

Some sites use JavaScript and other client side navigation. Search engines struggle to follow things that happen on the client side (or in the browser). You can tell if a site's navigation is client side by viewing the source or by turning off JavaScript and active scripting then reloading the document.

I generally recommend staying away from JavaScript and client side navigation. If you feel you must use it make sure you add static text links to the bottom of your pages.

Site Map:

It is also a good idea to have a site map, linked to from the home page, which links to all major internal pages. The idea is to give search engine spiders another route through your site, **and** to give users a basic way to flow through your site if your navigation is broken or confusing. The site map should be:

- quick loading

- light on graphics

- & overly simplistic

I usually title my site map as "site map." Sometimes when people optimize their site map it lists above the other pages in their site since it has so many descriptive words on it. The site map is not the ideal entry place into a web site though.

Xenu Link Sleuth (free download) checks for broken links and can also help you quickly build a site map, which you may later need to reformat to match your site design.

> I do not worry about keyword density. I use descriptive page titles, semantically related headers and sub headers, and descriptive internal linking to help search engines define what my pages are about.

Pagination:

This is not something most webmasters need to worry about, but some large catalog sites organize items by genre and then list choices alphabetically. If you have a vast number of related choices and are creating a navigation route that is more likely to be useful to bots than humans you may want to link to all of the choices on one page, or provide links to each of the additional pages near the bottom of the first page.

If you only have 1 next link on each page then each time a spider indexes a page you are sending them to a page with less and less link popularity.

This may not be a big deal if you have other paths for spiders to search through your site, but if this is a primary indexing mechanism you can't expect them to spider through 25 consecutive pages of items starting with the letter S if they only get one of those links at a time until they index the next page.

Entry Pages that Convert:

Poor pagination and other similar problems sometimes cause large dynamic sites to waste much of their link authority on pages that provide search spiders with little unique content or value.

If these pages rank in the search results over more focused pages on your site then you may have a much lower conversion rate than would otherwise be attainable.

Optimizing Your Page Copy

Optimize Each Page:

One of the most important things to understand is that **each page is its own unit and has its own ranking potential and its own relevant keywords**. Usually a home page has more value than the other pages since it is typically the easiest place to build links at. Home pages should generally be optimized for the most relevant competitive keyword phrases in your market that you feel you would be able to rank for. Interior pages should be optimized for other relevant phrases that relate to the content of each page.

There are many things to optimize on each page. Above we already spoke of how to choose your keywords, page titles, and meta tags. Within each page there is also content that can be optimized.

On the Page Optimization Only Goes So Far:

When optimizing a page for competitive terms the bulk of the ranking algorithm will be based upon link analysis. **Effective link building has no limit to how much it can help your rankings**.

Some people think that more is better and more is better and more is better. This is not true with on the page keyword density, and some search algorithms may discount artificial links which are created in quick bursts.

The algorithms for grading page copy are based on a bell curve. Some pages will have near perfect term weights and then after some point added placement of certain words does not make your page any more relevant, in fact it can make your page become less relevant.

Imagine a page that starts its page title, meta description, first header, first paragraph and second paragraph all with the same word. Does that sound like natural quality information? Or perhaps more like someone trying to game the relevancy algorithms?

So the point is **you have to mix it up some**. Sure make the page title ultra relevant, but don't forget to use a few subheaders that might not be keyword rich, and don't forget to use modifiers and related terms in some of your subheaders and throughout the page copy.

The more your writing sounds like it was crafted for humans instead of bots generally the better it will rank.

Each search engine has its own algorithms and they do not all align with one another. Thus, the most effective way to improve your rankings on all search engines will be via link building, but proper page structure and on the page optimization does still play an important role in gaining targeted inbound traffic (especially for uncompetitive keyword phrases or in search engines that rely heavily on page contents).

Text is Important:

Almost every page is going to have navigation and decoration. It's impossible to have just one thing (usability, or copywriting, or S.E.O. – you need them all). Building a page and a site is a balancing act. For search engines the portions of the page that matters most and you have the most control over is the text. Some places try S.E.O. so hard that the copy reads like rubbish. Obviously, that is no good. Traffic means nothing if people do not convert.

Use Keywords in Headings:

Use keywords in headings and subheadings throughout the page - this heading should capture the person's attention and tell them they are in the right place. `<H1>Optimize Web Pages – Learn SEO Copywriting</H1>` would be a classic straight SEO approach

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search engines. Natural writing will cause you to use your keywords throughout the text.

I only recommend using a single H1 tag on each page. I also try to use many H2 or H3 tags to break up the page copy and help structure the data.

Break the page into subgroups:

h1 (consisting of primary keywords and a modifier or call to action) **Only use one h1 tag per page & do not bold or emphasize it. It probably works best if it is slightly different than your page title.**
h2 (similar subtopic phrase or idea with some keyword phrases in it)
paragraph bla bla bla
h2 (another subtopic with some similar or overlapping keywords in it)
paragraph bla bla
paragraph bla bla bla
h2 (Many subtopics do not have the same keywords as the page title and main heading. If you are writing for conversion not all of them will, which is also good for SEO. Mix it up. Keep it natural looking.)
h2 (another subtopic with some similar or overlapping keywords in it)
unordered list
paragraph bla bla
h2 (another subtopic focused on another niche)
paragraph bla bla bla
paragraph bla bla bla bla

Usually the subheadings will focus on a keyword phrase that is slightly more specific than the main heading.

The next example set is going to be a bit self promotional, but that is not really the intent. It is hard for me to think of structuring content without thinking about a topic, and it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to tell people to copy any of my pages or client sites.

If I wrote a page about applying for a job the page title and headers might look something like this

<title>Search Engine Optimization Guru Looks to Help 1 Lucky Client</title>

<h1>Online Search Engine Optimization Expert for Hire</h1>

<h2>Aaron Wall: Your SEO Expert</h2>

<h2>History in the Search Community</h2>
<h3>Author of SEO Book: A Well Known Search Blog</h3>
<h3>Top Selling Marketing Book Author</h3>
<h3>Speaker at Search Engine Strategies & WebmasterWorld</h3>
<h3>Directory Editor</h3>
<h3>Moderator at Many Professional Discussion Forums</h3>

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<h2>Search Engine Ranking Achievements</h2>
<h3>Search Marketing ROI Results</h3>
<h3>Client Testimonials</h3>
```

Descriptive reader focused sub headings improve the usability of your website, both for search engines and human visitors.

I only recommend using one H1 tag per page. The headings help structure the information and give the words in their tags a ranking boost. If you start doing things like:

- Placing all your content in an H1 tag.

- Bolding the H1 tags.

- Bolding all occurrences of your keywords.

then you are doing things that would give search engines a reason to discount your page. Thus, the combined effect will be more likely to hurt your rankings on multiple fronts since your content may look less appealing to search engines and site visitors will be less likely to buy from it or link at it.

Place Your Keywords Where it Makes Sense:
- Place keywords in the paragraphs.

- Place keywords in the heading tags.

- Place keywords in img alt tags.

- When the word is part of a small statement making a specific point, you may bold it or italicize it.

- You may also want to include your keywords a few times in bulleted lists.

- When possible place the keywords in links, and don't forget navigation.

- Don't focus on just 1 core keyword over and over again. Mix in many variations.

- The key focus of the page should be on readability. If the page does not make sense to human eyes then it is no good for a search engine **and it will not make sales**. You want to use keywords often, but not to the point where it sounds like you are writing for the search engine and not the user.

Don't Be Generic:
If your keyword is "eat cheddar" you can look for the word 'cheese' and try to replace it with 'cheddar'. A good idea in Jill Whalen's "The Nitty-gritty of Writing

for the Search Engines" report is to play detective. Ask who what where when and how. Try to avoid stuff which is generic.

A great example I can remember is the guy who was #1 in Google for "xyz tips." He had words across the top of his page like "forums" "new" and "strategy". I told him adding the word xyz in front of these would help him out. Sure enough he quickly got to #1 for xyz tips, and since those words were in link text his inner pages started ranking better for those terms as well.

Using some mixture of terms and phrases is important (ie: in some spots you want to use terms related to your keywords and not just your keywords) since latent semantic indexing type algorithms may be able to detect unnatural copy which lacks related terms and score hyper-focused repetitive unnatural text as being less relevant. If you took your core keyword out of the page copy and replaced it with blanks you would still want humans to be able to understand what the document is about? If they could you are in great shape.

Heather Lloyd-Martin also wrote an e-book about SEO copywriting. Her book goes more in depth than Jill's and also talks about some of the common problems S.E.O.'s have when working with large companies, and how to solve those problems.

Be Creative:
There are so many creative ways to mix in your keywords. Again, assuming we wanted to target "eat cheddar" we could write the following:

Cheddar is one of my favorite foods to eat. Cheddar is ...

Notice how the keywords overlap and are in different sentences. There are many different ways to get your keywords in the content.

Spread Your Keywords Throughout The Page:
Some of the more recent algorithms may have the ability to look for natural language patterns. In natural language, the different words in a keyword phrase will appear spread apart from one another.

To boost your rankings in these algorithms, you will want to use the word eat in some spots and cheddar in other spots. Often your keywords will appear next to each other naturally. Some phrases like "peanut butter" often occur together, but in general **all of your occurrences of the keywords should not be together.**

Keywords at the Top of The Page:
Some people strongly believe that keywords near the top of the page and before your navigation enhance search engine rankings. I have never worried much about this.

It can easily be accomplished by writing a sentence above your branding images or through using a floating DIV or other CSS techniques. When using tables some people use a blank cell technique to make the search engines see the body content

before navigation. If search engines place weighting on where the keywords are on the page then they most likely use the order of the words in the actual page source code and not the visual display of the pages.

Microsoft did research into visual page segmentation and Google hired some lead Firefox programmers away from Mozilla. As computer clock cycles get more efficient if they can improve relevancy by looking closer at how words appear on displayed pages they will factor that into their algorithms.

Naming Filepaths:

Usually, you want to use short file names and folder names so that the data is easy to transmit using various means such as e-mail. Long file paths may look a bit spammy to search engine editors or searchers looking through search results.

Generally, you want to use one to a few keywords in each filename or folder. Use lower cased filepaths because some directories & content management systems do not handle upper-case filenames. Separate words with a – (hyphen) symbol between each word. If you leave blank spaces it will look weird in the address bar and if you use _ (underscore), search engines will not be able to parse apart the individual words in each file name.

Some people will cite your website using the URL as the link text. If you use descriptive URLs that should help improve your rankings. If your site is already built and well indexed, there is probably little reason to change filenames, but if you are making a new site it is worth the 5 seconds it takes to use descriptive filenames.

Building Content

Same Old Stuff:

Creating an extremely useful web-based tool or paying a programmer to create one for you is one of the most effective ways to build content which will help you build natural linkage data. Writing articles will also help you build up your link popularity.

Many websites blindly add large sums of content to their site because they think it is free so it should help them and has low cost. The problems with adding exact copies of low quality articles are:

- since the articles exist elsewhere yours probably will not rank as well as the one of the other copies on the web.

- low quality content reflects poorly upon you.

- Many people add unfocused garbage to their site which loses the interest of their visitors.

- Some unscrupulous parties copy the contents of other websites without asking. Tools such as CopyScape make this easy to detect.

- Tons of tools are on the market which scrape various RSS feeds and mix them to create many content pages. Content generation tools such as these will require search engines to place even greater trust on linkage data.

Some people also clutter up the Internet with search result screen scrapers and other auto content generation crap. I am generally against generating low quality automated content as I feel it lowers the quality and functionality of the web as a whole, though I suppose some people may find it effective for generating traffic, at least until their sites get banned.

Comparison Content:

Many times, people are interested in the difference between two similar or competing products. I created pages comparing Overture (now known as Yahoo! Search Marketing) to Google AdWords and many people search to find the pages comparing and contrasting those two systems.

Content Format:

Sometimes the format of information is as important as its quality. By distributing information in different formats it might become easier to pick up inbound links. For example: good blog posts are viral.

Radio is not very competitive in many markets. SEO Rockstars and SEO Radio are a few S.E.O. related radio programs which pick up many inbound links.

Ideal Content:

If you can create something that becomes a well cited authoritative work in your field it is worth far more than creating dozens of low quality pages. The authority granted by 1 well referenced document will help boost the rankings of every page on your site.

It is a good idea to create day to day content, but it is smart from a business perspective to also try to create a few industry standard pieces of work.

Deep Linkable Content:

If you build a large website and large brand it is a good idea to try to create niche specific high quality content that many people will directly reference / link at. This will help search engines spider your sites better and will help search engines understand that your site is an authority on much more than just whatever is on the home page.

Free Decent Content:

There is a ton of good free content out there, but you need to do a bit of research to find it. If you are building a long-term business, quality is usually more important than quantity. Creative reintegration of other content with some fresh new content or other features can make your site much more useful to your site visitors, but you do not want to push it too far as duplicate content filters improve daily.

- If you sell products, make sure you grab the official specifications from the manufacturers.

- Incorporate user feedback into the pages.

- When you write articles remember to quote and link into websites of topical authorities.

- Incorporate related / compatible items into the pages.

- If you have a web related idea or are researching the history of something that may have appeared on the web, you can view what a site looked like in the past from the Internet Archive. You may not be able to use the old web copy, but screenshots might be acceptable and how things change certainly makes for good article information.

- Integrate topic specific RSS feeds into your website.

- Ask a friend to write an article for you.

- Search for articles on your topic in search engines. In addition you may want to look at article / ezine directories and glance at industry hub sites to see if the authors allow you to repost their articles. Most people who know a decent amount about marketing will let you post their articles in exchange for a link back to their site.

- Sometimes, it is worth the cost to hire a professional writer. Some of my friends hire people to write press releases and articles to promote each new site they create.

- Common Content and Copyleft are two projects which aim to help allow the free flow of information by allowing people to reuse various registered content. Yahoo! created a free Creative Commons search.

- Content from prior to 1921 should usually be usable. From 1921 to 1963 may be usable, depending on whether or not it was registered.

- The U.S. Government has a bunch of free copy on a variety of topics. When in doubt check with Copyright.gov. A variety of government resources are referenced at the end of the chapter.

Integrating Consumer Generated Media:

It can seem a bit hard to optimize pages that consist of content created by others, but there can be some blessings in letting others add content to your site.

- Spelling errors become more acceptable. If some of your users misspell a word here or there I doubt that will hurt your credibility as much as if your own internal content was full of spelling errors.

- Consumers will tend to generate the most feedback on your most popular offerings.

When you collect feedback on your site, if you let feedback givers rate the quality of an item it might be a good idea to create a feedback page for each rating type. This will help improve conversion rates if spiders index pages that are consistent in theme and message.

You also want to make sure you are not running into pagination errors where you require spiders to jump through many hoops to index all your feedback. Any sorting option you give site visitors should be given to search bots as well, but as static text links.

It also makes sense to usually include more content per feedback page instead of less. The reasons for this are many fold

- If you have fewer feedback pages then you do not need to index as many pages.

- Many longtail searches will match different words left by different writers. For example, one of my sites with feedback about medication and depression frequently matches searches for things like "drugname side effects libido and orgasms". One person who left feedback mentions how it affected their libido, while another mentioned how it left them with orgasm related issues. Instead of listing 5 or 10 feedback messages per page by offering 20 to 50 feedback messages per page it creates a much larger overlap of relevant text which queries will find the page relevant for.

Other Content Creation

- Sometimes it is worth it to spend a little money to help build your site up. Many people can find college students and pay them about $10 - $12 an hour to create content for their sites. I live in State College, PA so I am sure this will work well for me here in the next few months.

- Find a copywriter for hire at a site such as Elance or have a more expensive copywriter ghost write an article for you. Make sure you get the exclusive rights to the article if you do not want them to use it on other sites or newsletters later.

- Some sites like Constant Content make it quick, cheap, and easy to buy articles, tutorials, and reviews.

- You can buy content from various sites that specifically create content for sale by finding out who creates news in your industry or by searching for syndicated content providers from a search engine or directory.

Automated Content Creation

Use, or improper use of any of the following mentioned tools can drastically increase the chances your site will be removed from search indexes. If you are new to the web and are running a limited number of websites, it is recommended that you avoid using these types of tools – especially on any site that is a main source of income.

Most automated content creation tools create content which reads like rubbish. Some tools such as Traffic Equalizer scrape search results and publish the results as web pages on your site.

RSS Equalizer can be used to create pages from related RSS feeds. Some people mix this data to create well themed and useful web pages. In some regions the web pages created by RSS Equalizer and Traffic Equalizer may be illegal due to copyright laws.

ArticleBot is a tool which creates many semantically sound articles from a single article.

I have not yet used any of the automated content creation tools, but some of my friends have stated positive things about them. They are usually used on temporary websites.

Unexplored Waters

Hype Hype Hype:

Some fields are hypersaturated and full of hype. Unless you can become one of the few people at the top of that social group you probably are not going to make much money jumping into a hypersaturated field.

Just because there is hype and conversation in a market it does not mean there is money to be made there.

Where the Money Is:

If you find holes in conventional S.E.O. wisdom you can make a boatload of cash. I like having at leas a couple spare sites to do algorithmic testing on.

If you find markets that are not yet on the radar of other marketers it is going to be far easier to profit from your sites.

I have a number of niche sites that make hundreds of dollars a month while requiring virtually no effort to run them. This site has done well for me, but I have some sites that make over $1,000 a month while requiring well under an hour of work, largely because they are markets underserved by other S.E.O.'s. One retailer I do S.E.O. for makes about $40,000 a month on marketing entirely driven by search engines. I might spend about an hour a month marketing his site.

The point of that last paragraph is not to paint me as arrogant or rich, but more to emphasize that there is a true disconnect between value created and how much

profit you make. It makes more sense to target underserved markets and techniques than to jump into an already developed hyper-saturated marketplace.

Interactive Elements

Resources Cited:

Literature:
- As We May Think - Vannevar Bush's Memex manifesto from around the end of the second world war (http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/flashbks/computer/bushf.htm)

- Tipping Point - Malcolm Gladwell's book about how small changes can make a big difference. (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0316346624/)

- BlockRank – research paper about leveraging local link structures for faster computation of PageRank (http://www.stanford.edu/~sdkamvar/papers/blockrank.pdf)

- The Nitty-gritty of Writing for the Search Engines - Jill Whalen's copy editing e-book (http://www.highrankings.com/seo-writing.htm)

- Search Engine Writing – Heather Lloyd-Martin's site and e-book about S.E.O. copywriting (http://www.searchenginewriting.com/)

Software:
- Google Sets (http://labs.google.com/sets)

- MSN clustering preview (http://rwsm.directtaps.net/p5/clustermain.aspx)

- SEO Book keyword suggestion tool (http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword/)

- Google AdWords keyword suggestion tool (https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal)

- Yahoo! Search Term Suggestion Tool (http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/)

- Google Suggest (http://www.google.com/webhp?complete=1&hl=en)

- DaveN's Google Suggest Scraper Tool (http://www.davidnaylor.co.uk/innosense/sugscrape.php) I also have a similar free tool at http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword-information/

- Google Traffic Estimator
  (https://adwords.google.com/select/TrafficEstimatorSandbox)

- Google Trends (http://www.google.com/trends)

- WordTracker (http://www.wordtracker.com)

- Keyword Discovery (http://www.keyworddiscovery.com) and their
  keyword directory http://keyworddiscovery.com/keyword-directory.html

- Keyword Intelligence (http://www.keywordintelligence.com/)

- Digital Point keyword suggestion tool
  (http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/suggestion/)

- Good Keywords – downloadable keyword software
  (http://www.goodkeywords.com/)

- Lexical FreeNet (http://www.lexfn.com/)

- Tag Cloud – free folksonomy tool (http://www.tagcloud.com/)

- Alexa – competitive analysis tool (http://www.alexa.com)

- HitWise – competitive analysis tool (http://www.hitwise.com)

- Wordnet - a lexical keyword database for the English language.
  (http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/~wn/)

- GoRank Ontology Tool
  (http://www.gorank.com/seotools/ontology/)

- Prog – Google search with PageRank (http://seochat.com/seo-
  tools/pagerank-search)

- Unique inbound linking domains tool
  (http://www.555webtemplates.com/backlinks-tool.asp)

- Unique C class inbound links tool
  (http://www.webuildpages.com/cclass/)

- Free Meta Tag Generator (http://www.search-marketing.info/meta-
  tags/make-meta.htm)

- Xenu Link Sleuth – finds broken links on your site
  (http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html)

- CopyScape – find people who are copying your website. (http://www.copyscape.com)

- Automated content generation – higher risk tools (http://www.articlebot.com)

Websites:
- Post Trades forum – has a free tool which tells you how many unique domains are linking into a site. (http://www.posttrades.com)

- Dan Thies Keyword Research Video – links near the end of this post http://www.seoresearchlabs.com/blog/2005/10/seo-controlling-entry-pages.html

- My keyword research video (http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4731142191695956676)

- S.E.O. Research Labs keyword reports (http://www.seoresearchlabs.com/)

- Mike Grehan's interview of Jon Glick (http://www.seobook.com/archives/000292.shtml)

- Article about keyword density not meaning much (http://www.e-marketing-news.co.uk/Mar05/garcia.html)

- Smaller search engines for keyword research Snap, Ask.com, Gigablast, & Vivisimo
  (http://www.snap.com)
  (http://www.ask.com)
  (http://www.gigablast.com)
  (http://vivisimo.com/)
  (http://www.become.com)

- Yahoo! Search: Untitled Document - shows many people are failing to name their documents correctly. (http://search.yahoo.com/search?p=allintitle%3Auntitled+document)

- Robots Exclusion Protocol (http://www.robotstxt.org/wc/exclusion.html)

- Yahoo! Search: SEO Book http://search.yahoo.com/search?fr=slv1-&ei=UTF-8&p=seo+book

- Google Search: SEO Book http://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&q=seo+book

- Webmaster Radio – hosts SEO Rockstars (http://www.webmasterradio.fm/)

- S.E.O. Radio (http://www.seoradio.com/)

- Common Content (http://www.commoncontent.org/)

- Copyleft (http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/copyleft.html)

- Internet Archives (http://www.archive.org/)

- Elance (http://www.elance.com)

- Constant Content (http://www.constant-content.com/)

- FedWorld (http://www.fedworld.com/)

- Copyright.gov (http://www.copyright.gov)

- U.S. Government RSS feeds (http://www.firstgov.gov/Topics/Reference_Shelf/Libraries/RSS_Library.shtml)

- BBC RSS feeds (http://backstage.bbc.co.uk/)

Government Printing Offices:
- Catalog of US Government Publications (http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cgp)

- New Electronic Titles (contains content which is not yet properly indexed and sorted) (http://www.acces.gpo.gov/su_docs/locators/)

- Library of Congress (http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/news/extgovd.html)

- CIA (http://foia.cia.gov/)

- US Department of State (http://foia.state.gov/)

- US Historical Documents (http://www.ushda.org/)

- FBI (http://foia.fbi.gov/)

Some Notes

1. Try out a few of the keyword suggestion tools to find your favorite. You'll probably use these tools often.

2. Look at your top ranking competitor websites to see what terms and types of customers they are optimized for.

3. Do home page keyword research. Optimize your home page.

4. Find at least 3 keyword phrases to build internal categories around. What division points are logical for your internal site structure?

5. List 5 important questions or quality criteria customers may ask or look at before hiring you? Does your website cover these issues?

6. Ask 5 customers why they chose you? Would it make sense to emphasize these aspects more?

7. Ask for review of your page at the SearchGuild SEO forum. (http://www.searchguild.com)

8. Optimize another page of your website and ask to have it reviewed if you are still uncomfortable.

Chapter

5

Directories and Communities

Most pages that get submitted to search engines are of low quality. There is no guarantee that your site will get included for free just by submitting it. The best way to get listed in search engines is to get other people to link at your site.

Yahoo! is currently the only major search engine to offer a paid inclusion program. Yahoo! Search Submit Express lists sites in all of the Yahoo search properties. In addition to a $49 inclusion fee, they also charge a category based price per click of either 15 or 30 cents. **Usually, paid inclusion into search engines is not worth it for most sites.**

The best way to submit your site to search engines is by having them find links into your site from other sites. There is no need to submit or resubmit your site to search engines.

Directories vs. Search Engines

Search engines are operated by scripts and machine code. Some of them have human editors, but by and large search engines are run by automation.

Directories are human compiled lists of sites organized by categories. Since directories are entirely human-edited they take time and effort to maintain. Whenever I create a new site and I am happy with it, I submit it to a about a half dozen or dozen directories. A few of the larger directories are listed in the next section. In addition, you can find a relationship chart which clearly shows how the largest search engines and directories interact here: http://www.bruceclay.com/searchenginerelationshipchart.htm

When submitting to directories it is worth it to spend the extra time to ensure you are in the correct category and are following the directory guidelines. For example, the DMOZ guidelines can be found here: http://dmoz.org/add.html.

Submitting Your Site

Submitting to Search Engines:

You may want to pay to submit your site, but most search engines will list your site free. The best way to get your site indexed **is through having a search engine follow a link from another site**. Toward the end of this book, I will also address another option called paid inclusion.

Social Interaction and Links

Where to Get Links:

- Directories may link to sites you submit.

- You can exchange links with similar web sites. If you can afford to it is better to create legitimate business partnerships and friendships rather than just link exchange with whoever is willing.

- Writing articles about your topic and placing them on other websites can give you inbound links via the article signature. If you submit articles to other sites you may want to create unique content just for the article submission sites or have a longer or slightly different version of the article on your site so that you are not fighting against duplicate content issues when others syndicate your articles.

- Writing press releases can give you inbound links.

- You can participate in forums which provide signature links. If you participate in communities and leave relevant useful comments then eventually people may want to link to you if they start to like you.

- Buy links or rent advertising space.

- Donate to charities for links.

- People interested in your site may eventually link to you without you asking. Generally this is where S.E.O. battles are either won or lost in competitive markets.

Generally the easier and cheaper the link is to get, the less a search engine will want to trust it. Getting other people to want to talk about you or your business (and link to you) is the golden egg of S.E.O.

Search engines want to count legitimate editorial citations. They would prefer not to count other types of links as votes. Some engines, such as Google, have advanced algorithms to find and discount some artificial links.

How often do Search Engines Crawl?

Search engines constantly crawl the web. Pages that frequently update with strong link popularity may get crawled many times each day. Pages that do not change that often, are associated with spammy sections of the web, and / or have little link popularity may get crawled only once or twice a month.

Sites like CNN are crawled hundreds or thousands of times each day. Since search engines are constantly adding content to their index they are in a constant state of flux.

How Search Engines Evaluate Links:

Through the 'eyes' of a search engine, you usually can not control who links to you, but you can control who you link to. **In most cases** if bad sites link to you it **does not** hurt you. If you link back, **it does**. So in essence, it usually does not hurt you to get inbound links. **You should be rather selective with who you are willing to link out to though**.

Some search algorithms may look at the good link to bad link ratio as well. If your site has few well-trusted links and many low quality ones, they may filter out your site if they suspect it of overt ranking manipulation.

When you get quality links, you are not only getting the boost those links may give you, but you are also lowering your risk profile and naturalizing your link profile.

If you are unsure if something is a quality link or not, ask yourself if you were a search engineer would you want to trust that link. If the answer is yes then it is a quality link. It is still ok to get some low quality links, as automated scraper sites and other junk sites give most all well-ranked sites a bunch of low quality links, but the key to doing well longterm is to try to create a reason why people would want to give you quality links.

Blogs and Weblog Comment Spam:

I recommend viewing the web as a social medium. Find blogs with posts about a recent news item you are interested in and posting a comment linking to your site with your real name in it. The whole point of weblogs is community discussion, so it is not spam to add something useful and link to your web site from it.

Don't expect the link to help you rank better in the search engines, but if you participate in your community and leave useful comments it will make some people more likely to link at your site.

An even better way to get noticed with blogs is to comment about what other blogs say on your own blog.

On some occasions I have seen mainstream media outlets quote blogs or contact people who left comments on blogs. If you are actively engaged in the conversation you will gain authority much quicker than if you are not.

Rel="NoFollow":

Many major search engines and blog software vendors came together to make a link nofollow attribute. The nofollow tag allows people to leave static links in the comments and trackbacks of blogs which search engines may not count for relevancy.

Essentially, the tag is designed to be used when allowing others to post unverified links into your site. It is a way of saying "I did not provide an editorial vote for the other page."

You also can use it if you are linking out to shady stuff as an example but do not want to parse any link credit to the destination URL.

Many webmasters will likely be a bit sneaky and create fake blogs and then spam their own blog with links off to high margin website affiliate programs.

The nofollow feature looks as follows:

Link Text

The rel="nofollow" tag may also make it easier for many webmasters to cheat out reciprocal link partners. I am a big believer in karma though, and doing things like that will likely come back to hurt you.

Also think of the nofollow tag as if you were a search engineer. If a site was full of nothing but unverified links would you trust that site as much as a site that had some trusted editorial links to other sites? I wouldn't.

Search engineers, such as Google's Matt Cutts, are trying to push webmasters to use nofollow on ads sold on their sites. Unless the use of nofollow is built you're your content management system I would not recommend using nofollow. Using it is a way to define your site as an S.E.O. site which may be trying to manipulate Google's index.

Chat, Google Groups, & Forums:

In forums, people asking and answering questions creates free content for the person who owns the site. This automated page creation allows the forum owner to sell advertising space against the work of others.

In exchange for the posts, many S.E.O. forums allow signature links that point at your website. Since forums change rapidly they often get indexed frequently. This will help your site get indexed quickly if you ask a few questions at a few of the various S.E.O. forums.

Of course, the goal of forums is to have meaningful conversations, but if you are reading this e-book odds are that you may still have some questions.

Forum links are easy to get and forums have many links on the pages though, so the links probably do not have a large effect on S.E.O. Forum sig links from

relevant useful posts have far more direct value in driving sales than in effecting search results.

I have found that some search engines, such as Yahoo!, look at word patterns on web pages to find what words relate to others. I have the username seobook on many forums. On many forums there is a button to private message users next to their username.

By helping others by participating in web communities you become more linkworthy and work your name and your brand into the language representative of your topic.

General Directories

Directories worth Getting Links In:
In general, I think it is worth submitting your site to directories, but submitting your site to search engines is a waste of time. The two most popular directories are DMOZ and the Yahoo! Directory.

Just about any quality search algorithm should trust and place weight on links from those two sources.

The Open Directory Project:
The Open Directory Project (DMOZ) is free, but sometimes it can take a while to get listed. DMOZ editors work free of charge and are under no obligation to list your website.

Ensure you take the time to submit your site to the right category and follow their directory guidelines. If your site is not in English, make sure you submit it to the world category. Regional sites should be submitted to their respective regional category.

With the O.D.P., you do not need to keep resubmitting over and over. In the past, they allowed webmasters to ask for status checks on submissions, but they discontinued that in May 2005. If you do not get accepted it is not worth losing sleep over. Submit and forget it.

If you have general questions about DMOZ you may want to ask at Resource Zone.

You may want to apply to become an editor if you really enjoy your category. You should take your time when applying to become an editor. It is easier to become an editor for a small non-commercial category than a large highly commercial one. After you become an editor and do a good job you can gain editing privileges over other categories as well. Also it is best if you do not disclose that you are interested in S.E.O. They would prefer to hear you say you want to help organize the web and make it a better place.

The Value of a DMOZ Listing:

The Open Directory Project is syndicated by many other sites and inclusion into it often provides your site with dozens of inbound links. Many people are quick to state that the Open Directory is worthless or that it is super important.

The fact is that it is fairly important for some sites and fairly unimportant for others. It really depends on how many other good places there are which may be willing to link at your site, and how creative you are in making things they would want to link at.

There are a many variables that go into the value of a listing. I usually just submit and forget about it. I do not find that it helps to be pre-occupied with a DMOZ listing. Many high ranking sites are listed in DMOZ, and many high ranking sites are not. Most of my original useful sites were accepted into DMOZ. Most of my spam sites were not.

The Yahoo! Directory:

You will still list in Yahoo! powered search results even if you do not submit your site to their directory. Yahoo! charges a $299 recurring annual fee for commercial sites (double that for adult sites), which is a bit expensive for small time webmasters, but not a large fee if you are serious about making and marketing a quality website with a legitimate business model.

A number of people I know have changed their credit card details and found that their Yahoo! Directory listings still stayed even though they did not re-pay their recurring annual review fee.

Unlike most directories, Yahoo! recently shifted their directory to list sites in order of popularity instead of alphabetical. They also paginate the results, so if your site is new and there are 300 sites listed in your category your site will not be appearing on the first page of the category unless you also pay a monthly directory category sponsorship fee or build significant link popularity from a variety of sources.

Non-commercial sites can list in the Yahoo! Directory free, and I can attest to the fact that they have listed multiple sites I own for free.

When a site gets submitted to the Yahoo! Directory, an editor quality checks the site. Since Yahoo! controls their own directory it would be logical for them to place extra weighting on a Yahoo! Directory listed site. Some top S.E.O.'s have told me

they have seen significant increases in their Yahoo! Search rankings after submitting a site to the Yahoo! Directory.

If you submit your site for free make sure you submit to the most relevant category. If you pay for the Yahoo! Directory review fee it might be worth it to try to submit to a somewhat authoritative category. They may place your site in a different category than what you submit to, but it is worth a shot.

To give you an example, in the Yahoo! Search guidelines they link to the S.E.O. resources category. Thus I decided my site to the authoritative S.E.O. resources category instead of submitting to the S.E.O. services category.

Regional Yahoo! Directories:
I believe Yahoo! has decided they are going to depreciate many of their regional directories. They still accept free submissions but do not guarantee a review time.

Second Tier Directories:
Directories such as Gimpsy, GoGuides, RubberStamped, Uncover the Net, JoeAnt, Web Beacon, MSN Small Business Directory, and Skaffe all cost less than $50 each to submit to.

JoeANT is free if you become an editor, and it only takes a couple minutes to sign up. Gimpsy is free if you are willing to wait many months. Skaffe is free for editors. GoGuides has a bulk submission discount program.

If you are going to list your sites in many directories you may be able to save time by using Roboform to save some of your submission details.

Mix Things Up!
When links and citations occur naturally there is no 100% easily definable pattern. If something is easy for a search engine to do and it will improve search quality, they probably will do it.

Make sure you mix up your anchor text and your site descriptions so that there is no easily identifiable unnatural pattern.

If you start directories yourself and you use common default directory software you may want to look to remove common footprints the script leaves so that other sites which may be abusing said script do not cause your site to be filtered as well if a search engine decides to penalize sites which are using a commonly abused script.

Junk General Directories:
On the web, links are a currency. The problem is many webmasters want any link they can get to improve their PageRank. Some webmasters take advantage of this situation by creating low quality general web directories that will link to anyone willing to give them some money.

This leads to a couple main problems, which essentially boil down to an unnatural linkage profile. If a directory is not useful to humans then the inbound links are likely going to lack linkage data from many trusted sites. To

build up a high PageRank, the directory will often build lots of links from many low-quality sites.

Additionally, many of these directory owners are lazy and have have no desire to create any legitimate value. In not employing editors to add any useful sites most of the listed sites in the directories also point to low quality sites.

TrustRank as an Equalizer:

TrustRank is an algorithm which assigns trust scores to a seed set of around a few hundred or so human-reviewed websites. From those sites trust propagates throughout the web. If most of a site's inbound and outbound links are related to sites with low trust scores then that site might have a bad trust score. Good sites will likely have a higher percentage of trusted links.

TrustRank can re-rank the results to account for any improved rankings that would have occurred due to link spamming. They may even impose a penalty greater than the effective gain from the link spamming, which is why it is important to make sure you build some quality links and do not just buy from any page selling PageRank.

TrustRank also flags high PageRank sites with low trust scores for human reviews. This allows them to assign bad trust score to sites that are artificially manipulating the search results.

Below is a graphic of the link profile of a typical money hungry low quality directory. The red **X**s represent things that should be there but are not.

Many other low quality sites exist on the web outside of the directory space, but the business model of selling links to desperate webmasters has created a glut of junk directories. This glut of directories, and their link profiles makes the concept of TrustRank easy to understand.
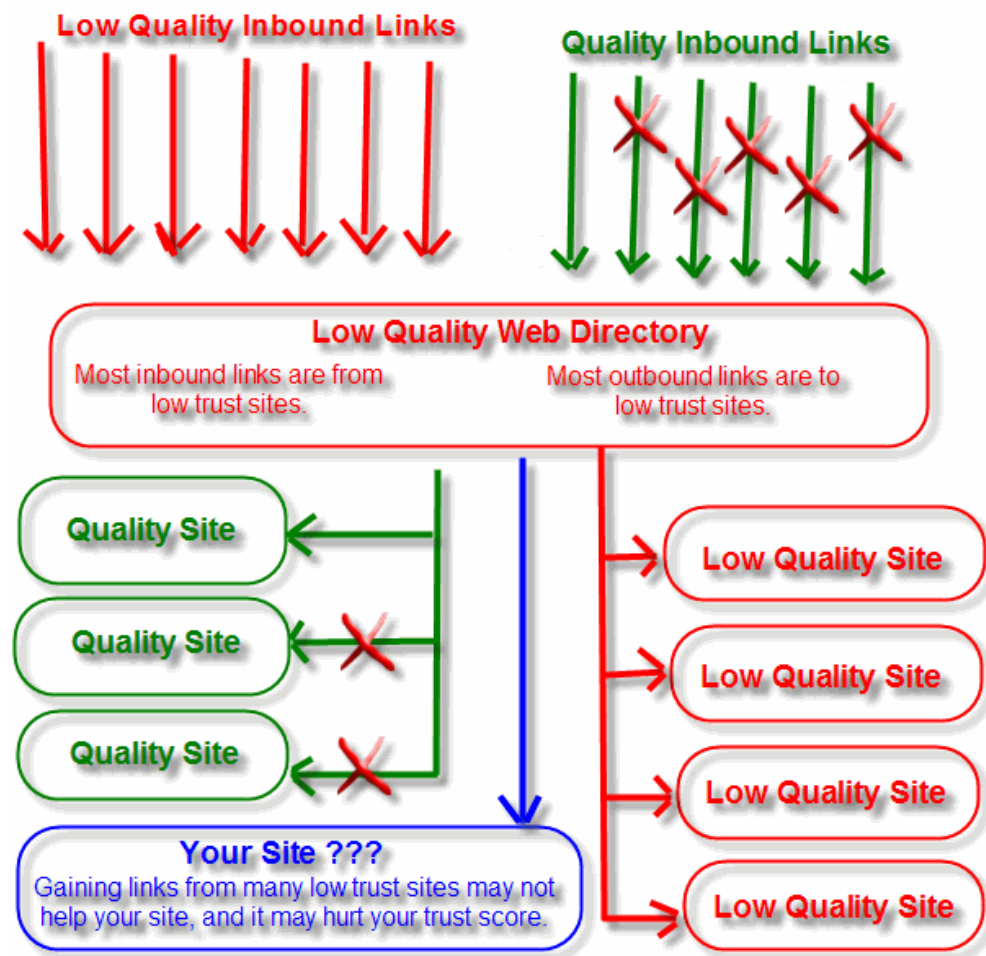
How do I tell Which Directories are Good or Bad?

I do not necessarily have the best answer for that question. If you are building a site for temporary profits then even most of the low quality ones can help you build links that will be effective for ranking in MSN or Yahoo!. The problem comes about that some of those links which help you in less sophisticated algorithms may end up hurting your Google ranking.

From the picture, you can see that search algorithms are heavily reliant upon linkage data. If you look at a site's inbound links (I will explain how to do this later on) and mostly find low quality sites and few links from quality sites that is bad.

When you look through the listings in your category and throughout the directory there should, in general, be many high quality sites that were added free by an editor for each site that paid for a listing. You do not need to view the whole directory to figure out if it is good or bad, just a few categories that you know well. Are quality sites listed there? If many junk sites are listed there then you probably do not want to pay for a submission.

If the categories are almost all blank then wait to see if an editor will be making it useful. If the directory consists only of paid listings or blank pages it is probably not worth paying to be listed. Directories with many empty categories often get flagged

by duplicate content filters for having too much similar content (since there is little content on most of their pages beyond the directory structure).

Another thing to look out for is site wide or home page ads to high margin sites in areas like casino, prescription, or debt consolidation. Avoid those types of directories as well since they are more likely to be above radar and search engineers would be more likely to want to discount links from those sites.

I believe TrustRank is not implemented to the point where you get large negative scores for just a few bad links (as scraper sites virtually guarantee all top ranked sites gain a few bad links), but it perhaps could use it to help figure out the good link to bad link ratio and flag high PageRank sites with low trust scores for human review.

Niche Directories

Industry Specific Directories:

Business.com is a business directory which costs a couple hundred dollars annually to list your site. Sometimes Business.com redirects links and sometimes they do not. If they are redirects some search engines may not follow the Business.com links, but it might still offer great direct exposure for B2B type businesses.

Microsoft also has a small business directory which is a bargain at under $50 per year. There are also many industry specific directories you can find by searching for terms such as "my keywords + add url," "my keywords + submit," or "my keywords + directory."

I usually try to find directories which have one time submission fees or directories which look as though they are going to be longstanding quality directories.

Tips to Pick Directory Categories:
Often times a site will fit many different categories. When choosing a category to submit to in a directory I look at a few different ideas.

- Is my site likely to be accepted if I submit to this category?

- Are there reasons this organization or other sites outside of this organization are likely to place extra emphasis on (or otherwise link into) this category?

- How many links are listed in this category?

- Where does this category fit in the directory structure?

- How related is my site to the sites listed in this category?

Reasons I Like Second Tier Directories (Great Value):

Since second tier directories are smaller, your link is usually closer to the root page and most pages have less outbound links than in large directories. If the categories you submitted to in a large directory are full of hundreds of sites, or are many levels deep into the directory structure, you may gain greater link popularity in a smaller directory than a larger one.

Keep in mind that the quality of the other sites listed in the directory matters too. If they list many junky sites then few quality resources are going to link at their site.

Directory Traffic:

Directories rarely provide much direct traffic. The bulk of the value of a directory listing is in how search engines evaluate the links. Occasionally, you will find a general directory that does provide good traffic – that is the exception more than it is the rule.

Niche directories tend to drive decent traffic though. Any site that ranks well in related search results may be a good place to get a link because ranking for relevant search queries means they stand a good chance of being well trusted and sending you direct visitors.

Reciprocal Link Required:

Some directories require reciprocal links to be listed in them. I do not recommend swapping links with most of these types of directories. Directories are intended to list sites. Sites are not intended to list directories. If you like something then feel free to link to it, if not then don't.

Some vertical niche directories are of high enough quality to deserve links, but most are not.

Link popularity is a currency and if you are lacking money (as I was when I started on the web) you may need to reciprocate a few links off the start. Make sure the directories you swap with is not shady before swapping links.

The exceptions to this rule are that I am usually willing to reciprocate links with:

- Extremely powerful sites that I do not believe are going to get penalized. Generally this type of site still should be on the same topic as your site.

- Directories which are well focused and are defined as an industry hub in my topic. S.E.O. Consultants, for example, would not be a bad directory for S.E.O. sites to link at.

Directory Warnings:

Some sites that pose as directories do not provide static text links and/ or their pages do not get indexed. Many of these databases will never provide any direct traffic or link popularity. Additionally, many directories require reciprocal linking and use their sites to promote aggressive high margin products. If you link into

sites that primarily promote off topic high margin items, then you are sharing the business risk that site owner is taking.

If you choose to spend money on directory submission, you should insure that the directory provides direct traffic or link popularity. You can do this by checking to make sure their directory pages have some PageRank on them, are in Google's cache. Search Google for cache:www.direcotory.com/page.php, and check the links of listed sites. When you scroll over a link in the directory the status bar at the bottom should indicate the domain that the link is pointing to and not some sort of redirect. You also can right click on the link to copy link location and then paste that to the address bar.

- You can check PageRank by downloading the free Google Toolbar.

- To insure a page is not showing phantom PageRank, check that the page is in Google's cache. Search Google for cache:www.whateversite.com/whateverpage.com.
  Also make sure that the cache date is within the last month. If a page has not been cached for many months then search engines do not trust that page much.

- To check that links are indexed by search engines, scroll over a listing in the directory. The status bar at the bottom of the browser should show www.whateverlisting.com. A few good directories happen to show some funky characters for redirects. Yahoo is the only major directory that I know of that show funky characters and still provide text links that some search engines will index.

  Most directories that show some **funky tracking characters are not providing static spiderable links**. If in doubt, ask questions at S.E.O. forums before spending any money.

- Some redirect links do get indexed, but there is no simple litmus test to make sure they do. You can right click and copy links from within the directory and do a server header check on them. If they show a 301 redirect they will probably add to your link popularity. If they show a 302 redirect they probably will not add to your link popularity. If they show a Java redirect then they do not count. When in doubt if a link counts ask in a couple various S.E.O. forums.

- If you use the Safari browser you can use a tool from Digital Point to view PageRank.

Crap Directories:

Some people buy a directory script, create a ton of categories, and then only add links if people buy them.

The problem with this is that many categories will not have unique content. Many of these same directories will list any business that wants to pay for a link.

If there is no unique content, or if the content is all sponsored links the site does not add value to search engines, then they may not want to index it.

You can view how many pages Google knows about from a directory by searching Google for site:www.directory.com.

Some directories, such as SevenSeek, do not have many listings as compared to the number of pages in their site. This will cause some search engines to either avoid indexing the site or only index a small portion of it. The index saturation of a site in Google can be found by searching for

<div align="center">site:www.directoryURL.com signature text</div>

Signature text for a site is any common text that appears on every page, such as the copyright. Sites which consist of many pages with the same or similar content may trip duplicate content filters. If you run a directory make sure you do not let search engines index the 'add URL' pages.

If you are using a content management system for your site, make sure you are not accidentally offering search engines the same (or near same) content at multiple URL variations.

Places to Find Directories:

I created the Directory Archives which primarily should only list directories which parse link popularity to sites listed in them, or directories which look like they might drive traffic to listed sites. In addition SearchEngineGuide and ISEDB each have a large directory of directories (though many of the directories listed in those may not parse link value).

Ensure that the page is in Google's cache and that the address bar show the location of the site the link is going to before paying for placement in any directory.

I also created a Microsoft Excel Directory Checklist sheet so you can track your submissions to many general directories. Some of them are a bit sketchy, but some of them are decent and most of them provide links for free or for a one time fee.

The directories with a blue background are the ones I believe provide the most authority in Google, or are priced cheap enough to provide value even if Google does not count them.

The Value of Directory Listings:
Most directory listings do not provide much value by themselves. What makes directories powerful is when you list your site in many independent directories.

> The value of a single directory link is usually not very great.
>
> Directories add value after you list in many of them, especially if you use various descriptive anchor text combinations.

If you have a keyword-rich domain name, it will help you get descriptive inbound links from directories. Most sites on the web only have links from a few dozen sites. By listing your site in a dozen or so quality directories and also getting links from other relevant quality sites you can quickly build up a great linking campaign at minimal cost.

Known S.E.O. Circles:

Most directories are not of amazingly high quality, listing many lousy websites. Martinibuster, a link building guru, often emphasizes avoiding being heavily located in known S.E.O. circles.

For example, common S.E.O. strategies for a new site might be to list a site in a bunch of directories, write a press release or two, trade links with many low quality sites, get a few links from signature files from S.E.O. forums, and submit a few articles to various article banks.

If your link profile matches most S.E.O. websites then it may be harder to rank than if you can come up with creative ways to get links from places that few other S.E.O.'s are listed.

Google Ignoring Some Directories:

Some directories have recently been removed from Google's cache. Additionally some of them have not had their cache dates updated in a great deal of time. Google might be trying to slow the growth of directories by not counting the links from many of them. Make sure you check the cache before paying for a listing.

Some of the directories will have a greater effect on relevancy in MSN or Yahoo! than they do on Google, so even if a directory is not counted by Google the link price might still be cheap for its effects on other search relevancy algorithms.

Many directory owners are building multiple related directories. Some search algorithms such as Google Hilltop will likely automatically filter out some of the relevancy score from a second directory if it is easily identifiable as being related to the first directory.

The one time listing fees make directories exceptionally appealing, but expect many directories will eventually be ignored by some of the search engines. In my perspective, that cost is factored into the listing prices. I average out the link costs for links from a number of sites.

The reason there are so many different pieces of information associated with directories is for a good period of time they were pure gold. They provided cheap and easy marketing.

Instead of just discounting some of the links, I believe Google may even place negative weighting on some of them from sites they define as low quality. Since Google is so much more complex and harder to manipulate than Yahoo! and MSN, and Yahoo! and MSN still place great weight even on many of the bad directories, it is hard to explain what directories count as quality links.

I think it is safe to say that when you look at directories such as Yahoo!, DMOZ, B.O.T.W., JoeAnt, Gimpsy and Skaffe that they probably count as good links in all the major algorithms. I have still seen Google rank many sites well primarily based on general directory links with few other citations.

Interactive Elements

Resources Cited:
Software:
- The Google Toolbar (http://toolbar.google.com/)

- Google Toolbar 4 beta (http://www.google.com/tools/toolbar/T4/)

- PageRank for Safari (http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/pagerank-mac)

- Top25Web PageRank lookup (http://www.top25web.com/pagerank.php)

- Prog free Google PageRank display search tool. (http://seochat.com/seo-tools/pagerank-search)

- Roboform – form filler (http://www.roboform.com)

The Major Search Engines
- Search Engine Relationship chart by Bruce Clay (http://www.bruceclay.com/searchenginerelationshipchart.htm)

- TrustRank – an algorithm for determining the difference between a good link and a bad link (http://www.seobook.com/archives/000661.shtml)

Directories
- DMOZ (http://www.dmoz.org)

- DMOZ submission guidelines (http://dmoz.org/add.html)

- DMOZ Resource Zone (http://resource-zone.com/)

- Yahoo! Directory (http://www.dir.yahoo.com/)

- Gimpsy (http://www.gimpsy.com)

- JoeANT (http://www.joeant.com)

- RubberStamped (http://www.rubberstamped.org)

- Uncover the Net (http://www.uncoverthenet.com)

- Skaffe (http://www.skaffe.com)

- Web Beacon (http://www.web-beacon.com)

- Wow Directory (http://www.wowdirectory.com)

- Business.com (http://www.business.com)

- MSN SBD (http://sbd.bcentral.com/)

Directories of Directories
- Directory Archives (http://www.directoryarchives.com)

- Search Engine Guide
  (http://www.searchengineguide.com/searchengines.html

- ISEDB (http://www.isedb.com/html/Web_Directories/)

Other Sites
- How to check Google's cache - Google's cache of my home page
  (http://216.239.41.104/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&q=cache%3Awww.seobook.com)

- My Directory Checklist (http://www.seobook.com/directorylist.xls)

Some Notes

- Apply to become an editor at JoeANT, Skaffe, Web Beacon, and DMOZ in categories which interest you. DMOZ will probably reject you. When you do apply to DMOZ try to apply for a small, ugly, and non-commercial category (maybe a local one) and take your time filling out the application.

- If your site is together and you can afford it, submit your site to the above listed directories. If you can not afford it apply to become an editor and submit your site to whatever directories you can for free.

- If your site is new and you are working on limited time and a limited budget submit your site to at least 3 quality directories.

Search Engines

Most legitimate search has been consolidated down to being in the hands of a couple important players. In some regional markets there might be important local players, but for most of the world Google, Yahoo! and MSN control the bulk of search.

The Major Search Engines

The following search engines are reviewed in order of search distribution from the best of my knowledge.

Some of the first listed search engines may appear to have more content and more information than the later listed search engines. The reasons that the top couple search engines have much more data listed in their sections, is

- Much of the data from one section would carry over to the next section.

- Companies which have been focused on search the longest are more likely to have plugged algorithmic holes.

- Google is MUCH harder for new webmasters to manipulate than the other engines.

The order of these listings has nothing to do with the relevancy or quality of the search results. They all provide quality results using similar algorithms.

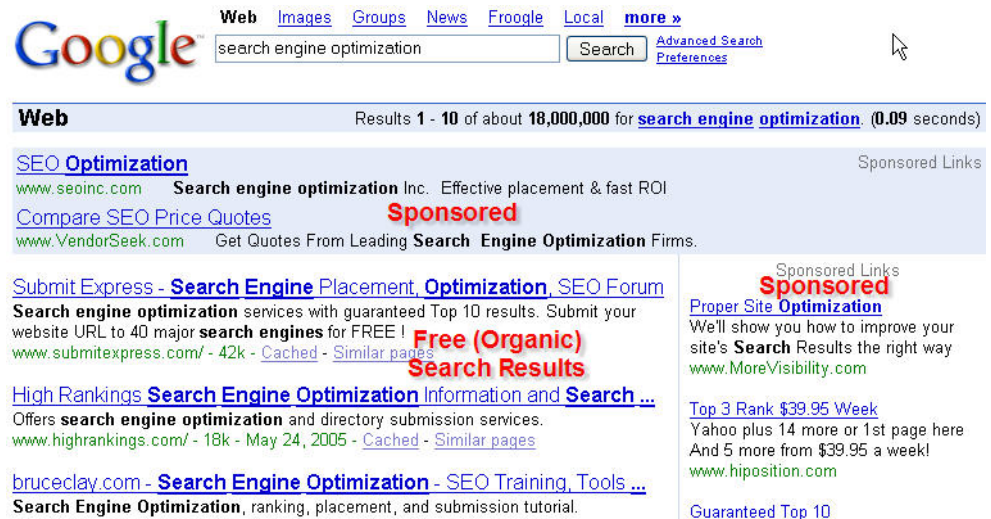## Google

Google Search Distribution:
Currently Google is powering around 50% of US search (Google, AOL, Earthlink, Go, Netscape, and many others). More worldwide search statistics are available at http://searchenginewatch.com/reports/index.php.

Google shows up to 10 pay-per-click AdWords ads on their search results, but they keep them separate from the regular (or organic) listings. There is no direct way to pay Google money to list in their organic search results.

PageRank, Briefly:
Google is primarily driven by linkage data.

The Google Toolbar provides a 0 to 10 logarithmic scale to mimic the link popularity of pages. PageRank helps provide a quick glance how important Google thinks a site is.

Google would like you to believe that their PageRank algorithm is the core of their search technology, but they also use many other technologies to improve their search relevancy.

 Many webmasters exchange links with as many people as they can, but there is an opportunity cost to everything you do. There are algorithms for sorting good links from bad links. Many link schemes increase your risk profile much quicker than they increase your potential rewards.

When you link to into the wrong circles, you run the risk of being associated with them. It is important to note that this PageRank value is **only one component** of the Google search engine algorithm. Many times a PR 4 site will rank above a PR 6 site because it was optimized better and has a well defined descriptive inbound link profile (which means better, more natural, keyword rich links from more sites, and more related sites).

Many Myths about Google:
There are many myths about Google that are represented as fact by marketers trying to make money. Misinformation spreads like wildfire because everyone wants to sound like the smart person with all the answers. One example of the many myths about Google is that you are limited to 100 links per page.

Google threw out that guidance based upon usability ideas. On pages with no link popularity, they will not want to follow many links. On pages with a large amount of link popularity Google will scour thousands of links.

I have one page with over 950K of page copy. Most pages should be smaller than that from a usability standpoint, but Google has fully indexed that page.

If you ever have questions SearchGuild.com is one of the most straightforward S.E.O. forums on the web.

What Pages of My Site are Indexed by Google?
You can check to see what pages of your site are indexed by searching Google for `site:www.mysite.com mysite.`

How do I Submit My Site to Google?
While Google also offers a free site submit option, but the best way to submit your site is by having Google's spider follow links from other web pages.

Google offers a Google Sitemaps program, which you can use to help Google set crawl priorities. In addition to helping Google index your site the Sitemaps program also shows you if they have any crawling problems with your site.

Where do I Rank in Google for My Keywords?
I use the free Digital Point keyword ranking tool to determine where I rank in Google. Tracking various sites helps me determine some of the ways Google may be changing their algorithm. If you sign up for the Google API service and are doing lots of sketchy stuff, then it makes it easy for Google to cross connect your websites. The Digital Point keyword ranking tool also supports Yahoo! and MSN.

Google Backlink Check:
Backlinks is another way of saying "links into a page."

When you check backlinks in Google, (`link:www.whateversite.com`) it only shows a **small sampling** of your total backlinks. Many links that do not show up when you use the link**:** function in Google still count for your relevancy scoring. In addition, there is a time delay between when links are created and when they will show up in search results.

To get a more accurate picture of links, you will also want to check backlinks in Yahoo! or MSN. Yahoo! typically shows many more backlinks than Google. The code to check Yahoo! backlinks to a site is `linkdomain:www.site.com`.

How do I know what sites are good?
First off, **common sense usually goes pretty far**. Secondly, Google has a toolbar which shows how it currently views a web page or website. The Google toolbar is one of the top search engine optimization tools for a person new to search engine marketing. It works on windows and is downloadable at http://toolbar.google.com/. Finally, if you have doubts you probably do not want to link.

You can also feel free to ask me or ask in various S.E.O. forums.

PageRank is a measure of link popularity which can come and go. It's not hard for a successful business to rent a few high PageRank links into their site and then leverage that link popularity for link exchanges. A site with decent PageRank can get penalized just the same as a site with low PageRank. Usually, you will want to error on the side of caution off the start.

If you are using techniques that fall far outside of Google's recommended guidelines, I would not recommend using their toolbar since the feedback the toolbar provides may make it easy for them to link you to all of your websites.

Google Toolbar Broken?

1. Sometimes the Google Toolbar gets stuck at 0 when searching the web. If you are unsure of the PageRank of a page go to a high PageRank site (like http://www.w3c.org) and then type the address of where you were just at in the address bar of Internet explorer. Usually this technique will unstick the PageRank.

2. Keep in mind that Google has only been updating toolbar display PageRank about once every 3 months, so if a site is only a few months old it will not be uncommon for it to show a PageRank 0 in the toolbar. Also remember that PageRank is only a rough approximation of authority.

3. To find out who is linking to your competitors, you can type link:www.evilcompetitor.com in the Google search box. Keep in mind that **Google only shows a small sample of inbound links** and **other search engines show more / better linkage data**.

4. The toolbar is just an aid, and should be combined with common sense. If you see sites linking into awful websites or a site looks sketchy then it may not be a good place to get a link from.

5. If you use the Safari browser you can use the PageRank Toolbar Widget for the Mac from Digitalpoint.

New Google Toolbar Features

In February 2006 Google introduced the beta version of their 4th Google Toolbar. It is currently an Internet Explorer only offering, but it has many new features over prior versions.

Some notable features:

1. **Search suggest:** tries to help you complete your search queries based on other popular searches.

2. **Toolbar buttons:** You can create custom XML buttons to link to some of your favorite sites. This also has a simple RSS reader integrated into it. I

created buttons on my site to link at many useful free S.E.O. tools and S.E.O. blogs.

3. **Saves bookmarks:** If you are logged in it saves your search history and bookmarks in your Google Account, which is accessible from any computer.

Google Update Florida:

In November of 2003, Google performed a major algorithm change. The goal of the change was to make it harder to manipulate their search results. It is believed that Google may have significantly incorporated Hilltop, Topic Specific PageRank, and / or latent semantic indexing into their algorithm.

It is important to get links from **the right community**. Do not rely on cheesy off topic link exchanges. They can hurt you more than they help you. For example, to a search engine marketer, a link from SearchEngineWatch (a search engine information resource hub) may be worth much more than many random off topic links.

I still have seen significant evidence that **off-topic inbound links can improve your Google rankings significantly**, but likely this will eventually change, and there is an opportunity cost and risk level associated with every activity.

In early 2004 Google also began to block the ability of certain sites to pass PageRank. In addition, Google seems to have set up a portion of their algorithm to delay the effects of some links or to only allow them to parse partial link credit until the links age. These moves are aimed at curbing manipulation of the Google index through link buying, by making it a much more expensive and much less predictable process.

It may take up to three or so months for the full effect of new links to kick in.

Google Update Jagger:

In November of 2005 Google rolled out another major update that caused a roar on the S.E.O. forums. I think mainly the update was most likely related to scrubbing link quality. Google also appeared to have placed more weight on TrustRank or another similar technology.

The value of low quality automated links is going down daily. S.E.O. is becoming more and more about public relations and viral marketing.

Google Update Big Daddy:

In early 2006 Google upgraded their crawl and indexing systems to a new architecture which leveraged different crawl priorities.

This update has caused many sites to be partially indexed or improperly indexed. They still are working on cleaning up some of the errors introduced by the new Google search architecture. Matt Cutts also mentioned on his blog that many sites

which were well indexed are no longer indexed or reduced to only having a few pages indexed due to have low trust spammy inbound links, shady outbound links, or participating in cheesy link exchange networks.

Various Data Centers:

Google uses groups of data centers to process their search queries. When Google updates algorithms or their refreshes their index, the changes roll from one data center to the next. When results rapidly change back and forth, sometimes they are tweaking algorithms, but more frequently you are getting search results from different data centers. You can use the free FireFox ShowIP extension to find the IP address of the data center of your search query.

Google Sandbox:

Many new sites, or sites which have not been significantly developed, have a hard time ranking right away on Google. Many well known S.E.O.'s have stated that a good way to get around this problem is to just buy old sites. Another option is to place a site on a subdomain of a developed site, and after the site is developed and well-indexed 301 redirect the site to the new location.

The whole goal of the Sandbox concept is to put sites through a probationary period until they prove they can be trusted.

The only ways most webmasters will get around it are:

- Buying an old site and ranking it

- Placing pages on a long established well trusted domain (through buying sites, renting full page ads, renting a folder, or similar activity)

- Gaining a variety of natural high quality links. When a real news story spreads some of the links come from news sites or other sites which are highly trusted. Also note that when real news spreads some of the links will come from new web pages on established trusted sites (new news story and new blog posts). It is an unnatural pattern for all your link popularity to come from pages that have existed for a long time, especially if they are links that do not send direct traffic and are mostly from low trust sites.

- Participating in hyper niche markets where it is easy to rank without needing a large amount of well trusted link popularity

About PageRank:

PageRank is a measure of connectivity. It is a rough approximation of the odds that a random web surfer will cross your page. PageRank is calculated by following links throughout the web.

The problem with PageRank is that most industries and most ideas are not exceptionally important. This means that if Google did place a heavy emphasis on PageRank, webmasters could simply buy or rent a few high PageRank links from

sites in a more important vertical and dominate the search results for their niche topc. That is not how it works though.

PageRank (also mentioned in The Anatomy of a Search Engine) as it relates to S.E.O. is over rated. By Google making the concept easy to see and understand, it allows more people to talk about them and makes it easier for more people to explain how search engines work **using Google and PageRank as the vocabulary**. Google's technology is not necessarily better / more effective than the technologies owned by Yahoo!, MSN, or Ask.

Speculation:

I mention a number of algorithms and concepts in the following section, including: Hilltop, TrustRank, Topic Sensitive PageRank, Temporal Analysis, and Latent Semantic Indexing.

Some of these algorithms may not be part of the current search environment, but the ideas contained within them are still worth understanding to see where search may be headed & what search topics search engineers think are important to improve their overall relevancy scores.

Hilltop:

Hilltop is an algorithm which reorganizes search results based on an expert rating system.

In the Hilltop white paper, they talk about how expert documents can be used to help compute relevancy. An expert document is a **non-affiliated** page which links to many related resources. If page A is related to page B and page B is related to page C, then a connection between A & C are assumed.

Additionally, Hilltop states that it strongly considers page title and page headings in relevancy scores (in fact these elements can be considered as important, or more important, than link text). Likely Hilltop also considers the links pointing into the page and site which your links come from.

The benefit of Hilltop over raw PageRank (Google) is that it is topic sensitive - and is thus generally harder to manipulate than buying some random high power off-topic link. The benefits of Hilltop over topic distillation (the algorithm which powers Ask.com – which will be discussed later) are that Hilltop is quicker & cheaper to calculate, and that it tends to have more broad coverage.

When Hilltop does not have enough expert sites, the feature can be turned off.

Google might be using Hilltop to help sort the relevancy for some of their search results, but I also see some fairly competitive search queries where 3 of my sites rank in the top 8 results. On those 3 sites it would be fairly obvious for search engines to know that they were all owned by me. When you search

for things like Microsoft it makes sense that many of the most relevant websites are owned by the same company.

Topic Sensitive PageRank:

Topic Sensitive PageRank biases both the query and the relevancy of returned documents based upon the perceived topical context of the query.

The query context can be determined based on search history, user defined input (such as search personalization – try **Google Labs Search Personalization** if you are interested), or related information in the document from which the query came.

Topic Sensitive PageRank for each page can be calculated offline. Using an exceptionally coarse topic set (for example, the top level Open Directory Project categories) still allows Topic Sensitive PageRank to significantly enhance relevancy over using PageRank alone, however T.S.P.R. can be applied more specifically as well.

Since much of it is calculated off line, Topic Specific PageRank can also be rolled into other relevancy algorithms which are calculated in near real time.

I do not think it is exceptionally important for most webmasters to deeply understand T.S.P.R. and Hilltop, other than to understand the intent of these algorithms. Instead of grading the web on the whole they would prefer to evaluate it based upon local topical communities.

Latent Semantic Indexing:

Latent semantic indexing allows machines to understand language by looking at it from a purely mathematical viewpoint. Here is a brief description of how it works

> Latent semantic indexing adds an important step to the document indexing process. In addition to recording which keywords a document contains, the method examines the document collection as a whole, to see which other documents contain some of those same words. LSI considers documents that have many words in common to be semantically close, and ones with few words in common to be semantically distant. This simple method correlates surprisingly well with how a human being, looking at content, might classify a document collection. Although the LSI algorithm doesn't understand anything about what the words *mean*, the patterns it notices can make it seem astonishingly intelligent.
>
> http://www.seobook.com/lsi/cover_page.htm

Google bought a company called Applied Semantics, which had a **technology called CIRCA**, which is a natural language processing technology used to conceptually understand content for targeting AdSense ads. They may use it to refine their search relevancy as well.

Latent semantic indexing is a rather expensive process and many S.E.O. experts debate to what extent major search engines may be using the technology. If Google is not using L.S.I. then I am certain they are using a similar technology.

Most webmasters do not need to know much about L.S.I. other than knowing that **mixing their inbound link anchor text is important**, and that **L.S.I. like algorithms rank natural writing better than clumsy machine written content focused on things like keyword density.**

Temporal Analysis:

Search engines can track how long things (sites, pages, links) have been in existence and how quickly they change.

They can track how long a domain has been in existence, how often page copy changes, how much page copy changes, how large a site is, how quickly the site size changes, how quickly link popularity builds, how long any particular link exists, how similar the link text is, how a site changes in rank over time, how related linking sites are, and how natural linkage data looks.

In some cases, it makes sense for real websites to acquire a bunch of linkage data in a burst. When news stories about a topic and search volumes on a particular term are high it would also make sense that some sites may acquire a large amount of linkage data. Most the time if links build naturally, they build more slowly and evenly.

If links build in huge spikes then search engines may discount – or even apply a penalty – to the domain receiving that linkage data if those links do not build in a somewhat regular pattern.

Stale pages may also be lowered in relevancy. A page may be considered fresh if it changes somewhat frequently or if it continues to acquire linkage data as time passes. Certain types of queries (like news related ones, for instance) may improve scoring for fresh documents.

Google may also look at how often your site is bookmarked, who your advertisers are, and other various feedback they can get from their toolbar.

Google was awarded a patent on March 31, 2005 covering these types of topics (but in much more detail).

While I do not think they are already necessarily doing all the things they mention in the patent I think they eventually many of them. The patent is interesting and worth reading if you are deeply interested in S.E.O. and information retrieval. If you do not want to read it you may want to look at the ThreadWatch post (url: http://www.threadwatch.org/node/2115) that mentioned it and the follow up thread. (url: http://www.threadwatch.org/node/2132)

TrustRank:

TrustRank is an algorithm which can be used to bias PageRank by placing additional authority on human reviewed trusted sites. Trust propagates out from the trusted pages and sites to pages and sites they link to. TrustRank also can be used to neutralize the effects of some types of low quality link building from untrusted sources, as well as flag high PageRank low trust websites for human review.

In the TrustRank research paper the seed sites fit the following criteria

- Seed sites linked at many other web sites. DMOZ and the Yahoo! Directory, for example, were most likely seed sites.

- Seed sites were controlled by major corporations, educational bodies, or governmental bodies.

I believe TrustRank (or a similar algorithm) is a huge part of Google's current search algorithm. If you look at a link through the eyes of a search engineer or search editor rather than just looking at PageRank you would do far better in terms of evaluating the value of a link.

Look at a site and ask yourself questions like: "Is this the type of site I would use as a seed site?" if the answer to that is no then ask "Is this site directly or indirectly associated with seed sites?" and "Why would many seed sites want to link at this site?"

Topic Sensitive TrustRank:

I doubt this is in place yet, but it is useful to read where the research is headed.

Since TrustRank is topic independent it could place too much relevancy on topics which are over represented in the seed set of trusted sites. Thus you could use DMOZ or the Yahoo! Directory to help extend out the seeded sites to a broader array of sites, and topically bias their TrustRank score based upon which categories they are listed in. You could then filter out the bottom half of trusted sites in each category to prevent too many spam sites from being selected as trust sources.

The bottom line is there is significant effort being placed on looking for ways to move the PageRank model to a model based upon trust and local communities.

Link Spam Detection Based on Mass Estimation:

TrustRank mainly works to give a net boost to good trusted links. *Link Spam Detection Based on Mass Estimation* was a research paper aimed at killing the effectiveness of low quality links. Essentially the thesis of this paper was that you could determine what percent of a site's direct and indirect link popularity come from spammy locations and automate spam detection based on that.

The research paper is a bit complex, but many people have digested it. I posted on it here http://www.seobook.com/archives/001342.shtml .

Due to the low cost of producing quality information and the profitability and scalability of spam most pages on the web are spam. No matter what you do if you run a quality website you are going to have some spammy websites link at you and / or steal your content. Because my name is Aaron Wall some idiots kept posting links to my sites on their Wall clock spam site.

The best way to fight this off is not to spend lots of time worrying about spammy links, but to spend the extra time to build some links that would be trusted to offset the effects of spammy links.

Algorithms like the spam mass estimation research are going to be based on relative size. Since quality links typically have more PageRank than most spam links you probably can get away with having 40 or 50 spammy links for every real quality link.

Another interesting bit mentioned in the research paper was that generally the web follows power laws. This quote might be as clear as mud, so I will clarify it

> A number of recent publications propose link spam detection methods. For instance, Fetterly et al. [Fetterly et al., 2004] analyze the indegree and outdegree distributions of web pages. Most web pages have in- and outdegrees that follow a power-law distribution. Occasionally, however, 17 search engines encounter substantially more pages with the exact same in- or outdegrees than what is predicted by the distribution formula. The authors find that the vast majority of such outliers are spam pages.

Indegrees and outdegrees above refer to link profiles, specifically to inbound links and outbound links. Most spam generator software and bad spam techniques leave obvious mathematical footprints.

If you are using widely hyped and marketed spam site generator software most of it is likely going to be quickly discounted by link analysis algorithms since many other people will be creating thousands of similar sites with similar link profiles and similar footprints.

Microsoft also paid heavily doing research to look at some of the mathematical aspects of spam. You may find watching this video interesting. http://www.cerias.org/news_and_events/events/security_seminar/details.php?event=212370&date=1102531134;&scope=day

Human Review:

Google claims most everything is done algorithmically, but they need to refine the algorithms and test the relevancy of their results. In June of 2005 Henk van Ess, of SearchBistro, posted a remote search relevancy quality rater document and spam document on his site.

These documents showed how Google asks remote "raters" to review search results. Even if the review input is not directly used to alter the search results, the guidance in the documents shows what Google wants. One of the documents was dated December 2003, so Google has been using human quality raters for a great length of time.

I would link to the documents, but I believe that GoogleGuy asked that they not be posted, and they may be taken down soon. I did an overview of the documents at http://www.seobook.com/archives/000917.shtml. I also link through to the original documents on that post in case they are still online.

The highlights are:

- Most search spam sites are heavily automated and provide little useful, unique, or compelling to the end user.

- If people would have no reason to want to view an affiliate site instead of going directly to the merchant then the site is to be rated as offensive.

- For longterm success of affiliate sites, or bare bone merchant sites, it helps to add some value added service that would make people want to visit your site instead of your competitors.

Supplemental Index:

Google has an auxiliary index where it stores some documents it may not trust enough to include in its regular index. Supplemental search results are used to provide search results when not enough regular search results are available. Why do sites get put in the supplemental results?

- If a site is new and does not have many inbound links, some of its pages may end up in the supplemental results until the site builds up its popularity and ages a bit. This is typical for some new URLs which have not been crawled yet.

- **Duplicate content:** for example, giving a search engine multiple URLs with the same content, or a directory full of empty categories with near similar content on every page.

- Too many variables in the URL

- Host was down when Google tried to crawl

You can see what percent of a site is indexed by comparing the Google search for site:www.example.com to site:www.example.com signature text, where signature text is text that appears on every page. Since pages in the supplemental results are not trusted as much as pages in the regular index it is likely that Google rarely crawls and places low or no weight on links from many of the pages in the supplemental results.

The Perfect Link:

Google using multiple algorithms in conjunction with each other can allow them to place exceptional positive bias on links which fit most or all their bolt on algorithms. This means the best links are those from:

- Well-trusted sites (think of sites which were chosen as seed sites or linked to from seed sites in the TrustRank algorithm)

- Sites that are on your theme.

- Pages on that site about your topic which is linked to from many sites on your topic and also links to other resources similar to your site.

- The anchor text would include some versions of your primary keywords.

- The link would drive direct targeted traffic.

- If the page ranks well in the search results for your topic then that is an authoritative page that may help significantly.

- If a page or site is easy to link at and hard to get a link from that is a great thing for those who get a link from that page.

- Some sites that are well read may lead to many natural secondary citations.

How to Succeed in Google:

Google is harder to manipulate than the other search engines, and Google tends to trust new sites much less than their competitors do. If you run a new website do not expect to rank well in Google for competitive queries until AFTER you rank well in Yahoo! and MSN.

The easiest way to get natural looking quality linkage data is to create something people would want to link at without you needing to ask them.

Google is much better than its competitors at counting only quality links as votes.

If you have an old well trusted domain but have not focused on S.E.O. yet then doing simple things like fixing up your page titles and gaining a few descriptive inbound links might be all you need to do

Matt Cutts, a well known Google engineer, describes his overview of the SEO process in this audio interview:
http://www.mikegrehan.com/audio/mattcutts/seoclip.mp3
Note how he states that it is a process and you need a certain amount of authority before you will be able to compete in Google.

Google is quick to index new sites, usually within a few days to a month. During the first month or two, it is common for your site to go into and out of their database many times until you have built up sufficient link popularity. Link building can help get your site indexed and keep you in the index.

Google primarily focuses its algorithm on linkage data. On-page criteria is weighted exceptionally low for shorter and highly competitive search phrases. To do well in Google, you will need to target less competitive phrases using many different pages, or think of ways to get others within your community to want to link to your site. Some of the more common ideas for improving your link reputation are to:

- Join trade organizations.

- List your site in directories.

- Submit press releases via sites such as http://www.prweb.com. Using PR Web and paying $80 can get you distribution in Google news and Yahoo! news. Press releases should usually be newsworthy, although most of them tend to be pure crap. I believe Google News has a 65 character limit on its titles, and Yahoo! has a 150 character limit. Both tend to favor longer copy around the 400 to 600 word range, although a short useful press release is better than a long useless one. You can look at a few current press releases on PR Web, Google news, or Yahoo! news for formatting examples. Don Crowther has good PDF reports offering templates and press release tips at http://www.101publicrelations.com/. SEO-PR.com also does press releases for an affordable rate.

- Create a quality topical directory one level above your category (slightly broader). By giving links to others in your field some of them might take notice of your presence.

- Write compelling articles and get them syndicated.

- Sponsor 501C organizations (or buy/rent other links), or sponsor other sites.

- Reciprocate links with other quality sites.

- Place advertisements on relevant related sites.

- To keep your link profile looking natural to Google make sure you mix your anchor text heavily & get at least a few links from high quality sites.

You will still want to structure your page properly using heading tags, page titles, and the other page elements to help you rank well in all search engines, but currently quality links are what matter most with Google.

Off-topic links still count toward your link popularity. If you already have many links from within your community then you may receive a great ranking boost by sponsoring a few non-profits or renting a few strong inbound links from other websites. If you are in a competitive field, you need to build many on-topic links.

Anchor text: (inbound link text) is one of the most important element in Google's current algorithm and is worth far more than PageRank alone. Good anchor text combined with on-topic links will eventually yield strong search engine rankings.

It can take up to 3 months for your inbound links to help improve your Googl rankings for competitive search terms. With Google, you want to build linkage data over time to minimize the chances of it appearing unnatural.

If Google believes your site to be a trusted authority, the ranking delay time is not as noticeable and may not even exist.

Link Searching Tips:

The most time consuming part of S.E.O. is building a linking campaign. Tools or ideas which help us save time doing this are extremely valuable.

- **You can classify domain extension or specific site ideas when searching for potential links**. Inurl:+".edu" AND (intitle:links OR intitle:partners OR intitle:resources OR intitle:engines) AND ("searchenginewatch" OR "search engine watch").

- In Google you are not able to use the link: function with other advanced search operators at the same time. In Yahoo! or MSN you can.

- **Filtering out a site**. If there is a specific site which keeps clouding up your link search you can filter them out by placing -site:www.whateverevilsite.com in your search string.

Google SEO Tools:

In the next chapter I will cover some of the more advanced linking tools I use for most of my link research. There are a couple free tools I recommend using which were made just for Google.

- **Proogle / Prog:** Prog is a search interface which looks like Google with the exception that it displays PageRank underneath each of the pages listed in the search results. You can do a backlink check and set the number of page results to 100 per page to quickly scour backlinks to a competitors site. This will help give you an idea as to what are the most important backlinks into their site without needing to purchase any link software. You also can use Prog to do a quick analysis of the competitive landscape of a search phrase.

- **Google TouchGraph:** Not really an exciting S.E.O. tool, but it is a very cool looking tool which graphs out the sites related to whatever site you enter. TouchGraph helps you see what sites are related to your site by comparing your site to other sites that show up for a Google ~ search.

If your related sites do not consist of sites topically related to your site then you need to work on getting more people inside your community to link at your site. Here is a picture of my topical community. You can see many of the sites are exceptionally related to my site. This is great.
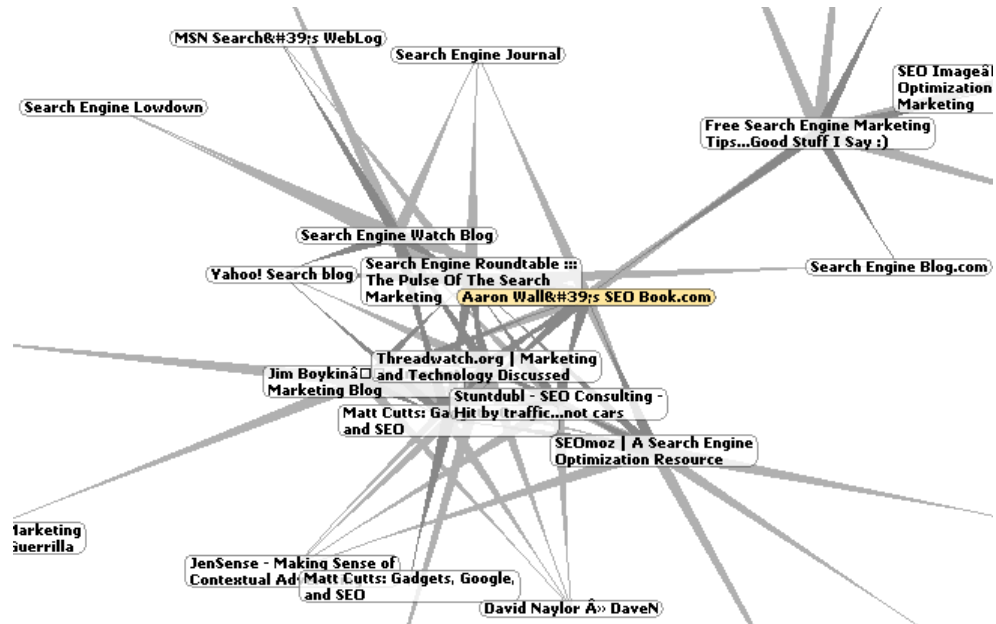
Google and Spam:

Google is primarily a mathematical company and they usually state that they try to handle spam via algorithms.

While the term 'algorithm' can be used loosely, there is human intervention. However, I am told that they do not specifically respond to most spam reports. You can report spam to them, but do not expect it to have much immediate effect on search results. Generally, time spent reporting spam to Google would be better spent making a better site. Also, some competitors can get a bit feisty if they are snitched on. I know a guy that got so mad at being turned in that a month later he ranked 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 10. He then e-mailed the snitch thanking him for the motivation to create all those other pages.

If your site is kicked out of the index for an automated spam penalty, it will usually come back after 60 days after the thing that triggered the spam penalty has been removed. If your site was manually reviewed and removed the penalty period might be much longer.

You can send Google a re-inclusion request via a form on their site after you have cleaned up your site explaining a sob story of how some S.E.O. company ripped you off. If you are still having problems after e-mailing them a few times, you can call them at 650-330-0100. Google usually will not reply to most bans. If your site is manually banned for industrial strength spam you stand a slim chance of getting back in the index unless you are a large advertiser, have a well known brand or you getting banned was a large public issue.

While they do not openly and publicly advertise it, I have been told by a few big spenders on Google AdWords that they have received low level one-on-one ranking consultations.

Google's webmaster guidelines are located at:
http://www.google.com/webmasters/guidelines.html

Problems with Google's Technology:

Jeff Dean, a Google Engineer, also talks about Google's technology a bit in this video at: http://www.uwtv.org/programs/displayevent.asp?rid=2459.

Since Google has the broadest distribution, people also work the hardest to game their system.

Google tends to take the view that any relevancy manipulation is inherently wrong and the S.E.O.'s are the enemy. In doing this, Google often prevents many quality resources from ranking and ends up occasionally having relevancy which is substandard. It seems they would rather make their own results slightly substandard than allow others to manipulate their index.

Currently Google's algorithms play WAY TOO MUCH emphasis on domain age and trust. This will lead to a stale index, and worse yet, many spammers have been buying old sites and adding tons of spammy content to them. Here is a relevant thread worth reading about how easy it is to game Google with old domains http://www.threadwatch.org/node/6484

You can also use Archive.org to see how old the average top ranked site is for your primary keywords. Typically the top ranked Google results will be older than the top ranked results on other search engines.

Google & Duplicate Content:

Since December 2004 webmasters have been noticing Google has been tweaking their duplicate content filters. If you have many pages with near similar content then they may struggle to rank in Google.

If you rewrite your URLs make sure they are not getting indexed under the old and new URLs. Also ensure print only and other versions of similar content are not getting indexed. Webmaster World had a good thread about the topic mentioned here http://www.seobook.com/archives/001230.shtml.

As automated spam spreads and rich consumer feedback is posted to the web hollow merchant sites will be forced out of the Google search results, which is a trend that has been going on for a couple years now.

The best solution to that problem is to be able to collect rich user feedback on your site, or find other ways to differentiate your site from websites that are hollow product databases.

Wildcard Replace:

When search engines compare one page to the next for uniqueness of content they can use sliding text readers across the text. This is one of the things that hurts many information light product catalog databases. If one page is like *Cheap **green** baby seat blah blah blah* and the next page is like *Cheap **red** baby seat blah blah blah* then when the search engine compares *Cheap ✱ baby seat blah blah blah* both of the pages will appear identical.

Search engines do not want to index multiple copies of identical content.

If the only difference between template driven pages on your site is part number you may eventually run into problems where you notice search engines do not want to index much of your site.

WWW vs Non WWW:

Some search engines may view site.com and www.site.com as being two different URLs. If you split your link popularity amongst both versions you will have less authority.

To prevent both versions from getting indexed you may want to 301 redirect one version at the other version.

Informational Bias:

Yahoo! has a tool called Yahoo! Mindset which allows you to place greater emphasis on commercial or informational results.

By default Google tends to bias the search results heavily toward informational resources. This makes business sense for them for many reasons:

- **They want to promote creating additional search inventory to show search ads against.** As inventory is created they can demand more out of new content by biasing their algorithms to work harder at promoting the creation of higher quality content.

- **As more information clogs up the search results more searchers will click on AdWords for commercial searches.** Merchants are then stuck using AdWords for commercial transactions.

- **Many informational sites are monetized using contextual ads such as Google AdSense.**

Google Hijacking:

Sometimes people can hijack the search results of other webmasters. This is rather uncommon in most fields, but if you get into high margin areas (such as prescription drugs) it is much more common.

In May of 2005 Google actually had one of their sites hijacked. Notice below how the Google AdSense site is showing up as being part of the all-in-one-business.com domain.
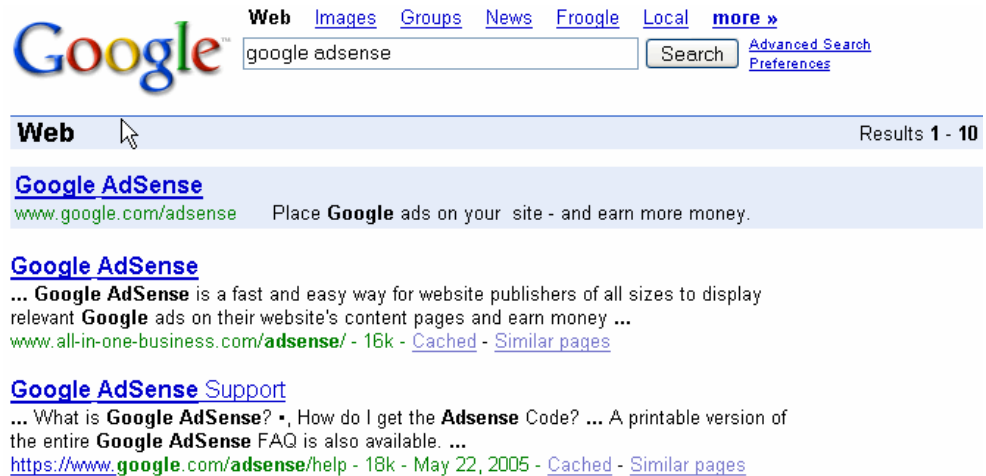
Not too long ago Google changed their facts & fiction page to include:

> There's almost nothing a competitor can do to harm your ranking or have your site removed from our index. Your rank and your inclusion are dependent on factors under your control as a webmaster, including content choices and site design.

While the hijackings are uncommon, if you are going to play in hyper competitive fields make sure you make friends with some people who can help you out of sticky situations. People usually do hijacks via 302 redirects, meta redirects, or a combination of the two. An unwritten law amongst many of the most aggressive S.E.O.s is that you should never hijack a listing and you should never file a spam report. If you do, most likely you will not like some of the retaliation actions which other webmasters may do.

Froogle:

Froogle is Google's shopping search engine. It accepts free product feeds from merchants. It also searches the web to find products and match them up with their associated images as a backfill.

To optimize your site for great Froogle listings, you will either want to make sure that your site is designed to make it obvious which pictures go with what prices and descriptions, or submit a data feed. Data feeds are free to submit and expire after 30 days (so it is a good idea to submit a feed every few weeks). There are many automated tools which will automatically submit your data feeds once a day to

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insure your Froogle data is current. It is a good idea to use descriptive image names and titles as well as use your keywords in the data you submit to get top Froogle placement.

For more information on Froogle see the Froogle Information for Webmasters.

Yahoo! Search

What is Yahoo! Search?
The Yahoo! Directory and Yahoo! Search are two entirely separate things. The directory is a manually reviewed collection of websites. Yahoo! Search is powered through various search technologies purchased by Yahoo!

Yahoo! Search probably serves over 100 million searches each day. The directory would likely be lucky to serve more than a few million searches a day.

Yahoo! Search is powered through a rewrite and combination of different pieces of what was once AltaVista, AllTheWeb, and Inktomi. As they launched the new Yahoo! Search product they rewrote the Inktomi core to make it easier to update and improve its relevancy on longer search queries. Yahoo! Search also is leveraging the power of spam filters which are refined by Yahoo! e-mail processing.

Yahoo! Search Distribution:
Yahoo! technology now powers around 27% of US search including Yahoo!, AllTheWeb, AltaVista, and many other sites that syndicate or use portions of these search indexes.

Yahoo! places pay-per-click ads at the top and bottom of Yahoo! search results in a blue box, and also places ads on the right side of search results. On some of their partner sites, these ads are blended so that they look very similar to regular search results.

Yahoo! also has a paid inclusion program by the name of Yahoo! Search Submit Express, which allows them to generate revenue from the regular (or organic) listings. Generally I do not recommend using their paid inclusion program.

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The Yahoo! Search Index is Shared:

The Yahoo! Search index is also used by AltaVista and AllTheWeb. Each of these search engine websites may still use their own algorithm to organize search results from the common search index, and Yahoo! may use AltaVista and AllTheWeb as test beds for some new algorithms.

Editorial Approach to Search:

Yahoo! believes that a hybrid of human review and mathematics works better than just math alone. Sites included in the Yahoo! Directory or in the Yahoo! Search Submit Express paid inclusion program are given an editorial review. Yahoo! has also stated that some of their editors randomly review portions of the web. It is believed that sites which receive a review may eventually be given a small ranking boost, though Yahoo! has stated that review does not affect relevancy. Yahoo! grants 501C charity and many educational websites free inclusion into the free side of their Content Acquisition Program.

What Pages of My Site are Indexed by Yahoo!?

You can check to see what pages of your site are indexed by searching Yahoo! for `www.mysite.com.` While Yahoo! also offers a free site submit option (you must be logged in to use it), the best way to submit your site is by having Yahoo!'s spider follow links from other web pages.

Where do I Rank for My Keyword in Yahoo!?

Shawn Hogan's Digital Point keyword ranking tracker allows webmasters to track their Google, Yahoo! and MSN rankings for free, although it will require you to place a php page on your server.

You can also look for other Yahoo! SEO Tools at the Yahoo! Developer Network.

Yahoo! Backlink Check:

Backlinks is another way of saying "links into a page."

When you check backlinks in Yahoo!, (`linkdomain:`www.whateversite.com) it shows most of the known links into a site. Yahoo! has also had some trouble with 301 redirects and may show the wrong URL locations for some of the backlinks.

You can check the backlink into your home page specifically by specifying the full URL of the home page (`link:`**http:**//www.whateversite.com/)

You can check the links pointing into any specific page on a site using their individual page link check command (link:**http:**//www.site.com/folder/page.html). Insure to include the http: part when checking links pointing into individual pages.

Yahoo! will also let you look through most of a competitor's backlinks. Their advanced search page allows you to specify a domain type as well. This makes it easy to see if they have any .gov, .edu, or other high power backlinks which may be well trusted based upon the domain extension. You can also subtract out their internal links or links from other specific domains by adding –site:othersite.com in your link search query.

> Yahoo! puts heavy weighting on page copy. Using keyword rich page titles, headers, and subheaders can go a long way to improve your rankings in Yahoo!.

Yahoo! and Meta Tags:

Most major search engines ignore the Meta Keywords tag and place low weighting on the Meta Description tag. Yahoo! specifically asks webmasters for this data. Yahoo! believes the more information they know about a page, the better they can evaluate it.

Mike Grehan interviewed Jon Glick (of Yahoo! Search) and he stated that the meta description tag is treated similar to page content. He also stated that the meta keywords tag is used for inclusion into a subset of search results, but has no effect on relevancy. I also covered the meta tags above in the meta tag section earlier in this e-book.

Yahoo! Answers:

Yahoo! created a free question answering service and includes many of these questions and answers in their search results.

The idea of integrating Yahoo! user questions and answers directly into the search results shows how much Yahoo! wants to keep their users on the Yahoo.com domain and how much Yahoo! wants to be the most important content site on the web. Compare that strategy to Google, who wants to send away visitors as quickly as possible and hope they come back.

How to do Well in Yahoo!:

Yahoo! usually lists a site within about a month. The best way to get your site submitted is by building a strong linking campaign. If you need to get your site indexed quickly, Yahoo! does have a paid inclusion program which I generally do not recommend using for most websites. Site Match is recommended for large databases that are hard to crawl, sites with rapidly rotating inventory, event sites on

a tight deadline, or sites which need the tracking provided by the Site Match program.

While also factoring in linkage data, Yahoo! Search places a bit more weight on "on the page" factors than Google does. Yahoo! Search results are far easier to manipulate than Google's search results.

To do well in Yahoo! Search, your pages should have a decent keyword prominence and be properly structured using keyword rich heading tags, subheadings, descriptive linking and navigation (as mentioned above in the "how to optimize your pages" part of this e-book).

High rankings for more competitive terms will require you to build a linking campaign. Yahoo! Search is not as discriminatory as Google is with scrubbing out bad links. Off-topic inbound links are still somewhat powerful to help improve your Yahoo! rankings, though it is usually best to get links from similar sites when possible.

At the 2004 Las Vegas WMW World of Search Conference Yahoo! stated that they preferred if you have somewhat shallow directory paths of 3 or so levels deep or less.

(example: www.mysite.com/cheese/cheddar/sharp/yummie.html = good)

(example: www.mysite.com/chs/chd/shrp/eat/now/today/yummie.html = bad)

At the 2004 Chicago SES conference, Jon Glick stated that Yahoo! looks at both the links to a page and the links to the site to help determine the relevancy scores of a particular page.

While Google has stated that they look at the web on a page by page basis there is clear algorithmic proof that content placed on an older and more well trusted domain will also rank better in Google than content on a new domain.

Why Yahoo! is Somewhat Focused on "On The Page" Criteria:

Yahoo! has a paid inclusion program which allows them to generate revenue from people who join their paid inclusion program. By relying upon page content, Yahoo! makes it easier for its paid inclusion members (or other editorial reviewed content participants) to improve their rankings. I cover paid inclusion in depth near the end of this e-book in a section called "paid inclusion".

While Google's search results seem to be tuned to informational websites Yahoo!'s algorithms are tuned more toward commercial websites. Google has little information of their own, so they need to make their results as informational as possible to leverage the value created by small independent publishers to get bigger publishing companies to want to give up more of their content.

Yahoo! is perhaps the single largest content site on the web. They do not mind if their search results are a bit biased toward commercial results because they ideally want people to read, use and share Yahoo! content.

Yahoo! and Spam:

Yahoo! actively edits spam out of their search results. If someone you are competing with is not complying with Yahoo!'s guidelines you may want to point that out to Yahoo!. There is a chance that Yahoo! will remove your competitor's site if they deem it as spam. Again, most of the time it is recommended that you do not use spam reports unless you are prepared for webmasters to play hardball.

Since it is easy to get delisted via a manual review, it is suggested that you not use overly aggressive spammy techniques to achieve top Yahoo! placement, unless you can afford to burn the URL. Also, do not submit your site to their paid inclusion program if it does not have original and unique content or your site may be rejected and removed from their search index.

If your site gets de-indexed from Yahoo! and you think it was due to not following their editorial guidelines, then clean up the spammy stuff and submit your site to the Yahoo! Search Submit Express program. Submitting your site will get it reviewed and re-crawled by Yahoo! Slurp if the editors see your site has been fixed.

If your page was removed and you can not afford Yahoo! Search Submit Express read the Yahoo! spam guidelines (http://help.yahoo.com/help/us/ysear...letions-05.html) and request a site review at ystfeedback@yahoo.com.

Additionally Yahoo! has a search help page which may help answer some of your questions about their search technology http://help.yahoo.com/help/us/ysearch/index.html.

Yahoo! and Affiliate Websites:

Yahoo! tries to edit out many of the "site in a box" type affiliate sites as well as any content which does not add value to their search experience. Yahoo! does not hate affiliate websites, they hate unoriginal replicated content as it degrades the quality of their search results if a searcher sees the same things over and over again.

It does not hurt you to have affiliate links on your website as long as you also have some original content.

I have stressed duplicate content in some areas of this book. It is also worth noting that some search engines may also have custom algorithms designed to detect and demote thin affiliate sites.

The Problems With Yahoo!'s Technology:

Since Yahoo! actively edits their search results they will be forced to edit them over and over.

After they remove a site for spam it is very easy for someone to reduplicate that site (and maybe even use a slightly altered version) at another location.

Yahoo! could also use a bit of coaching on determining the difference between editorial votes and spammy links. Some of my clients outrank their own manufacturers for their manufacturer's brand name in Yahoo!. That is just flat out bad relevancy.

Yahoo! Mindset:

Some searches are commercial in nature and some are informational in nature. Major search engines have the ability to distinguish what search queries are more likely to be commercial and what search queries are more likely to be informational.

Search engines can also classify whether they think a particular result is commercial or informational in nature. In the search results, search engines like to show a mix of result types so that they have a greater chance of solving the searchers needs. Yahoo! Mindset is a beta test tool which allows Yahoo! searchers to bias the results toward commercial or informational type resources.

New Yahoo! Patent:

Yahoo! filed a patent application on May 12, 2005 for using MyYahoo! data to help improve search relevancy. Bill Slawski links to the patent and reviews it at http://www.cre8asiteforums.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=24500.

The major search engines are working hard to get a large enough collection of user data to be able to use it to augment link analysis in determining search relevancy.

MSN

MSN is one of the top 3 search properties. MSN Search switched from Yahoo! Search to MSN's technology February 1st, 2005. MSN has about 13% market share. MSN is trying to win search volume by offering prizes to searchers and has picked up Amazon as a search distribution partner.

Their pay-per-click ads are delivered via the Microsoft AdCenter platform. Currently they place a few ads at the top and bottom and some in the right rail, similarly to how Yahoo! displays ads.

MSN has a "search near me" feature. Sites can gain a relevancy boost in local search results if they use their address on their site using the following format:

1 Microsoft Way Redmond, WA, 98052

Many of their search results show pages based primarily on page content. The MSN Search technology is also somewhat easy to manipulate with bulk non themed low quality links and other old basic level S.E.O. strategies (such as spammy domain names, descriptive page titles and internal linking, and keyword rich content). One friend told me that it reminded him of Yahoo! Search from 3 years ago (as in sooooo easy to spam).

In February 2005, I started a new site and through about $2,000 worth of link building I had the site ranked top 10 in MSN for a frequently searched $5 per click word within 2 weeks. One of the major problems with doing that was in building links that quickly, it will likely make top Google rankings take a much longer time to achieve.

MSN search uses clustering algorithms. Some pages and sites may rank for related phrases that do not even occur on them. Recently I looked through their clustering results for my name and noticed that they company which sued me was ranking #5 for my name, in spite of having no relevant page copy or link anchor text. http://rwsm.directtaps.net/p5/clustermain.aspx?query=aaron%20wall

Their search will likely evolve rapidly throughout the next couple years. You can learn more about the MSN Search product by reading their blog located here: http://blogs.msdn.com/msnsearch, and their site owner suggestion guidelines are located at http://search.msn.com/docs/siteowner.aspx. Andy Edmonds and Erik Selberg talked about MSN's search technology in this hour long video http://blogs.msdn.com/msnsearch/archive/2005/10/22/483846.aspx.

You can get the latest news about MSN's ad product by visiting their AdCenter blog http://blogs.msdn.com/adcenter/.

Toward the end of 2006 MSN also hopes to beta launch a contextual ad network.

How to do Well in MSN:

Spammy stuff still works great. Even a web novice can probably rank for many semi competitive terms in MSN within a week or two just by submitting their site to a bunch of directories and writing articles for a bunch of article syndication sites.

They have a long way to go to become relevant.

Ask

Ask Search Distribution:

Ask has a distribution of around 4% of US search through Lycos, Ask.com, Excite, MyWay and Iwon. For a number of years MyWay was the default home page on Dell computers, but more recently Google partnered with Dell.

InterActive Corp. bought out Ask and cross promotes Ask on their other properties such as Expedia.com, Ticketmaster.com, and Match.com.

On the Ask site, they blend Google AdWords ads at the beginning of search results on highly commercial terms. You can also buy Ask pay per click ads directly. Ask will display internal ads for a particular search query only if they feel they will make more money from them than from running AdWords ads.

Pay-per-click advertising is covered further in the pay per click section of the e-book. I probably would not recommend buying Ask ads directly unless you had some compelling reason to believe they would have a significant volume of high quality traffic for your keywords.

Ask also sells banner based advertising and Kelkoo product ads for some of their more expensive words.

Below is a screenshot of the results part of an Ask results page
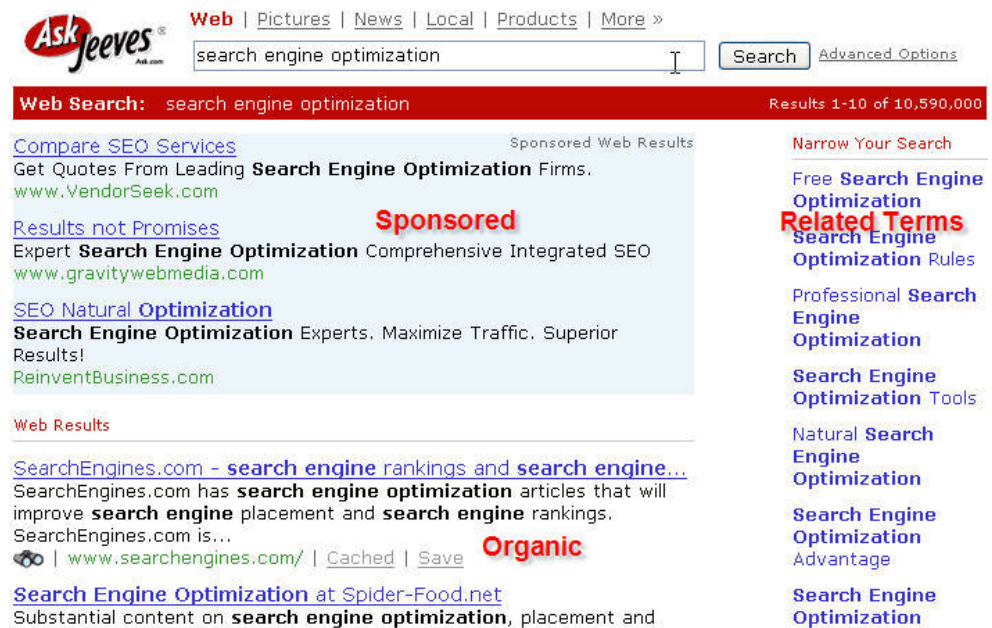
What is Teoma and How Does it Work?

Teoma is the search engine which powers Ask. In early 2006 Ask killed the Teoma brand and the Teoma.com website, but Teoma is the search technology used to power Ask.

The core of the Teoma search technology is based upon the idea that society and the Internet consist of tiny communities which self organize themselves into hubs and authorities.

Hubs and Authorities:

An authority is a site which is linked to by many sites covering that topic. A hub links to many relevant topical sites. It is said that a good authority has links from many good hubs, and good hubs link to many good authorities.

If you read advanced search engine papers and information mining topics such as latent semantic indexing and multi-dimensional scaling, you can learn how some of those technologies are similar to what Teoma does. LSI works at understanding word relationships, but Teoma looks at understanding relationships between pages within communities.

Search engines create a reverse index of all the terms in their index. For example, maybe 10,000,000 pages have the word 'cheese' in them. After a user searches, Teoma will look at the local term space to find similar terms to cheese and the local communities that surround those topics. Teoma takes a snapshot of the area and bases most of its rankings off of local interconnectivity of that subset of search results.

Below is an oversimplified image. Notice how pages which link to the same pages may be assumed to be related. Also, pages which are linked to from a common page may also be deemed as related.

In the image, 'E' may or may not be an authority page depending on what type of link it is. If a page has a link from only one hub page, then it may not be topically related. For example, many hosts or web designers add designed by or hosted by links on some client websites.

H

H is a **hub** linking out to many related resources.
Also an **authority** page since hubs F & G link at H.

A   **B**   **C**   **D**   **E**

F
Hub Page

G
Hub Page

A, B, C, D, &
possibly E are
authority pages.
Authority pages are
typically cited on
multiple hub pages.

Notice how pages F, G, and H link to many of the same resources. A page that links to many related resources is a **hub** page. The pages that are cited by many independant hub pages are assumed to be related and are known as **authority** pages. Page F, G, & H may also be assumed to related since they link to the some of the same sites. F & G also link to H. Sometimes Hub pages can also be authority pages. Some topical communities overlap. This is a small simple example to make it easy to understand.

When Teoma is Most Effective:
Teoma works more effectively at organizing data in larger developed categories where there are many links pointing back and forth to reinforce the structure of a community.

Are Hubs Confusing?
If you are still a bit confused about the terms hubs and authorities you can use a free tool I created called Hub Finder to help you understand and visualize what hub pages are.

Google has a related sites feature which shows other sites they deem to be part of your site. Google TouchGraph makes it easy to visualize this data. Below you can see some of the sites that are in the same topical community as seobook.com.

You can think of online communities in the same way as you think of cities and towns offline. The biggest exception to that analogy is that the online communities

> Teoma is focused on local / topical communities. The best way to rank well in Teoma is to link out to useful related sites and get many related sites to link to your site.
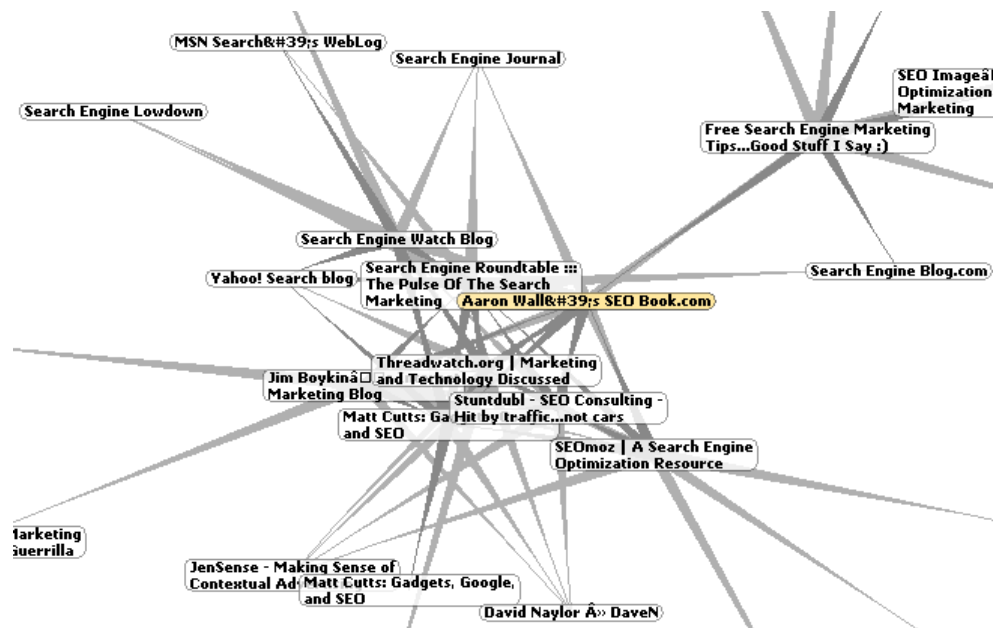
can be based around geographic locations or common ideas, hobbies and points of interest.

Effect of Links on Teoma:

Teoma does most of its link evaluation after the user searches, and primarily focuses on local communities, so:

- It is hard to measure link popularity in Teoma.

- Off topic links have extremely little effect on Teoma's search results.

- On topic links are exceptionally important.

How to do Well in Ask:

Ask is usually one of the slower engines at picking up new websites. The average time for picking up new sites is about a month and a half.

Since the primary focus of Ask is on local communities, it can take a long time to rank well in it. You will need to find ways to embed yourself in the correct local communities to list well for competitive terms. Social interaction is key.

Ask has two sections to its search engine results pages. The results section is filled with the sites that are considered the authority websites. They also provide a 'refine' section. 'Refine' is a list of other terms in the local associated term space. For example, cheese may have phrases like cheddar in the refine section.

Due to their small market share, their slow crawl speed, and their reliance on links from topical experts I would not worry about ranking in Ask. I would probably spend most of my time focusing on the engines with a greater reach.

> This is probably the single most important concept in this whole e-book.
>
> Many people look for links just think "link," but often this is not the most effective way to do link building. If you think of the web as a huge social network and think of links as relationships you have a huge advantage over your competitors.

Ask and Spam:
I actually do not know a lot about their spam policies as it rarely comes up in discussion due to their small market share.

The Problems with Teoma's Technology:
Since Teoma is so focused on local communities, it is easy for people to spoof false topical authority onto a site by creating many sites within a specific theme that commonly link to the spoof site and other randomized authoritative sites on that topic.

Since Teoma does not provide a ton of traffic, there is less of a strain on their algorithm by people manipulating search results than there is on Google or Yahoo!

Comparing Search Results

Since different search engines weigh different parts of their algorithms differently, they can all have similar relevancy while having significantly different search results.

Some people are quick to ask how their sites are being penalized in one search engine because they rank well in others. While many sites do get penalized for aggressive spamming techniques, most sites that do not rank well usually just fail to satisfy the specific ranking algorithm for that specific engine in question.

- Google is primarily focused on anchor text and link popularity. They are much better than their competitors at determining which links are legitimate editorial citations.

- Yahoo! focuses a bit more on "on the page" content (while still relying a decent amount on link popularity).

- MSN is sorta like Yahoo!, but even easier to manipulate with low quality links and basic textbook S.E.O.

- Teoma is focused on local communities.

It is far easier to spend a good bit of time learning how to get links versus constantly tweaking pages over and over again. I do not worry much about things like keyword density. I know that Yahoo! usually likes content to be a bit more keyword rich and Google usually prefers more natural sounding content.

While the on-page criteria can vary from engine to engine the ability of off page factors to raise your rankings is limitless. Different search engines will evaluate different links in different ways. In general, they all like links pointing at your website: especially links related to your field. Some search engines (such as Teoma) may also boost your rankings if you link out to related resources.

Thumbshots has a cool ranking tool which shows you how sites rank in different search engines so you can compare how well different algorithms overlap one

another. Due to heavy load, this tool is not available all the time. MyriadSearch.com is another site which makes it easy to see the overlap between the major search engines.

Interactive Elements

Resources Cited:
Software:

- Digital Point Google Ranking Checker (http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/keywords)

- Yahoo! Developer Network – various tools (http://developer.yahoo.net/wiki/index.cgi?ApplicationList)

- The Google Toolbar (http://toolbar.google.com/)

- Google Toolbar 4 beta (http://www.google.com/tools/toolbar/T4/)

- PageRank for Safari (http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/pagerank-mac)

- Prog free Google PageRank display search tool. (http://seochat.com/seo-tools/pagerank-search)

- Archive.org – shows the age of a website (http://www.archive.org/)

Websites:

- Major search engine search volume breakdown (http://searchenginewatch.com/reports/index.php)

- SearchBistro – site which posted the Google search reviewer documents. (http://www.searchbistro.com)

- My review of the Google internal spam guidelines and search review document (http://www.seobook.com/archives/000917.shtml)

- My review of Link Spam Detection Based on Mass Estimation (http://www.seobook.com/archives/001342.shtml)

The Major Search Engines

- MSN Search (http://search.msn.com/)

- MSN Search blog (http://blogs.msdn.com/msnsearch)

- MSN Site owner suggestions (http://search.msn.com/docs/siteowner.aspx)

- Video about MSN Search (http://blogs.msdn.com/msnsearch/archive/2005/10/22/483846.aspx)

- MSN Paid Search (http://advertising.msn.com/searchadv/)

- MSN spam fighting via mathematics – this post http://www.seobythesea.com/?p=160 links at this great video http://www.cerias.org/news_and_events/events/security_seminar/details.php?event=212370&date=1102531134;&scope=day

- Ask pay per click listings (http://sponsoredlistings.ask.com/)

- AllTheWeb- powers Lycos and AllTheWeb. (http://www.AllTheWeb.com)

- AltaVista (http://www.AltaVista.com)

- Yahoo! Search (http://www.search.yahoo.com) free submission (http://submit.search.yahoo.com/free/request) paid submission (http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/srchsb/sse.php) – generally I do not recommend their paid inclusion product.

- Discussion of Yahoo!'s new patent (http://www.cre8asiteforums.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=24500)

- Yahoo! Mindset (http://mindset.research.yahoo.com/)

- Google (http://www.google.com) free submission (http://www.google.com/addurl.html) Google Sitemaps (http://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps/) webmaster guidelines (http://www.google.com/webmasters/guidelines.html)

- Google Research Papers: The Anatomy of a Search Engine (http://www-db.stanford.edu/~backrub/google.html) PageRank (http://dbpubs.stanford.edu:8090/pub/1999-66) Hilltop (http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~georgem/hilltop/) Topic Sensitive PageRank (http://www.stanford.edu/~taherh/papers/topic-sensitive-pagerank-tkde.pdf) Applied Semantics CIRCA (http://lsdis.cs.uga.edu/SemWebCourse_files/WP/Applied-semantics-ontology_usage.pdf)

- Google Sitemaps – helps you discover if Google has any crawl problems while trying to crawl your site (http://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps/)

- Post about Google trusting old sites too much (http://www.threadwatch.org/node/6484)

- Google's Matt Cutts talks about the S.E.O. process http://www.mikegrehan.com/audio/mattcutts/seoclip.mp3

- Topic Sensitive TrustRank
  (http://www.cse.lehigh.edu/~brian/pubs/2006/WWW/topical-trustrank.pdf)

- Jeff Dean video about some of Google's technology
  (http://www.uwtv.org/programs/displayevent.asp?rid=2459)

- Example of Google getting one of their own sites hijacked
  (http://blog.searchenginewatch.com/blog/050526-084634)

- InfoSpace - Meta search engine which owns Dogpile, Excite, WebCrawler, MetaCrawler and a few others. (http://www.infospace.com)

- Search Engine Relationship chart by Bruce Clay
  (http://www.bruceclay.com/searchenginerelationshipchart.htm)

- Myriad Search – meta search tool I created which makes it easy to cross compare the search results from the leading search engines
  (http://www.myriadsearch.com)

Other Sites

- Google's cache of my home page
  (http://216.239.41.104/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&q=cache%3Awww.seobook.com)

- PR Web press releases (http://www.prweb.com)

- 101 Public Relations – press release templates and report
  (http://www.101publicrelations.com/)

- My Directory Checklist (http://www.seobook.com/directorylist.xls)

- Coverage of Google's new patent
  (http://www.threadwatch.org/node/2115)
  (http://www.threadwatch.org/node/2132)

- Latent Semantic Indexing information
  (http://javelina.cet.middlebury.edu/lsa/out/cover_page.htm)

- Usually time spent reporting spam is time wasted, but you can report spam to Google (http://www.google.com/contact/spamreport.html)

- Froogle (http://www.froogle.com)

- Froogle information for webmasters
  (http://www.google.com/froogle/merchants.html)

- Report spam to Yahoo! – Yahoo! does edit their search results and is more likely to reply to a spam report than some engines such as Google (http://add.yahoo.com/fast/help/us/ysearch/cgi_reportsearchspam)

- Thumbshot search engine and ranking comparison tool (http://ranking.thumbshots.com)

- SearchEngineWatch - Danny Sullivan's search engine information website. (http://www.searchenginewatch.com)

Some Notes

- Search for your target keyword on each of the major engines. Do the results heavily overlap? Which results are the same across many engines? Which ones are different?

- Practice searching at link profiles of a couple top ranked websites. Try the Google link:www.site.com search for a page. Next try Yahoo!'s link:**http://**www.site.com search for a page. Notice how much lower the Google link count is than Yahoo!'s.

- Try Yahoo!'s linkdomain:www.site.com to see how many links point at a site on the whole. Perform the same query again, but then place –site:www.domain.com at the end of your search query. This will show you how many external links point at a page.

- Look at Archive.org to see how old the top 5 sites in Google ranking for your primary keyword are. If they are more than a year old it is going to take a while to catch them in Google unless you have a much better holistic marketing strategy.

Link Building: AKA the Holy Grail

S earch engines currently base relevancy primarily on linkage patterns. Who links at you and how they link at you are what determines where your site will rank for competitive search queries.

Text in Incoming Links

What Link Text is Good to Use?

If you link to this site, a link with the words "Search Engine Optimization" or "SEO Book" are more valuable than a link that says "other site." Evaluating the text in the links, along with who links where, is one of the major ways search engines get feedback from external sources.

Search engines can look for noun verb patterns in text, but machines can be taught to crank out text. There is limited cost to content creation, so search engines must look offsite to understand what a document is about.

Currently link analysis is the most effective way to determine document quality.

How Powerful is Link Text?

Many bloggers are politically outspoken and view George Bush in a less than favorable light. Hundreds of people have linked to his biography page using the phrase "miserable failure" as the link text. Searching on the phrase "miserable failure" in Google, at the time of this writing, ranks the biography page of George W. Bush at the Whitehouse.gov website as the #1 result in Google. It is a good example of just how powerful **link text can be**.

Part of why it is so expensive to build a current search engine is that feedback and linking take time to measure and collect. Everything you collect, changes. The text used in links is going to be very important in the foreseeable future.

How Not to Move a Web Site:

If I did this with a client site I'd deserve to be shot. I changed my D.N.S. and moved one of my sites at about the same time. The D.N.S. change quickly propagated through but my site took a while to load to the new server.

Google happened to spider my URL when there was no site on the new web server..

Index of /

In spite of the site not being there, my then blank site (Search-Marketing.info) still ranked at number 6 for "search engine marketing" out of 15 million results.

So you don't repeat my error, the proper way to move hosts is to set up the new site, point the DNS at the new location, and then take the old site down after a few days to a week.

Why are Links so Powerful?

When we write stuff about ourselves we have a tendency to lie. It is human nature to boost your own worth. This is why meta tags and page copy are nowhere near as powerful as they once were. They have been used and abused.

Links from other webmasters are viewed by search engines as unbiased third party votes. While Yahoo! tends to put more weight on page copy than Google does, link text and the sites that link to your site are the #1 ranking criteria for competitive phrases in all major search engines.

Many people look for links just think "link," but often, this is not the most effective way to do link building. If you think of the web as a huge social network and think of links as relationships you have a huge advantage over your competition.

You can do many manipulative things to make your ideas appear better than they are, but if you can find more natural ways to embed yourself in the social structure of the web, you will likely become extremely successful.

Links from Directories:

Some directories will only list your real site name. When submitting to the major directories you want to get the best listing you can, but many of those who edit directories are volunteers. To make their job easy insure you:

- Submit your site to the right category.

- Read the directory submission tips.

- Check to see how other sites in that category are listed. If they primarily are listed by site title make sure you submit your actual site title. If they seem to be a bit liberal (allowing keyword stuffed listings) you may want to submit with a more liberal and descriptive title (ie: try to get your keywords in some of the links).

- Use a suitable description. Make sure you mix your descriptions each time you get a link.

- View the other entries in the category so you can see the style of the other listings.

- Emulate the style of other listings, but provide your own original factual details in the description. Try your best to state what sets you apart or what is your unique selling proposition.

- Keyword rich domain names lead to keyword rich links from directories. If your site does not have a keyword rich URL then it is easy to change the site graphic design to make it look like the site's official name at launch is *my keyword store* or similar. That move might tick some people off, and it is not something you would do with an already well branded business, but if you are starting from scratch try to use what advantages you can

Links from Other Resources:

Some people are rather link liberal and will list your site as you please. Again, view how they have their other links and emulate them.

If you are trading links, and a site is requesting a super keyword rich link, they should have no problem with giving you a keyword rich link.

Sometimes writing articles or creating tools is a quick way to build links in a cheap and time effective manner.

How do You Learn Best?

Some people learn better by watching video than by reading. Dan Thies recently offered two free videos on link building. I recommend watching both of them, even if you also read the rest of this chapter. The first video is web based http://www.seoresearchlabs.com/week2-sample.html and the second one is an exe file http://www.seoresearchlabs.com/linkvideo/ .

Vary Link Text:

All the links pointing at your site should not have the same exact link text, as that could be a sure sign of link spamming. You want to mix it up and use different text links from different sites. This will make it appear as natural linking to search engines.

You probably shouldn't let any more than 20 or 30% of your links have any specific anchor text if you can control. There are no set rules, but mixing it up will prevent you from flagging spam filters which currently exist or may soon be added to search engines.

When I get links into my SEO Book site I frequently use the following anchor text:

- SEO Book

- Aaron Wall

- Aaron Wall's SEO Book

- Search Engine Optimization Book

- SEO Book: Search Engine Optimization

- sometimes I may use a few other variations such as: SEO Ebook, SEO Blog, Search Engine Marketing Tips, or SEO News

- I also occasionally use what some would consider to be bad link text. Sometimes using words like "here", "click here", www.domain.com, and http://www.domain.com may help make your link popularity look more natural.

- Requesting links without specifying the desired anchor text also helps guarantee your link profile will have a bit of variety in it, since people who are not told how to link will use various different anchor text combinations.

You want to use a few semantically similar phrases and many anchor text variations to make your anchor text look as natural as it can.

Some people try to make anchor text like this (with the following being one big link):

Seo, search engine optimization, placement positioning services strategy, top ranked #1 Google, Yahoo!, MSN

but that is not how people normally link. It is usually better to use many short link text groups instead of trying to get all of your keyword variations in every link.

My Link Profile is Less than Ideal:

My site has hundreds of thousands of links pointing at it. Given that many links I should be able to own the market, but because I was so focused on brand building my anchor text profile is not as well mixed as it should be.

I never expected my site or my reputation to grow as quickly as they did. This leads me to the point that if you think there is a chance your brand and reputation may grow quickly you may want to try to get good anchor text variation early on in your link building so that later on when lots of people link at you with your brand as the anchor text your site also has relevant anchor text for many other queries.

Using Links to Capture the Tail End of Search:

Many people optimize their sites for stuff like "purple widgets" and forget to optimize for more specific or related terms. You can't always optimize your page for all the terms you like, but you can add some modifier or descriptive words in some of the inbound link text to try to rank well in a slightly broader keyword basket. Some example link text might be

- Buy Purple Widgets

- Purple Widget Store

- Purple Widget Sale

- etc.

Doing this may mean that it may take longer to rank well for purple widgets, but it means you will likely rank for many more specific queries around that keyword term space in a quicker time period. It also makes your link profile look more natural and makes your site less likely to get filtered out of the search results.

Giving away Tools or Knowledge for Linkage Data:

Many sites build free linkage data by creating industry standard tools. I paid a friend only $400 to create the Hub Finder tool and in its first month of existence it probably got at least $1,000 worth of free links. Digital Point has many free links from the tools they give away.

If you have great free tools on your site, you may garner many natural editorial quality links from them. If you place tools on other sites, make sure you also put a few links on them to drive traffic and link authority at your most important sites.

Articles can act just like tools as link magnets. Paul Graham is a great example of a writer who gains a ton of free linkage data by giving away knowledge. His *How to*

Start a Startup article is a classic example of an article that built him significant linkage data.

In a large social network, as long as you think about scalability, it is hard to give too much away. The more you give away the more you get back.

Framing & Controversy & Story Telling:

Framing is a concept well known in politics. The thesis behind the idea of framing is that if you control the language of a debate you win. Frank Luntz is brilliant at framing issues for the Republican Party.

U.S. Politicians have used *Support Our Troops* as a phrase to gain blind support for the war in Iraq. At the same time the same government cut hazardous duty pay, cut veteran's benefits, and called back reservists using a back door draft.

There is a yellow *Support Our Troops* ribbon from China on many SUVs. Anyone who dare criticize the ribbons would be called unpatriotic.

Back door draft would be an example of an anti war frame. *Extension of honorable service* would be considered a pro war frame.

If you create an idea or campaign that is hard to dislike, or one which mentioning it causes controversy, you will likely gain many links. *Don't Think of an Elephant* is a short book about framing from a liberal political perspective.

Framing, Search, & SEO:

For the past few years Google had the largest search index. They boasted about how important index size was. Yahoo! announced an index twice the size as Google's. Sergey Brin was quick to discredit Yahoo!, stating their index had many duplicate documents in it. Google then stopped showing their number of indexed pages on their home page and stated that they thought relevancy was more important.

Many S.E.O.'s say they are ethical, which by default frames their competitors as unethical.

Before I wrote this ebook many people stated "you don't want an SEO Book – they are all outdated garbage." I used that frame to sell my ebook as "the only current SEO Book". I also give away free updates to help readers keep up with the market and also reinforce that marketing message.

If you read conversations in your marketplace the market will likely grant you many useful frames to position your business.

Getting Sued:

If you ever get sued, reflect upon how you can spin the story and market it. The marketing value of a well played lawsuit can be immeasurable.

I was sued by Traffic Power, and it got my site links from many newspapers, Wired, Slashdot, and the Wall Street Journal. I never really wanted to follow through with fighting the lawsuit but my friends talked me into it. After all those links started to pour in I knew why.

The nice things about getting links from high-profile well-trusted sites are: they are hard to duplicate, they drive significant direct traffic, and often lead to many secondary links.

Story Telling:

Seth Godin's *All Marketers are Liars* is a book about how consumers lie to themselves to justify their actions. Good marketers tell stories to match the bias and world views of their customers.

The search phrase SEO Book was not competitive until AFTER I created this site. I do reference ranking #1 for SEO Book as part of the sales process because it helps tell a story, reinforces my brand, and seems like it would be a competitive term. It also helps target my salesletter toward newer webmasters.

When people are new they tend to be hungry and are willing to work hard to earn a living. One time I formatted this e-book for about 4 hours so a person with poor vision could read it. I was hungry and wanted to help them.

Sometimes people who download this e-book have the page freeze-up during download or something goes wrong in the payment processing cycle. When problems occur, I provide customer service as quickly as possible. I never blame the customer because technology messes up. Blaming them would leave a bad impression in their minds.

If I provide a quick courteous response within a couple of minutes that is remarkable and means they will be more inclined to think my product is good and say nice things about me.

One time I ordered something from a person who has been an interent marketing guru for about a decade. The download did not work. His support team told me that I was all screwed up and I needed to white list their e-mail address. Seems to me they knew what the problem was (them getting blacklisted for being email spammers), so why blame me?

A large part of the bad reputation the internet marketing field gets is due to marketers working harder at marketing than at creating a relevant useful product in the changing marketplace and following through with quality customer support.

Customer support is a large part of the story customers will tell other prospective customers.

Being Remarkable:

Another one of Seth's books is called *Purple Cow*. The thesis of the book is that things that are remarkable are worthy of being remarked upon.

A link is nothing but a citation or a remark, so if you figure out how to create ideas or products which are remarkable people will talk about you and the links will follow.

Semi Official Article Names:

Many people link to things using their official names. When you write an article you can create an article name which is somewhat keyword rich to help pick up links with those words in the link text. After time passes and you have a few links, you can change the title to pick up slightly different terms in the link text, or to create an article title that is more descriptive and compelling.

Keep in mind that if you are too overt with how you mix things up someone might call you out on the technique.

Creating Tools & Content Based Around Linking Opportunities:

Sometimes when doing link analysis you come across pages that would be appealing to get links from, but may not be readily willing to link at your current site. So create something that they would link at.

Of all the pages on the web, most of them are not overtly amazingly thoughtful or original. With that being said, it costs next to nothing to write an article or hire an article writer to write about a topic which could likely gain links from various trusted or authoritative resources.

For most people, it is easier to create something worth promoting than trying to promote something not worth promoting. Along those lines, it is easier to create something people care about if you use their interests as the source of the content or idea.

If the thought or reasoning behind the article does not totally agree with you, then it might be a good occasion to hire a guest writer.

A good example of this idea is Myriad Search, an ad free meta search engine I created. Within a month of launch the site had over 1,000 links without me buying a single link. People linked at it because it is easy to link at. In the minds of some people it also changed by brand from being a person who did S.E.O. to a person who did search. Suddenly I was able to build link reputation that would normally be unreachable to most S.E.O.'s.

Tag, You're It:

Currently most search algorithms are driven by link reputation. Eventually search engines will have enough user feedback data to where they will be able to augment the links with how users tag web pages and their usage data.

If a site with exceptionally high link popularity scores rarely gets tagged search engines may discount the relevancy for that site, or flag that site for human review.

If you are big into web marketing I recommend creating a user account with each of the major engines unless you were using shady search marketing techniques.

I also would recommend looking at some of the other social software tagging websites like Del.icio.us. Pages which are heavily tagged today stand a good chance of being pages which are frequently cited on websites tomorrow.

If you track what types of information people are tagging then that may help you sculpt a few good ideas you could launch which may provide you with free viral link popularity.

Also note that things people tag or mention on their sites

- are typically hard links for competitors to obtain or compete with

- may lead to secondary links and media coverage

- are links that will likely provide much more pull than links from fairly static directory type sites.

Tracking how ideas spread can also help you find the people most likely to help you spread your idea.

Exchanging Links

Opportunity Cost

Over the last year Google has got much better at detecting link exchanges. Typically for most savvy webmasters the time wasted on a lavish link exchange program would be better spent creating useful original linkworthy content.

Trading links with a couple exceptionally relevant related resources might be a good idea, but don't waste your time trading dozens or hundreds of links.

Does it Work?

Not as well as it once did. Many people who created S.E.O. software or information products that sold themselves as experts found that their Google rankings tanked hard core because link exchanges are not all they were once cracked up to be.

If you go too far off topic with your link exchanges at best it is an opportunity cost waste that will have limited upside on your Google rankings. At worst it can waste your time and put you in spammy web communities that actually cause your site to rank far worse than it would if you stayed away from the spammy link networks.

The Limits of Reciprocal Linking:

As your time becomes more valuable and you learn more, sometimes it is cheaper to create tools or ideas that will build authoritative links instead of manually going after low quality link exchanges.

There are a variety of link exchange networks. A few of the more popular ones are Link Market, Links 4 Trade, Links Manager, and Link Metro. Some of these networks may help you save time, but do not look for them to be the end-to-end solution to your marketing needs. Most of the sites listed in link exchange hubs are garbage.

Link networks still suffer from the problem mentioned on June 26, 2000, when Brett Tabke closed the Buddy Links program:

> You must ask yourself why sites would join BL in the first place? Because they couldn't get listed in the search engines. That left us at times 'bottom' feeding.

Do not limit yourself to being stuck in networks.

I tend to view the web as a whole as my link pool, because if you are willing to work hard enough and create the right content, you can get almost anyone to link to you.

WeBuildPages made a query combination tool which can also be used to find link partners by tracking various searches on different search engines.

The problem with relying on reciprocal links, is that is has been abused. Some unscrupulous people have e-mailed competitor's link partners asking them to remove links. In order to do this, they spoofed the e-mail from address to make it look like their competitor sent the e-mail. If you trade links you should do so with trusted sources, and insure they trust you as well.

I would not join one of the automated link exchange networks with any site I was serious about running longterm.

Keep in mind that since reciprocal links tend to be in virtually hidden sections of sites chuck full of links that most of them do not carry much weight. Also if you link at off topic resources quality sites might be less likely to link at your site.

Greg Boser recently pointed out how ineffective most reciprocal link exchange networks are on his blog http://www.webguerrilla.com/linking/the-truth-about-reciprocal-link-networks/.

Jim Boykin mentioned that the fact that link exchange sections are typically tucked away in a corner that is not heavily referenced from external sources also means that smart search algorithms are not going to place much trust on them.

Requesting Links

Not every link you request requires giving a link back. Sometimes it is cheaper and more efficient to just to go target higher quality links. Sometimes you can just

request a link and get it by being personal and empathetic. Other times links may require payment.

Be Personal:

The best way to go about acquiring links is to be as personal about it as you can. Look around their website and try to find personal information. The more you find the better you are.

When emailing them, try to submit it to the person who runs the site, not a general info submission. If you can state where your link should go on their site and how it would improve their user experience, you stand a good chance of getting a link.

Off-topic somewhat personal statements showing you share similar interests may make you seem more human and more connected with them, and will make it easier to get links. For instance, if you found out that I like peanut butter somehow mentioning that or joking about it in the email will make me far more likely to link to your site.

Proper Link Request Buyline:

Another good idea is to make the buy line of the e-mail appear as a suggestion. If I see the subjectline of the e-mail as "SEO Book website suggestion", odds are that I am going to open it. **Feedback is a fundamental part of any successful business so I have to open it**.

I like using the word suggestion versus feedback. If you use feedback they may feel like you are tricking them. If you use the word suggestion, they are highly inclined to open the e-mail. Remember, getting someone to open the e-mail is half of the battle.

E-mail to Use:

When building links you are more likely to have a higher close rate if you use an e-mail address with the same domain name with the site for which you are building links. Hotmail and Yahoo! mail type accounts probably do not close as well.

Scouting Out Potential Link Sources:

A good way to find candidates for links is to use the Yahoo! link search. Do a search on Google to find your top few competitors. Go down the list, and perform a backward link check on Yahoo! for each of them. See the sites that link to them and see if you can get links from those same sites.

Also, look at the categories those sites are in and use the Google directory to get the best sites from those categories to link to you. (To do a backwards link check of a competitor's website you type link:http://www.evilcompetitor.com in Yahoo!'s search box.)

The Cost of Links:

Some people are afraid of certain links because they think those links cost too much money. An expensive link can also be a good deal though.

If a link is expensive, or if the cost of obtaining it is a significant amount of effort, money, a long time wait, or the approval from a webmaster who is a stickler for quality, it means those links are not going to be easy to get. People who create $5 sites hoping to double their money will not usually be acquiring links that take hundreds of dollars or many hours to get.

Finding Niche Directories:

You can do a search for "your keyword + directory" "your keyword + add url" "your keyword + submit site", any of them. Start thinking of ideas like that and finding link exchange partners or sources of inbound links should be no problem. You can search across multiple different search engines and even search for various file extensions. If you have a resource about the ASP language it may be a good idea to search for ASP file types. If you have a golf site with a flash game on it try to get golf links, but also see if there are some game sites or flash sites that might be willing to link at your site.

Affiliate Program Links:

Most affiliate programs redirect your links through a third party websites, which prevents the link from parsing PageRank or link popularity.

In addition many other websites use query strings on the links, these will not parse PageRank to the destination page. A query string is something like `?affil=34565` at the end of the link. This identifies the affiliate for tracking purposes.

Even if affiliate programs do not provide static text links, they still help raise your brand awareness and build trust in the eyes of your prospective customers. A well-run affiliate program can also mean that some of your affiliates are crowding some of your competitors out of the search results.

Problems With S.E.O. Friendly Affiliate Programs (How They Can Hurt Affiliates, But Help Merchants):

If you build enough link popularity pointing at an affiliate page, it can outrank the regular version of the document, but if many good affiliates are promoting a product and those pages link back to the home page of the site they are promoting, then you can end up pushing a ton of PageRank to the home page of the merchant site. That PageRank can filter down to the regular (or non affiliate) version of the page, which may eventually outrank all the affiliates. More information is available on the OverTheMark blog.

You Do Not Need To Reciprocate Every Link:

If you have a great resource, you do not need to give a link back every time you ask for a link. If you write compelling content people may want to link to it free, and that is the best way to get links.

I often group my sites with a couple other similar resources when I ask for free links. This gives me a better chance of getting my site listed because it seems like I

am trying to help them improve their site versus just helping myself. In addition, this helps clustering search engines such as Teoma know what sites are similar to mine.

You can't be afraid to ask or get rejected. Most link requests are rejected, but if you show that you put a good amount of time and effort in and that you are actually a human who visited their site, then you stand a much better chance of getting a link.

Cheesy Link Exchange Trick:

Some people also 301 redirect their new site to an established site to have it show the PageRank of the other site. Since the PageRank only updates every 3 months they can make many link trades based on fooling webmasters with the toolbar PageRank from the other site.

More Advanced Link Exchange Tools:

Automation is an extremely bad thing during the human interaction portion of link exchange. There is a program by the name of Arelis which will automate nearly 100% of the link exchange process, and it may be useful to use for most portions EXCEPT the human interaction.

You stand a far better chance to get links if you are **extremely personal** in your link requests. I try to automate many of the non-human interaction portions of the link exchange process, but do not automate messages.

There are a few linking tools I occasionally use, but keep in mind that anything that sends automated queries to search engines is usually going to be against their terms of service.

Yahoo! Site Explorer:

If using the linkdomain: and link: features confuses you then you may want to try Yahoo!'s free link analysis tool. Yahoo! will not give you the in depth information that Backlink Analyzer will, but it makes it easy to surf through a site and see what pages have inbound links and what links point at each page.

Backlink Analyzer:

I created Backlink Analyzer to give people a free option to do link analysis. Some of my friends have already compared it to the two paid tools listed below and described it as being on par or better.

Read more about my newly launched backlink analyzer at: http://www.seobook.com/archives/001108.shtml. Backlink Analyzer is currently a windows only application. My programmers are making an extensible cross platform version.

The biggest difference between Backlink Analyzer and the below programs is that Backlink Analyzer does not scrape Google PageRank values, since that is against Google's terms of service.

SEO Elite and Optilink are great link analysis tools.

Backlink Analyzer is similar to both of them in features, but is free.

OptiLink:

OptiLink ($224) is link analysis software which can scour up to 1000 different backlinks of a website and return the results in the order of PageRank. You then have the ability to go through and request links from the most important sites.

OptiLink also lets you know what words are in the different links so you can get an accurate picture of total link reputation and not just link popularity. Link reputation is the combination of link popularity and link text. Optilink will let you check the backlinks through multiple search engines.

SEO Elite:

SEO Elite ($167) is newer software which is extremely similar to OptiLink. It surveys backlinks to find what anchor text is used and linking page PageRank. In addition, SEO Elite will spider the links on your site or page and check that reciprocal link partners are linking back to your site.

Tattler:

Greg Boser created a free lighting quick link analysis application similar to the three listed above. Tattler is available free. It only works with Yahoo!, but is exceptionally fast.

Hub Finder:

Hub Finder is a free web based link analysis tool I created. The sole goal of Hub Finder is to help webmasters find co occurring links. Pages that link at multiple competing sites are also likely to link at your site.

This means you can enter in the URL of 2 to 10 competing websites, and wherever their inbound link overlap it will return in the search results. On-topic links may carry more weight than off-topic links in some search algorithms. Here is a quick visual run through of how it works

You can enter in a relevant topic to grab the top results from the search engine. You can choose to grab the results from Yahoo!, Google, or both.

The tool then queries Yahoo! to look for what pages are linking at each site. By default the tool searches through the top 50 inbound links for each domain. You can adjust this value from 50 to 250.

The sites which rank at the top of the search results for competitive phrases in your field are called authority sites. For the term SEO the following 11 sites are authority sites.

Querying the following 11 sites

1: searchenginewatch.com
2: searchengineguide.com
3: www.seochat.com
4: www.seobook.com
5: www.google.com
6: www.seoimage.com
7: www.seo-guy.com
8: www.seotoday.com
9: www.seo-usa.org
10: www.seoconsultants.com
11: www.rlrouse.com

After the tool grabs the links pointing at each of the domains it compares where they overlap and returns pages that link at 2 or more related websites. The pages that link to two or more authority pages are called hub pages.

Showing 40 sites with at least 2 matching backlinks from 442 search results

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	Site Name
X X X X X	[W] [A] [H] [D] [Y] searchenginewatch.com (63.236.73.97)
X X X X	[W] [A] [H] [D] [Y] dmoz.org (207.200.81.154)
X X X X	[W] [A] [H] [D] [Y] toprank.blogspot.com (66.102.15.101)
X X X	[W] [A] [H] [D] [Y] dir.yahoo.com (216.109.116.247)
X X X	[W] [A] [H] [D] [Y] pandia.com (161.58.59.247)

The nubers at the top of the results coincide with the numbers next to each site listed above. I clicked on #4 (which is SeoBook. You can see that Toprank and SearchEngineWatch both linked at my website.

Sometimes this tool will return a few useless or spammy results if you are not searching for a well established topic, but most of the time it will show some of the best sites you should try to get links from.

After the results show you can click the Download CSV button if you want to save the results to view them later in a spreadsheet.

Link Harvester:
Link Harvester is a free web based link analysis tool I created. Link Harvester will tell you if a site has any governmental or educational inbound links, as well as telling you the number of unique linking domains and unique linking IP addresses.

Link Harvester also auto checks boxes next to each site that links in more than 4 times so that you can re-query the tool to filter out the sites that link in many time to search deeper through the backlink database quickly and easily. That is something that **none** of the paid link analysis tools do.

In addition to displaying a link from each of the sites linking in, you can easily export the data to a spreadsheet. And, it is free, open source, and uses the Yahoo! API so you do not have to worry about the tool getting blocked.

Golexa:
Some people have described Golexa as a swiss army knife tool for S.E.O. It does not give the detailed link analysis data that some of the above tools do, but it does have many useful and interesting features.

Bonus Linking Tip:
One of the best ways to use these linking tools is to use them to track the links pointing at a website which has moved. Alert webmasters to broken links on their sites, and let them know that you have a similar site. Many webmasters will likely link to your site, especially if you list multiple similar useful sites and they do not think your motives are 100% selfish.

Being Smooth:
Sometimes it helps to be a bit smooth. Sometimes I suggest a few resources other than my own. Sometimes I just put my URL under my name as if its part of my signature. Both techniques have worked to get me many quality inbound links in a short period of time.

A "non link request" link request may actually have a higher conversion rate than an active link request with some webmasters. You have to read the motives of the webmaster.

The use of the above listed tools allows me to automate most of the link research process while still allowing me to remaining personal in the link request e-mails I send out.

Example E-mail (sent to a personal e-mail if they have one available):

hello <actual person>

I have been browsing around photography sites for hours now and just ran across yours...its awesome (**stroke their ego**)

Wow your picture of that dove, bla bla bla...bird photography is one of my bla bla bla
(**be specific & show you visited their site**)

I took this pic or a flying mongoose here: (**look we are the same**)

<optional>I have already added a link to your site on my cool sites page</optional> (**pay them if you feel you need to... link or cash or whatever other offer. if you feel a phone call is necessary then you may want to give them your number or call them up versus sending an e-mail.**)

Your site visitors may well be interested in bla bla bla at my site bla bla (**show them how linking to you benefits them**)

If you like my site please consider linking to it however you like (**let them know they have choices - don't come across as ordering them to do something. Also sometimes just asking for feedback on an idea gives you all the potential upside of a link request without any of the potential downside. If they review your stuff and like it they will probably link at it. And by asking for their feedback instead of a link you show you value their opinion, not just their link popularity.**)

or with this code (**make it easy for them**)

I think my site matches well with the theme on this page

Either way thanks for reading this and keep posting the awesome photos (**reminder ego stroke**)

thanks
me
me at myemail.com
http://www.mywhateversite.com
my number

Evaluating the Quality of a Potential Link Partners

Do They Have Quality Inbound Links?

You can tell a lot about a website by the other sites that link to it. Typically good sites are registered in some of the top directories like DMOZ or the Yahoo! Directory and have links from other good sites in their same industry.

You can do a linkdomain: search on Yahoo! to view some of their best backlinks.

If they have a high PageRank because they have been link exchanging with Viagra, casino, or other high margin cheesy websites then they are probably not a legitimate resource and are not a potential link source worth pursuing.

Does Their Site Offer Quality Content?

It is a good idea to review the site that wants to exchange links. If you link to a site you are sending your faithful web site traffic to their domain.

Is it a risk, or do they have good content? If there wasn't PageRank involved, would you still trade links with them? Do you enjoy their site? If the answer to these sort of questions is yes then feel free to link to their site. If the answer is no after no after no then it is not a logical link exchange opportunity.

Avoid the Sure Downfalls:

Off the start you may be a little more desperate for links as you are learning S.E.O. A good tip is to stay away from drug, gambling, and porn sites as they obviously destroy your credibility. Other sites that link to those types of networks may also hurt your site as well (since they may eventually be penalized).

Always use your own judgment as you will be the one footing the bill if the idea is wrong.

Using Common Sense:

That hemp/ S.E.O. store I mentioned earlier is a good example of not using common sense. If the site you are linking to has nothing to do with the topic of your site and no relation to what may interest your viewers, you probably do not want to link to them.

Carpet bomb linking strategies may be successful in the short term, but over time they will grow less and less useful to the point of eventual ineffectiveness.

There is also an indirect linking effect to linking. If you link to really weird sites then it lowers the odds that other industry resources will want to link to your site.

Example of a Junk Link Request:

If you send junk link exchange requests like this they will usually be deleted as spam. On the same token, if you receive a message like this you should delete your spam. Most link exchange requests should go right into the junk bin.

Hello Sir / Ma'am
I was at your site today. Great site I was wondering if you would want to exchange links.
I already have a link to you located at http://www.spamsite.com/links/reciprical-links-exchange2/other-sites37.htm

As you well know search engines look at links and give sites credit for their incoming links. By linking together we
make both of our sites stronger.

Please link to me with the following information

Buy Viagra Cheap Phentamine No Prescription Paxil Prozac Online

----

Eventually Aggressive Promotion Techniques get Penalized:

Even if a shady site has decent link popularity, you can usually bet that they will be losing it soon if they exchange links with all kinds of random sites. Link exchange works up until a point and then eventually it becomes link farm. A link farm is a site with a bunch of completely unrelated links scattered about in no logical order.

Eventually, overly aggressive sites get penalized, but webmasters using those techniques will usually have already started another site, and you may end up suffering for their greed if you exchange links with incredibly aggressive sites.

Another trick they may use is to have you link into their good site and have them link to you from a different domain of essentially no value. Since their good site is not going to get penalized (because it does not link out to any shady sites) it does not matter much to them if their bad site and your site receive a spam penalty for being part of a link farm.

Free Links & Buying Links

The Best Things in Life Are Free:

Mike Grehan interviewed Google's Matt Cutts <http://www.mikegrehan.com/audio/mattcutts/prclip.mp3> about PageRank and link quality. Matt stressed that Google wants to count editorial citations, and that the best links are usually free.

Garbage Links:

While many low quality links may still help, over time their value goes down. Guestbooks and the like are losing their relevancy in search results. Many of the holes in blog software which permitted heavy spamming are also being taken care of.

Some people have stated that Google is even filtering out links from pages with the file extension of links.htm or other page filepaths that would obviously indicate the page was created for link exchange. There are many legitimate long term free link opportunities available, though they may take a good bit of work to find.

In a sketchy field you may have to use many sketchy techniques to be able to profitably compete. You don't want to be the only site in your industry using really sketchy techniques unless you can afford for the site to get banned or having a bad effect on your brand. If the top site in your field has 300 links it probably is a bad idea to build or buy 87,000 links. You want to blend in.

Some large corporate sites like Expedia, which spend millions on Google AdWords, will likely be able to get away with doing more shady stuff than a new webmaster would. Companies that already have a brand built up have much more

leeway than new webmasters. When BMW was removed from Google for spamming Google reindexed the BMW site about a day later.

Have a Good Idea:

The web is a big social network where good ideas will want to spread naturally. It is far easier to spread an idea worth spreading than it is to push a bad idea. A link is a vote for a site. It is a citation. It is a remark. Oh hey, I found this over here. By being remarkable or different it far easier to build a linking campaign without a large sum of money or effort.

It is worth the time it takes to create good ideas that will naturally want to spread.

Give Something Away:

One of the best ways to build link popularity is to make something useful and valuable and give it away. PHPBB is a free bulletin board which has a PageRank of 9 or 10. Open Office is another great open source software project.

Some popular things to give away are: software, games, designs, and valuable information.

Submitting Articles:

There are tons of places on the web where you can submit articles. In addition to submitting them, if you provide an extremely compelling article with reprint rights you will find that it may just end up all over the web. I started writing articles when Google changed its algorithm in Nov 2003. Within a month or two I had articles appear on:

- SearchGuild (http://www.searchguild.com/)

- SEO Journal (http://www.seojournal.com)

- Sticky Sauce (http://www.stickysauce.com/)

- LilEngine (http://www.lilengine.com/)

- Internet Search Engine Database (http://www.isedb.com/)

- and many many other search specific websites.

When you write articles to submit to other sites, you may want to give them a slightly different version than the one you post to your site so that you do not deal with duplicate content issues.

Additionally you can drive more targeted traffic to your site by reminding readers that they can get the extended version of the article on your site.

Becoming an Authority:

In addition to the above links I have received links from sites I have never even heard of, and I got linked to by the #1 search engine resource (SearchEngineWatch.com). A link from Search Engine Watch is not something I could have bought with piles of cash, and it validates me as a search engine resource in the eyes of many S.E.O.'s (as well as in the eyes of some search engines). Danny Sullivan (editor of Search Engine Watch) is a well trusted search engine information source.

Becoming the Resource:

Danny Sullivan is known as the world's greatest search engine resource. I could try to become the same thing, but I would likely fail time and time again. That spot in the web is already occupied.

I can however become one of the better blog authors on the subject. I also can have one of the better e-books on the subject. It is worth focusing in on an idea until you can find one that has not already been taken, or something you will enjoy competing at.

It usually is much cheaper to position yourself in a new field or a niche field than a broad field that already has a dominant player in it.

What Information Sells?

Original content such as:

- Tips and articles. How to and creative articles work really well.

- News stories.

- Resource directories and top 10 lists.

Where do I Submit My Articles?

You may find that people link to you just because they like your site. Being a success on the Internet is much easier if people want to syndicate you for free. Off the start it will require some active effort to spread your name though. A couple good places to submit articles:

- Ezine Articles (http://ezinearticles.com/)

- SearchWarp (http://searchwarp.com/)

- Buzzle (http://www.buzzle.com)

- Idea Marketers (http://www.ideamarketers.com/)

- Ebooks N Bytes (http://www.ebooksnbytes.com/)

- Article Central (http://thewhir.com/find/articlecentral/)

If you can find industry related hub sites with a wide following, those are the best sites to submit your articles to.

Additional Bonus Article Submission Ideas:
Understanding where and how to find information will help you become successful on the web. After you find a few authors from the above sites you should search for their names to see where else they are published. You may also want to look through major directories and search for sites covering your topic which accept articles.

You should know who the experts in your field of study are. I also wrote a good brief article with other article submission locations on my blog (http://www.seobook.com/archives/000099.shtml).

Another trick is to search for the names of sites that are using automated spam software to submit articles. If people accept their automated request then likely they will want to list your quality article if you use a personalized inquiry. Two sites which sent automated spam articles to me are MarketingBlaster & SearchEngineGeek.

Writing Testimonials for Links:

I can not tell you how effective this technique is! A good testimonial almost requires they post a link to your site. There are two main tips about writing testimonials: who to write a testimonial for, and how to write that testimonial.

Who to Write a Testimonial for:
The web has a bunch of garbage on it. The web also has a bunch of good people on it. It is just as easy to say good things about people who do a really good job as it is about people who do a shoddy job.

If you tell people how a bad thing is good then those people will think you suck (this is extremely common in hype driven affiliate marketing). Only promote stuff that you would be glad to throw your name and reputation on.

Often testimonials are reciprocal promotion techniques. On the web, many links are business relations. The easiest place to get help is from the people you are helping. It only makes sense to promote and say good things about the people you do business with.

Not every testimonial is a strong business relationship, but you should write testimonials only for people you would like to promote. Directly or indirectly that is what you are doing.

How to Write a Testimonial:
Words like "good" are actually rather bad. When possible you want to use concrete phrases and terms that make the service sound exceptional. An example testimonial I wrote was "There are few places on the web where you can place an ad and have it pay for itself in the first day. SearchEngineGuide is one of those

places." The first two day of me running an ad on his site I sold over $600 worth of e-books from his ad.

Many of the people on the web who are considered "marketing experts" are selling get rich quick scams. Most Internet marketers selling Internet marketing products only make money off selling the idea to someone else who will probably lose money on the deal.

These people usually have crafted the art of writing testimonials because their livelihood is completely dependent upon selling the products to members of their newsletters. If you glance through that *33 Days to Online Profits* I would **not** recommend buying most of the stuff they are selling, but you can learn a bunch from reading how Yanik Silver recommend other products.

Building Links to Pages that Link to You:

If I tried to add my site to the S.E.O. page at Wikipedia, it would just get removed and labeled as an attempt to spam. Yet, I still can benefit from the existence of the Wikipedia by adding links to pages that link to me, as long as those links are useful to the Wikipedia.

You also can add links fairly easily to the Wikipedia talk pages or your personal profile page.

I think the Wikipedia is amazing and do not encourage spamming it, but if you have something that should be linked to from there then make sure it is. If someone else linked to you and that page is relevant to Wikipedia make sure the Wikipedia links to that page. For example, Alexa linked at my site when I posted about Accoona spamming SEO forums. I referenced that Alexa page in the Wikipedia because that page was relevant to coverage of Accoona.

Again, I want to stress that I think the Wikipedia is an amazing site and that I do not encourage spamming it. The same indirect link building idea can work with other sites in similar ways as well.

Building Links to the Most Relevant Page:

When you ask for links it makes sense to point links at the most relevant page. Pointing links at the most relevant page means:

- People will be more likely to link at the targeted related page

- People will be more likely to click relevant links

- People who click the links will be more likely to convert

- Algorithms which are good at determining relevancy will boost relevant links more

In the same vein, if you have a large site and want to build a natural looking link profile you need to create useful and well marketed content in deep verticals. Don't just point all the links at your home page.

But My Site is a Boring Retail Site Nobody Will Link at:

If you view yourself as a commodity so will other people. No matter what field you are in there are some causes and people who care deeply about what you do or a field that relates to you.

Become a subject matter expert on an important issue and leverage that authority to make your site more powerful than competing sites.

If many legitimate sites link at one authoritative document on your site much of that trust flows through to the rest of your site.

Other Free Linking Resources:

- LinkingMatters.com

- Linking101.com

- Eric Ward.com

Outsourcing Linking Programs:

Frequently many people find link building frustrating. You may want to outsource your link building to a link building firm.

If you do outsource portions of the work make sure you still do some link building yourself. Link building is so important that it is not something I would feel entirely comfortable entirely outsourcing.

Renting / Buying Links:

-- This is an advanced S.E.O. technique most webmasters do not need to do. I would learn and practice S.E.O. for at least a few months before I jumped right into any type of link rental advertisements. --

Make Sure Your Site Works Well First:

Many people aggressively advertise on other sites without fixing internal conversion problems. If you can double your conversion rate without much additional expense it does not make sense to concentrate on more exposure first.

With that said, you can boost your link popularity by renting a few strong inbound links. I usually prefer to rent links from related sites as they may also send direct traffic as well as provide a direct boost to link popularity.

Register with Directories First:

By registering your sites at quality directories it makes your link popularity look like a natural part of the web. If you only have one or two sources of links the linkage pattern may seem unnatural to search engine algorithms.

Renting links is extremely expensive if you do it incorrectly. Registering your sites with many second tier directories costs a one time fee of $20 - $40 each. That price will continue to pay for itself month after month.

When links develop naturally it is likely that a site has many low power links pointing into it as compared to number of high power links. You usually want to build a broad base of low power inbound links in conjunction with building any exceptionally powerful inbound links.

If you are reliant upon just a few powerful links, if something happens to those links you could be in the hurt locker. If you have a many low power inbound links then your rankings will be more stable if you lose a few links or when large algorithm shifts occur.

Importance of Anchor Text:
When renting links, insure you use the best anchor text possible and do not rent links based exclusively on PageRank. When I rent links, I make sure I am renting extremely descriptive anchor text as well.

"Using the right anchor text" means that you are mixing up your anchor text at different locations.

Renting Banners:
I prefer to rent static text links versus renting image links. Sometimes certain sites sell banner space cheap. If they are going to sell you a banner ask if it needs to be an image or if it just needs to be a banner in shape. One of my good friends ordered a banner filled with a ton of text links from college newspapers for dirt cheap.

If you do use an image banner, make sure you use descriptive ALT text on it so search engines will have some idea what the link is about.

Ideal Links:
If it is a useful, on-topic site, I first look to see if I can get any free themed links from that site. Look around and see if there is an area where they link at sites similar to yours, and think about what you can do to get them to reference your site. Many sites accept articles or have tools and resources sections.

Jim Boykin offers the following image and advice on looking for linking locations:

> You're the bottom circle (the target). The circles in the middle represent the site you're seeking advertising on. The circles on the top are the sites that link to the site you're seeking advertising from.
>
> The page on the far right has no outside link linking to it. It's only "votes" are what the internal sites passes. (lower reputation and trust).
>
> The first subpage you'll see has lots of votes to it (links). The Glossary page I found had 740 backlinks including 44 .edu's….Having an ad on a page like that (in the middle of the glossary, for relevant products services, yada yada,) would mean that the 44 colleges are directly linking to a sub page - they are directly voting for that page…the trust

and reputation are through the roof….getting an ad on a page like that gives the trust and reputation a straight line to your target.
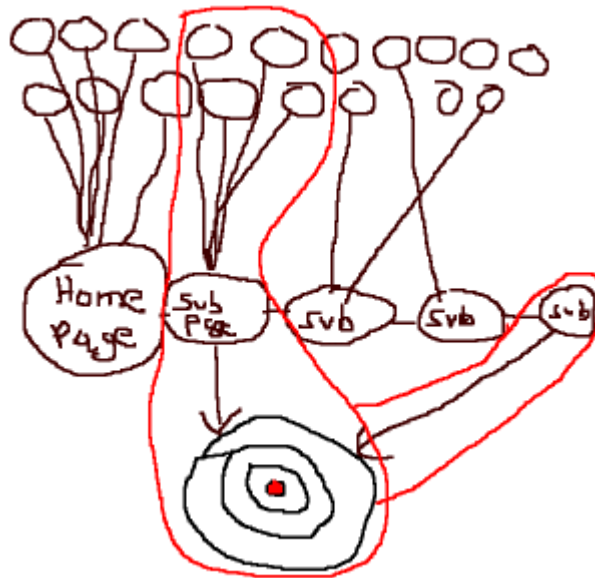
If you want a link to pass authority to boost your search engine rankings get links from within the content area of pages which are voted for by many legitimate resources. It is also best if these pages are virgin in nature, ie:

- No other S.E.O.'s are renting links from the page yet

- Many of the inbound links are from legitimate governmental, educational, or news organizations who do not typically consider S.E.O. when linking

- The webmaster has not yet heard of what SEO is, and thinks they are just selling you ad space

How do you find the most authoritative pages on a site? If you do a site: search on Yahoo! typically the results are returned in order of importance. Look at the top few pages from the site to see if they look like they would be important pages and why they would be important, then check their link authority either using the Yahoo! Site Explorer, the Yahoo! link: function, or other backlink analysis tools like Link Harvester or Backlink Analyzer.

Single Links vs Run of Site Links:
If you discovered a virgin area of the web and want to keep your link buy under radar it is probably best to find the single most important page to get a link from a site instead of placing a sitewide link.

If you buy links you need to consider the direct advertising effect and the indirect search relevancy effect. Some sites will rent you a single link for $75 or let you have a link on every page of their site for $100. Frequently, the prices for single links and sitewide links are exceptionally close to one another. Most of the link renting I have

done has been done more for direct traffic, and thus I usually did site wide sponsorship from relevant sites.

If you are renting links from off-topic sites, it would be advisable to not get run of site links, as that could stick out as abnormal link pattern. Google and other search engines may penalize the sites renting links and not the sites the links are on.

In some cases, where sites are obviously selling links, search engines may strip the ability of that site to pass link authority to other sites. If a site is selling links too aggressively some search engines place limited or no trust on their outbound links, while still ranking that site normally.

Many of the major search engines do not give a site much additional relevancy for site wide links over a single link.

Caution: In February of 2005 Google did an update where many sites which had a large percentage of their links come from sitewide links with similar anchor text no longer ranked well due to having unnatural link profiles. Make sure you buy some individual links and make sure you mix your anchor text.

When buying sitewide ads, I usually recommend buying pre-sell pages instead of placing sitewide links. Pre-sell pages are explained in the next section.

Pre-Sell Pages (or Content Hosting):
Pre-sell page is a term I coined for a powerful rented page. Essentially, instead of renting a link you rent a full page ad. If you are paying for ad space you should try to get the best value you can.

Within a site link popularity flow naturally. If you link cross site it may not flow as naturally. If a site links to another site from every page many search engines may only take the most powerful link into account within their relevancy algorithm.

You can ask the advertising site to point site-wide links to a hosted advertising page on their website. On that page, send multiple deep links into various points of your site using descriptive link text. You may also want to place links in the middle of paragraphs and use semantically similar page titles, headers, and subheaders on your pre sell pages.

Some people also link off to a few related resource pages on their pre-sell pages to better help clustering search engines understand what their site is about.

If a site has a strong authority score their pre-sell page may also rank in the search results. This helps give you the potential of getting two high ranked sites from one link purchase.

WeBuildPages was the first S.E.O. firm to market pre-sell pages.

Importance of Number of Links on the Page:
Any page only has a certain amount of link popularity (Google calls this PageRank and Yahoo! calls this WebRank) which it can redistribute to other pages. Each

additional link on a page takes away from how much voting power the other links on that same page get.

A page does not lose link popularity for linking out to other sites, it just splits what link popularity it can give amongst all pages it is linking to. The link popularity of a page is split up amongst the pages internal and external links.

When evaluating a potential link buy, it is important to consider how many links are on the page. If you see north of 80 links on a page, then you need to consider that you will only be getting a small amount of link popularity from that page.

Ease into Link Renting:
Renting links should be a controlled process. By doing it in a somewhat controlled manner, you guarantee you know what links are working and how many you need.

Location of Links on the Page:
A friend of mine is a database programmer/ S.E.O. who has friends who work for Google. He stated that Google is trying to look to change their link algorithm to where they can provide both positive and negative linkage credit for link location on the page and site link patterns (most likely discounting footer banners full of links and other common link rental locations).

Ideas like these are what make building lots of natural link popularity important. Many Internet marketing experts are shifting portions of their business models to creating content they control so that people can get contextually relevant ads within the main content area of the pages.

The link renting business will evolve as the algorithms do, but quality link renting will increase in price as the cost of selling links gets more expensive.

Link Brokers:
There are many link brokers on the market which jack up the prices considerably as middle men. You may want to look around to find one of the main link brokers or websites selling links directly.

Many sites pose as link brokers by marking up the prices of other link broker's inventory. When you buy links from a link broker you want to go to the source and not pay middle men. If you want to use a link broker directly, I do know who the most prominent link brokers are. Send me an e-mail and I will let you know who I recommend.

The reason I do not reference any link brokers specifically in this ebook is that I believe many sites rush off to rent links before they have built other links and before it would be profitable to do so.

I also believe that it is best to build links from places that others are not looking. Many people competing with you probably are already buying links from link brokers and some of the high profile link buying will get discounted.

If Something Seems Like too Good of a Deal:
Google has blocked some websites from being able to pass their PageRank (or link popularity) to other websites.

The PageRank parsing penalties prevent a page from transferring PageRank even though the site itself may show PageRank. These penalties have typically been applied to sites with a high PageRank & especially those that are linking to high margin sites which are extremely off topic.

If a site has a high PageRank and pharmacy or casino ads, then there stands a good chance that it will not parse link popularity.

Shop Around:
You may want to look at a few link brokers to view prices for various linking opportunities. Prices fluctuate in the link market from person to person and site to site. I believe link prices are more volatile than the commodities or futures market. It is worth taking the time to shop around.

If you dig up link opportunities that others have yet to explore they have a much greater chance of improving your search engine rankings.

Getting Links from Various Sites:
Any given site can only pass a finite amount of link popularity. To improve the effectiveness of renting links, it is recommended that you get links from multiple different websites. This is part of the reason I recommend registering your site with many different directories. Some search algorithms may also provide additional weighting on links which have aged.

Cheap Linking Opportunities:
You would be surprised how cheap some related sites are renting links. I have rented links from a few of the search engine marketing industry hubs at exceptionally reasonable prices.

In addition, blogs and 501C charity sites are havens for low cost links. Some powerful 501C sites will give you a lifetime or year-long links for as low as a few hundred dollars.

NetworkForGood can help you find a worthy cause located in your area which may be worth sponsoring which can also help you build link authority. I view sponsoring charities as a true win/ win situation.

Some blogs are out to lunch on their price. Some blogs are exceptionally link heavy and provide almost no value on a per link basis yet still want to charge hundreds of dollars per month. Some other blog type sites don't know their own value, and will give you a link for a minimum $5 to $10 one time donation. Many bloggers are just having fun and are not out to make a ton of money. An additional bonus with blog advertising is that blogs are viral in nature, meaning if you have a viral type product then you may get many ongoing secondary links for free.

Just to give you an idea of how cool BlogAds are (especially for cause driven or fun type sites), I got many additional bonuses for my first ad set I ran. Over half of the sites I ran my first ad on extended my ad longer than I ran it for, completely free. In addition, one site provided me a permanent static text link and another site placed my ad on multiple sites free.

If you have a message worth spreading, bloggers may help it spread. A couple of the more popular blog ad networks are BlogAds and AdBright. Some of the links provided by these blog networks may go through redirecting ad servers (and thus not count toward your link popularity), but the viral nature of blogs make them an ideal marketing channel for many messages.

Rent Static Links:
When renting links to improve search engine placement, ensure they are static descriptive links versus links with a tracking code or links that get redirected through some sort of ad server. Search engines usually do not evaluate most links which are redirected or sent through an ad server.

Also, think of creative ways you can induce free inbound links before heavily renting links. The best ideas tend to find ways to spread themselves. Money spent improving the idea behind your site is better spent than money spent on renting links, since improving your idea or site does not usually have expensive recurring fees associated with it.

Links with Tracking Codes:
When buying regular ads from websites, if you use **tracking URLs,** you may not want to point them at your home page or other pages which already rank well in the search results.

Some webmasters have bought links from authoritative pages using tracking URLs only to find that some search engines would spider that link and use THAT page as the canonical URL.

Search engines only want to include each document in their search database once. If a document is available at multiple different locations – like site.com, site.com/index.htm & www.site.com – the search engine will choose the page that has the highest authority score, which is usually based on link reputation.

That may not be a problem in some cases, but one of my friends had over 100,000 links pointing at his home page, and his rankings disappeared because the high authority link rental from a site like CNN.com had a tracking code. Google and Yahoo! thought www.site.com/?source=cnn was his home page.

Some search engines will usually use the highest PageRank URL as the canonical URL for a given page. If that URL version does not have good anchor text **from a variety of websites,** then you risk tanking your rankings if you link at a high-ranking page using a tracking code.

Canonical URLs:

As stated in the above section about links with tracking codes, search engines only want to index one URL for each set of unique content. The WWW. version of a domain is a subdomain of the root URL. Sometimes the contents are the same, but they are not always on all sites.

It is in your best interest to 301 redirect the URL you are not using to point at the in use version of the URL. This way, you do not run into canonical URL and duplicate content issues. It also will help unify your link popularity if Google is unaware that both URLs are the same site and some people are linking to different versions of the URL.

Make sure you know what your old .htaccess file is, read about modifying it, and know what you are doing prior to modifying your .htaccess file. Always back up your old .htaccess file before modifying it.

Linking Networks:

Currently, I do not use any linking network to boost the rankings of my sites, but there are a few innovative new linking networks which are worth mentioning.

Digital Point created a free cooperative advertising network where text links are randomly rotated across thousands of sites in the network. The advertising network does not focus on relevancy much yet, so currently it amounts to a big link farm, but since it is so well integrated into the web and spans so many sites it is rather powerful. Some search engines, such as Google, look at temporal effects of linkage data and are not likely to place much trust on new rotating links. In a ThreadWatch post Matt Cutts may have also hinted that they could use rotating inbound and outbound links as a sign of a lack of quality and lower a site's crawl priority based on that.

Link Vault in another link exchange network which acts similarly to Digital Point's network, except that it provides static non-rotating links.

Before joining any linking network I would read the pros and the cons listed in this high quality Threadwatch thread at: http://www.threadwatch.org/node/808.

Ideas that Lend Authority to Themselves:

Some ideas are great link sources. They are easy to build links at, and perhaps provide underpriced ad inventory if you buy ads on them

- Stats, numbers and surveys which sound official.

- History of _____

- Association of _____

- Demographic xyz is _____

If you can't see any low hanging fruit ask yourself

- How can I make an idea appealing to the local or national government?

- How can I make an idea appealing to colleges?

- How can I make an idea that appeals to bloggers?

- How can I make an idea appealing to a specific demographic?

Want a good example? Salary.com conducted a survey that reported that average stay at home mother would be paid $134,121 if she was paid for all the work she did raising kids.

Want another good example? There are numerous tools which aim to help bloggers determine how valuable their blogs are based on how many people link at them. Not surprisingly, most of these tools estimate exceptionally inflated values.

What is the bottom line? **People like to feel important. If you make others feel important they will do your marketing for you.**

Waiting for Results

Patience is a Virtue:
S.E.O. is a marathon not a sprint. Impatience causes many webmasters to grow frustrated and give up early.

Many people want to change and change and change until they get to the top. Keep testing throwing out new ideas and hope that a few of them catch. That is just smart marketing. But as far as S.E.O. goes, you will want to wait a few months after your initial optimization before you really start changing anything. Create new content and new good ideas, but do not worry about going back to your content to re-tweak it over and over again.

After you feel the page copy is decently structured for usability and S.E.O. then you do not need to change it over and over again unless you are trying to test it for conversions. Often times, one of the better ways to test conversion rates is through a split A/ B test using pay-per-click search engines (will be explained in the Pay Per Click chapter).

Be Consistent:
You have to give search engines a chance to react to what is there. It would be much harder to list well for a competitive term if you used 100 different anchor text combinations. It might be useful to use a half doze to a few dozen variations.

You have to pick and choose. Using a few variations may be a good idea to make your linking appear as natural linking, but you should focus your anchor text around related niches. After you master a few related term sets, you may want to diversify, but you want to choose wisely and stick with it for a few months.

Search engines change their algorithms many times each month. Ranking changes you see are often due to algorithmic changes and not changes in relevancy based on small changes in page copy.

Why Frequently Changing can be Bad:

If you write a blog or a site with rapidly rotating content it makes sense that your copy will constantly be changing. That is not a problem. Where people run into a problem is when they waste time obsessive compulsively tweaking the same page copy over and over again. The time spent doing that might be better doing other promotional activities or creating new content.

If you keep changing your page copy before you establish your online presence with good links, you will never know what the best page format or layout is. You will not be sure how you would rank or convert if you stayed with your copy.

If your site is completely hosed it might make sense to do a major improvement, but otherwise it is a good idea to change only one thing at a time, since you cannot see the effects if you change everything. If your site is a complete disaster, a makeover may be necessary, otherwise just give it time and keep working on building relevant inbound links.

Customizing Your Browser for S.E.O.

Internet Explorer:
I created free Google Toolbar buttons that make it easy to use some of my favorite free S.E.O. tools. This will make it easy for you to quickly look up a site's age or inbound link counts.

http://tools.seobook.com/buttons/

Firefox:
I list my favorite Firefox extensions and bookmarks to help you customize Firefox to make it S.E.O. friendly on this page

http://tools.seobook.com/firefox/bookmarklets.html

Interactive Elements

Resources Cited:
Books:
- Don't Think of an Elephant – book about the concept of framing (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1931498717/)

- All Marketers Are Liars – book about how good marketers tell stories (http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1591841003/)

- Purple Cow – book about being remarkable
  (http://www.sethgodin.com/purple/)

Software:
- Server Header Check
  (http://www.searchengineworld.com/cgi-bin/servercheck.cgi)

- Digital Point Google Ranking Checker
  (http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/keywords)

- Yahoo! Developer Network – various tools
  (http://developer.yahoo.net/wiki/index.cgi?ApplicationList)

- Yahoo! Site Explorer (http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/)

- The Google Toolbar (http://toolbar.google.com/)

- Google Toolbar 4 beta (http://www.google.com/tools/toolbar/T4/)

- PageRank for Safari (http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/pagerank-mac)

- Prog free Google PageRank display search tool.
  (http://seochat.com/seo-tools/pagerank-search)

- HubFinder (http://www.linkhounds.com/hub-finder/)

- Link Harvester (http://www.linkhounds.com/link-harvester/)

- GoLexa (http://www.golexa.com/)

- Roboform – form filler (http://www.roboform.com)

- Show IP – FireFox extension shows what IP Google results are coming
  from (http://l4x.org/site/node/1078)

- Backlink Analyzer – like Optilink and SEO Elite, but free
  (http://www.seobook.com/archives/001108.shtml)

- Optilink ($224) (http://www.optitext.com/)

- SEO Elite ($167) (http://www.seoelite.com)

- Tattler – similar to Optilink and SEO Elite but free.
  (http://tools.webguerrilla.com/i-deleted-the-download-page/)

- Espion – tool which allows you to search through sites as if you were a
  search bot (http://tools.webguerrilla.com/new-browser-app/)

- Free buttons to add S.E.O. tools to your Google toolbar
  http://tools.seobook.com/buttons/

- Free extension list and bookmarks for making Firefox more S.E.O.
  friendly http://tools.seobook.com/firefox/bookmarklets.html

Websites:
- Google Search: Miserable Failure which shows the power of link text.
  (http://www.google.com/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&q=miserable+failure)

- Major search engine search volume breakdown
  (http://searchenginewatch.com/reports/index.php)

- Paul Graham's How to Start a Startup article - free example of an article
  that helps build links (http://www.paulgraham.com/start.html)

- SearchBistro – site which posted the Google search reviewer documents.
  (http://www.searchbistro.com)

- My review of the Google internal spam guidelines and search review
  document (http://www.seobook.com/archives/000917.shtml)

- My review of Link Spam Detection Based on Mass Estimation
  (http://www.seobook.com/archives/001342.shtml)

- WeBuildPages page about pre sell pages
  (http://www.webuildpages.com/presell-pages.htm)

- Jim Boykin's post about finding the most authoritative and most relevant
  link locations on a site
  (http://www.jimboykin.com/tips-for-finding-the-best-pages-to-get-links-from/)
  (http://www.jimboykin.com/part-two-tips-for-finding-the-best-pages-to-get-links-from/)

- Dan Thies link building videos –
  http://www.seoresearchlabs.com/week2-sample.html and
  http://www.seoresearchlabs.com/linkvideo/

- Google's Matt Cutts interview on PageRank and link quality
  http://www.mikegrehan.com/audio/mattcutts/prclip.mp3

- Coverage of Google's new patent
  (http://www.threadwatch.org/node/2115)
  (http://www.threadwatch.org/node/2132)

- Latent Semantic Indexing information
  (http://javelina.cet.middlebury.edu/lsa/out/cover_page.htm)

- World Wide Web Consortium (http://www.w3c.org)

- Problems with SEO friendly affiliate programs
  (http://www.overthemark.com/seoblog/item/51)

- Eric Ward's Netpost linking strategies website. (http://www.netpost.com/)

- Linking Matters (http://www.linkingmatters.com)

- Linking 101 (http://www.linking101.com)

- SearchEngineWatch - Danny Sullivan's search engine information website.
  (http://www.searchenginewatch.com)

- SearchDay - the free SearchEngineWatch newsletter
  (http://searchenginewatch.com/about/article.php/2155721)

- Digital Point's Cooperative Advertising Network
  (http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/ad-network/)

- Link Vault link exhange network (http://www.link-vault.com)

- WeBuildPages query combination tool
  (http://www.webuildpages.com/search/)

- Threadwatch thread about link exchange networks
  (http://www.threadwatch.org/node/808)

SEO Article Sites
- SearchGuild (http://www.searchguild.com/)

- SEO Journal (http://www.seojournal.com)

- Sticky Sauce (http://www.stickysauce.com/)

- LilEngine (http://www.lilengine.com/)

- Internet Search Engine Database (http://www.isedb.com/)

General Artilce Sites
- EzineArticles (http://ezinearticles.com/)

- SearchWarp (http://searchwarp.com/)

- Buzzle (http://www.buzzle.com)

- Idea Marketers (http://www.ideamarketers.com/)

- Ebooks N Bytes (http://www.ebooksnbytes.com/)

- Article Central (http://thewhir.com/find/articlecentral/)

More Article Ideas
- My list of article submission locations
  (http://www.seobook.com/archives/000099.shtml)

Other Resources
- NetworkForGood (http://www.networkforgood.org/)

- BlogAds (http://www.blogads.com)

- AdBrite (http://www.adbrite.com/)

Some Notes

- Download the Google Toolbar if you are using Internet explorer. Try it out on a few sites to see what PageRank the top ranked competitors in your vertical have.

- If you install the Google Toolbar on Internet Explorer

- Write an article about something that interests you that relates to your business. Submit that article to Ezinearticles and Search Warp. Practice writing at least one article a week.

- Glance through my list of article submission locations.
  (http://www.seobook.com/archives/000099.shtml)

- If you are a great writer and can write exceptionally authoritative articles get one published on a selective site that is hard to get published on.

Chapter

9

Pay-Per-Click

P ay-per-click search engines can give you instant traffic and allow you to test new business models in real time. The pay-per-click market is competitive, though. It is worth spending an extensive period of time learning how to write and target ads, tracking your competitors, and doing deep keyword research before jumping in.

Before You Start

Metrics-Based Marketing:

P.P.C. search engines provide a highly track-able marketing medium. Frequently, people begin marketing without any idea as to the approximate value of a click. If you do not set up a value range and track the results, you have no way to distinguish good marketing from bad marketing.

To know the value of a click, you need to decide what the goal of your marketing is. If you are just branding, then you should expect to lose money to gain mindshare or reinforce your brand, and tracking may not be that important. If you are using pay-per-click search engines for direct product marketing, you need to know how much each click is worth.

Typical Conversion Rates:

Lead generation sites typically have a conversion rate around 10 to 12%, but can go as high as 30% + if they are properly targeted and exceptionally appealing to visitors.

Since little investment is needed to arrive at your website and many other sites are just a click away, selling stuff on the web has a conversion rate similar to direct mail advertising. High ticket items have a lower conversion rate and unique cheap items tend to have higher conversion rates. Many stores find typical conversion rates might be anywhere from .3 to 5%.

Doing the Math:

There are many factors that go into click price. It is somewhat hard to measure branding, but ad distribution can help with that. Most other things are tangible.

If you know your average order size, profit per order, and estimated conversion rate, you can get a good idea what clicks are worth. Some people also factor in

lifetime value of a customer, but it is harder to measure and there is still enough opportunity in many markets to do your math primarily based on direct return.

Before You Start:
It is a good idea to look at the various ads which are displayed and in which order over time. The top guy might be an idiot losing tons of money or a person who is paying an extreme premium for branding.

If ads from affiliate marketers or smaller sites are ranking around the same ad position over the course of a few weeks to a month, then they are probably doing something right (generating profits). It is worth it to take a couple weeks to do deep keyword research and market analysis before jumping into pay-per-click search engine marketing.

You Will Lose Money:
Most clicks end up being failures. Even if you have a 30% conversion rate that means that 7 out of 10 clicks did nothing for you. When you dip your toes into the pay-per-click market, there stands a good chance you will lose money before you start making money. The main reasons are:

- **You need to learn how the systems work**, learning:

    o what terms are important and what ones are not.

    o how to target the ads

    o how to write the ad copy

    o how to bid and what terms are overpriced

- You are competing against the best accounts.

    o Some competing advertisers may have other intangible assets which give them an unfair advantage.

    o If you are brand new your competitors have more experience than you do.

    o Some ad campaigns have been fine tuned for months or years.

 Search engines try to sell the concept of pay-per-click marketing saying that it is so targeted that everyone makes money, but in the real world that is not how things work. Some markets are competitive and will require learning, sound strategy, and tracking to generate profits.

Why Pay-Per-Click is Important:
I was working to raise the rankings of one client for a few competitive phrases. It was taking a decent investment in time and money. I then started a pay-per-click campaign to test numerous terms. As it turns out, his conversion rate for the words

we thought we needed were not great. There were a couple other terms with lower search frequency and less competition which converted exceptionally well.

Had we not done pay-per-click marketing, we may have never properly focused his S.E.O. efforts. In less than a month on about $300 we increased the productivity of his site ten fold.

The only way to be certain of anything in marketing is to test it. Pay-per-click marketing allows you to test real-time with the fastest feedback loop of any marketing medium in the world.

What is Pay-Per-Click?

In 1998 Overture pioneered the idea of selling search ads. You could buy search results for as low as a penny or two per click. This system has quickly evolved into one of the worlds most competitive marketplaces.

Why Use Pay-Per-Click?

Sometime you can not afford to...or simply do not want to wait. Pay-per-click search engines allow you to be listed at the top of search results quickly. This will allow you to:

- Prototype ideas to track demand before you invest into a new business model or are stuck footing the bill for a new site design.

- Quickly gather feedback on market conditions.

- Split test a live audience, and gather results in real time.

You can use Google AdWords to offer a free white paper about a topic from a one page website. If nobody is interested in downloading your white paper or you cannot seem to get enough click-throughs, then odds are:

- the market is not yet ready for your product

- or you are marketing it from the wrong angle

- or you are marketing it to the wrong people

Who Should I Trust in Pay-Per-Click?

There are a few major players in the pay-per-click arena. Yahoo! Search Marketing currently has network partnerships that span Yahoo, InfoSpace, AltaVista, AllTheWeb and many other partners. Google AdWords has a larger distribution network across Google, AOL, About, Earthlink, and many others sites...even a few of my own. Microsoft is a new player in the market, but their limited syndication network means their traffic quality is high.

For the sake of this book I am only going to cover Google AdWords, Yahoo! Search Marketing, and Microsoft AdCenter.

There are a few other pay-per-click search engines (Ask, Business.com, Miva, Kanoodle, Enhance Interactive, 7Search, Findology, Search123, Epilot) that may be well worth a look **after** trying Google, Yahoo! and MSN. While beginning pay-per-click advertising, I would recommend **only using Google AdWords, Yahoo! Search Marketing, and Microsoft AdCenter**.

Why Use Large Pay-Per-Click Search Engines?

> When you use large pay per click search engines you guarantee you are getting at least some good traffic, and that your business model is scalable.
>
> Smaller engines provide slower feedback loops, and some may not even provide quality traffic.

- The results will be scaleable.

- The feedback will be quicker.

- They offer many great tracking and targeting features free.

- Larger pay-per-click search engines generally present higher quality traffic and are less susceptible to fraud.

- It is less complex managing two or three accounts versus 100 accounts.

- It's easier to track the ROI on 2 accounts than on 100 accounts.

- Many of the extremely small search engines **never have real traffic**. You are wasting your time registering with them.

- Even some of the better second tier search engines may waste a big hunk of change. In early November 2004 I tried using LookSmart. It sent me twice the traffic as Yahoo! Search Marketing and traffic from LookSmart had a 95% bounce rate. That means that 19 of 20 site visitors from LookSmart immediately left and **I paid for garbage traffic**. The quality of traffic from smaller engines will vary from term to term, but its best to go with the biggest guys off the start, and then, if you have spare time, try some of the smaller engines.

Case Study: the Ignorant Bidder
If a term does not convert well for you, then it may not be worth it to rank near the top for that term.

Not too long ago, a person was bidding on an eBay ad for "SEO Book" at over $1 a click. Assuming I can get a 1.5% conversion rate I can afford to pay that much, but this person was just throwing away their money.

Just to test the waters I placed my e-book on eBay and it did not go for anywhere near what I usually sell them for.

I find it hard to believe the person who was bidding a dollar a click was making any money. They later lowered that bid to 21 cents. In some markets, there will be dumb companies that rotate in, lose money, and then go bankrupt. By the time they go bankrupt others may soon take their money wasting market position.

Some terms are not worth buying at the price the keywords go for.

Landing Page Tips:

Conversion is a way to measure how successful a pay-per-click campaign is. A few tips to improve landing pages:

- **Remove navigation:** unless it is necessary, remove other options. Let people do what you want them to do, and don't give them many other choices.

- **Make link text appealing:** people tend to glance over copy instead of deeply reading every word. Since links are action points, people tend to pay more attention to link text. Make sure link text is appealing since it is far more likely to get read than most of the page copy.

- **Pictures of people:** people like to look at other people. Testimonials appear more legitimate if they have pictures next to them.

- **Give them a clue they have found the correct page:** Place the words they searched for in large text at the top of the page to show them they are in the right location. If you are a large merchant with many products maybe use something like 'search results for: *their search term'.* Typically it is best to point people at a landing page instead of the home page.

- **Other ideas:** some of the other concepts listed throughout this e-book (such as using short paragraphs and subheaders) also apply to landing pages. Corey Rudl constantly retested his landing pages. You can learn a good amount by seeing how he changed his landing pages over time. MarketingSherpa also has a landing page handbook for sale.

Yahoo! Search Marketing

Yahoo! Search Marketing was formerly named Overture.

How Does Yahoo! Search Marketing Work?

Yahoo! Search Marketing is primarily a manually-edited pay-per-click search provider. You write ads for your website and they get editorially approved to appear in the search results on Y.S.M. partner websites. Y.S.M. bid prices are

transparent. You can usually see exactly what your competitors are bidding at any given time.

Y.S.M. places exact match listings above broad match listings. This means that if you bid on the exact term that someone is searching for you will rank above ads that are matched via broader matching options.

If you bid 10 cents for "best seo book" and someone else bids 25 cents for "seo books" your best seo book ad will show above theirs if someone is searching for "best seo book."

Y.S.M. also truncates search terms for ad targeting, so book and books are treated as though they are the same keyword phrase.

Y.S.M. Bid Prices vs. Click Costs:

With Y.S.M. you pick a maximum bid price and your bid will never exceed that. Their software has a bid discounter built in, so often times your average bid cost may be less than your bid prices. Y.S.M. makes most bid prices transparent. In competitive fields, competitors will ensure your click costs are near your bid price.

Bid Jamming:

In some niche markets there will only be a couple people who place exceptional value on ultra qualified leads. For example, a Chicago DUI attorney may bid much higher for the term 'Chicago DUI attorney' than a general nationwide firm would. If there are only a couple competitors in a market, it is not uncommon for the top few bids to be $5 or $10 while the rest of them are around 25 cents or less.

For example, if they bid $10 you can bid a max bid of $9.99. If the third placed person is only bidding 25 cents your clicks will cost you 26 cents each while ensuring your competitor pays a full $10 per click.

Of course you want to monitor your accounts closely if you are using aggressive bidding techniques or bid jamming people. Some competitors will be stupid and let you take their lunch money. Others may be smart and re adjust their bids to bid jam you. Some will go so far as click fraud, so you need to watch your account closely if you are bidding aggressively in competitive markets.

By default ads are widely matched and syndicated to the content network, so if you bid high on the search network make sure you check the content network ads and bid lower on those. It doesn't take too many $10 content clicks to come in to make for a bad day.

Bid to Position:

When you use the bid-to-position bidding strategy, it also hides your full bid price, only showing 1 cent more than the person below you. Bid to position allows you to bid a max price and max position. Yahoo! will keep your click cost and ranking at or below your max.

Y.S.M. Programs:

Y.S.M. has a $5 startup fee (which is converted to click credit), and it has no monthly minimum spend. They also have a FastTrack program where their account representatives will set up your account for a one time $199 fee. I recommend taking the time to set up your own account. You know your products better and are more interested in your own success than some random Y.S.M. editor is; they are more interesting in ensuring you spend as much as possible.

Y.S.M. offers a local product called Local Match, which allows you to target your ads from a .5 to 100 mile radius of your business location. The Local Match product requires that you have a business with a physical address, but it does not require a website. These ads give driving directions to your place of business. Local Match ads show up in the same location where other Y.S.M. ads appear.

Y.S.M. also offers a paid inclusion program by the name of Search Submit Express. I generally consider this a waste of money for most websites. Search Submit Express gives your sites 48 hour refresh throughout the Yahoo! powered search products. S.S.E. has a one time $49 review fee and also has an **incremental cost-per-click**. S.S.E. is good for sites which:

- are rapidly changing

- or are having dynamic indexing problems

- or need indexed quickly

- or need the associated tracking offered by Search Submit Express

Free Yahoo! Search Marketing Tools:

Yahoo! offers a suite of tools to help their advertisers set up their accounts.

- **SEO Book Keyword Research Tool:** cross references the Yahoo! Search Term Suggestion Tool, the Yahoo! View Bid tool, and all the Google keyword research tools. (http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword/)

- **Yahoo! Search Term Suggestion Tool:** shows the frequency of searches across the Y.S.M. network for the prior month. (http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/)

- **Yahoo! View Bid Tool:** show the highest bidders for a specific search term. (http://uv.bidtool.overture.com/d/search/tools/bidtool/?Keywords=casino&mkt=us&lang=en_US)

- **Yahoo! Advertiser Workbook:** free downloadable e-book released by Yahoo! to help you get the most out of your YSM campaign.

Y.S.M. Search Term Suggestion Tool Errors:

Y.S.M. truncates their search terms. While the plural and singular versions of search terms will greatly differ in search volume Y.S.M. just lumps them together.

Please note that the Yahoo! search term suggestion tool tends to run high on highly commercial search terms since many automated bots and bid managers scour through their partner network.

Here is an example keyword research search for S.E.O.

And here is an example of the bid prices for S.E.O.

View Bids

Type in a search term and we'll show
you the Max Bids and listings for that
term.

seo

[Search] [Cancel]

1. **Professional SEO Marketing Firm**
   Cherryone is a SEO firm that gets
   results for search engine optimization.
   Get a free ranking report and quote
   today. No obligation. See how you
   compare.
   www.cherryoneweb.com
   (Advertiser's Max Bid: $4.99)

2. **SEO - the Proven Way to High ROI**
   Certified SEO experts; fast ROI. Get
   more traffic and high rankings.
   www.seoinc.com
   (Advertiser's Max Bid: $4.99)

WordTracker tracks click data from the meta search engines by the name of Dogpile and WebCrawler. Since WordTracker makes their money by selling data versus clicks, you can usually expect more legitimate traffic measurements using WordTracker. Digital Point created a free keyword suggestion tool which compares both traffic estimates.

KeywordDiscovery.com and GoodKeywords.com are two additional useful keyword research resources.

When doing pay per click advertising deep keyword research is a fundamental part of most successful campaigns. Many of the keyword research tools are top heavy (only showing the most common terms), but Yahoo! and Google both have enough traffic to give deep keyword research results. WordTracker has a few cool features called lateral search and thesaurus which help you find similar keywords. I tested many of the keyword research tools and WordTracker is generally the only tool I feel is worth paying an ongoing subscription for.

Another option to finding deep keyword data, is to run a broad matched Google AdWords ad (AdWords and matching options are discussed later in this chapter) and mine keyword data from the referral strings. Make sure you watch your budget closely and use negative terms to filter unwanted traffic if you use this technique.

The Keys to Doing Well on Yahoo! Search Marketing:

Ensure you target your keywords properly and do not get in bidding wars. Do not bid high prices for exceptionally broad or generic phrases.

Your exact match listings will still compete against broad match listings, but if you make a list of targeted phrases, you will not likely pay for as many untargeted clicks as a person bidding for more generic phrases. If you use somewhat generic phrases you will want to make sure you use negative words to block terms you are not interested in.

A few good examples of common negative terms to block are 'cracks' and 'free'. People looking for free stuff are typically poor leads for most businesses.

Keyword tip: Spammed Out Guestbooks some guestbooks which have been spammed by aggressive competitors may help you find many keyword variations. Keyword tools may help you find about 500 keywords, but the guestbooks sometimes may yield over 5,000.

There are a variety of free tools that will help you create keywords based on different keyword groupings. Using permutation generation tools will allow you to quickly create hundreds or thousands of relevant exact match terms. I have a free web based keyword list generator to use to make up my extended keyword lists after I have already done primary keyword research. Microsoft Excel also has a similar feature.

Some of Y.S.M.'s partners cut the ad text short so you will want to include your most important words near the beginning of the ad title and ad description.

Y.S.M. does not factor click through rate into click cost. A high click through rate may bring more expenses without many more conversions, so you will want to pre-qualify your site visitors. Write ads for conversions instead of just clicks. If you are trying to sell bulk stuff at wholesale do not be afraid to use the word 'wholesale' in the title AND place prices in the ad text.

P.P.C. vs S.E.O. in Small Paid Niches:

The more expensive the associated P.P.C. ads are, the more value there is in performing S.E.O. on a site in a paid niche. If the average cost-per-click is $5 then a $1,000 SEO campaign pays for itself after only a few hundred targeted visitors.

Y.S.M. tends to be a bit sloppier than Google at monetizing niche advertisements. Y.S.M.'s open bidding means that if there are only a couple strong advertisers, one can to stick the other while getting their ads cheap.

One of my clients pays about 12 cents a click on Yahoo! while her competitor pays about $8 a click. On Google I pay closer to $3 for each of those 12 cent clicks.

If you are unsure whether an S.E.O. campaign would justify its fees you can run a test P.P.C. account to see what type of demand there is in your target market.

Ad Writing Tips

There are many subtle hints to doing pay-per-click advertising correctly. A small change in conversion rate can make a huge difference once scaled out across the entire web. A marginal loss that turns into a marginal profit can become an automated revenue stream if you write your ads and convert better.

English to English Conversion

I went to the UK and realized just how different the versions of English are around the world. If you are targeting a specific region or country make sure your ads and website make sense to locals using words and phrases that make sense in their dialect.

Use Specific Words!

Choosing a keyword for pay-per-click ads is similar to choosing a keyword for search engine optimization. You do not want generic terms. Frequently single word terms bring so many competitor clicks, compulsive clicks, untargeted prospects and fraudulent clicks that it is hard to justify buying them. Single words are usually poorly targeted AND more expensive. If you get into bidding wars over general terms you are playing the game all wrong. Actually, the game is playing you.

Do Not Follow the Crowd:

Bid prices may not be justified where they are. Many times people feel they need to have certain terms. Without tracking them, these people lose money and do not know why they are losing.

Sometimes people chase a few core terms, which give them an inflated artificial value. If you try to do exactly what the other ads are doing you may fail. In many markets the top listed ad is losing money on each and every click.

Use Creativity to Lower Cost and Increase Conversion Rates:

Keyword Selection:

Think creatively. Try to imagine what your customers may type into the search engine to find what you are selling. You may even want to bid on terms which exist in a question format. Think of your target audience. Maybe these terms are problems that people have. Perhaps these people do not even know your product exists.

Writing Headlines:

Some of the most competitive ads in the world are magazine covers in a checkout isle. You may want to glance through a few magazines covers and table of contents to find ways to write headlines and ads that pull sales.

Place Keywords in Your Ads:

Many search engines highlight the words in ads that match the users query. Placing the search term in the ad will help your ad stick out more and improve your click through rate.

Bid on Current Events & Buzz Words:

My cheapest and highest converting ads are frequently ads for industry buzz words that nobody else bid on. The phrase "Nigritude Ultramarine" (a made up phrase from an S.E.O. competition) has sold multiple copies of this e-book. In addition it has introduced hundreds of visitors to my site at 8 cents per click.

Start with a Verb:

You may be able to significantly increase your click-through rate if you start your ad copy with a powerful active verb.

Additional Conversion Tips:

Trying to rank #1 may cause bid wars with ego bidders. Usually listing a bit lower will improve the return on investment since you have less compulsive clickers and a lower bid price. In addition, as people scroll down the ad list they do a better job of showing intent. They do a better job of pre-qualifying themselves for the purchase.

If you make the ads sound compelling to the reader, you can improve your click through rate to where you get more conversions than the #1 ad. Show benefits or offer a solution to their problems.

Link to a Landing Page:

Link to the exact page you want visitors to see, not to your home page. By channeling all your traffic through the home page you may be telling a person that you do not care about them, and make it harder for them to buy. You may even consider adding a special page to your site that is made exclusively for that pay per click program.

Exact vs. Broad Matching (will be explained further in AdWords section):

Many search engines use different matching levels which to filter ad targeting.

Exact match will only show for search results where the user searched specifically for your keyword phrase, **and only your keyword phrase**.

Phrase match will show when your exact phrase appears anywhere within the search query with the words in the same order.

Google and Yahoo! may show broad match ads when people search for synonyms of your keywords, or if your broad match keywords appear in the search in any order your ads will display.

If you are new to pay-per-click you may want to use exact match & phrase match until you get a feel for it, unless you are using broad match for keyword mining.

Misspelled Words:

Spelling errors are sometimes corrected for by the search matching software, but sometimes they are not. Bidding on keywords ran together, words with missed keys, and other spelling errors can help generate many cheap keyword variations. This free tool at http://tools.seobook.com/spelling/keywords-typos.cgi makes generating a list of misspelled terms quick and easy.

Make sure you do not place the misspellings in your ad copy as search engines do not want misspelled ads. It is usually best to put misspelled words in their own ad campaign separate from your other ad campaigns.

Search & the Buying Cycle:

Many people perform multiple searches prior to purchase. Typically early searches tend to search for generic phrases, and as people get closer to determining what they want to buy they search for brand names (or brand name + product) more frequently.

It may be harder to determine the ROI on the more generic terms than on well branded terms as the branded clicks typically fall closer to the purchase date.

Editing Ads:

Yahoo! manually reviews ads before they will display them. Google will display many ads before they have had editorial approval. If you consistently break their rules they may no longer want to do business with you, but sometimes it makes sense to test where the limits are.

Knowing that Google shows some ads before they are reviewed by humans means that Friday evening would be a good time to run aggressive ads since they might be displayed all weekend before they are reviewed.

Once Yahoo! has accepted a keyword you can try to rewrite new ad copy that is a bit more aggressive. If they do not accept your new ad copy your old listing with your old ad copy should typically still remain.

Customer Tracking and Bid Management

How Tracking Works:

If you are paying by the click, you need to know what each of those clicks is doing. From the second they click until they leave or purchase.

If your server is already equipped with great tracking software it is easy to add a tracking tag on the back of your ads. Instead of your Yahoo! listing going to http://www.domain.com/salespage.html have it go to http://www.domain.com/salespage.html?source=y+ad=6+keyword=fred.

Tracking Software:

My favorite log file analyzer is ClickTracks. It displays the webpage in a viewable browser highlighting the click ratio for each of the links. ClickTracks also allows you to set up custom tracking tags to view traffic through different visitor paths. While the software is expensive to some at $500, it is a steal for some larger commercial websites.

Some other popular conversion tracking software options are Keyword Max, Index Tools, & WebSideStory. If you are working with an exceptionally large account you may also want to try Efficient Frontier or Omniture.

ConversionRuler is inexpensive, suitable software if you are primarily concerned with tracking pay per click results. ConversionRuler starts out around $20 a month. Yahoo! and Google also provide built in conversion tracking software which they provide free.

There are also free tracking services such as Extreme Tracking and SiteMeter if you want to access referrer stats easily, but I would not recommend using them for tracking any of your pay-per-click statistics.

If you are a heavy spender on pay-per-click, you will most likely want to use bid management software.

Google Analytics:

Google also created a free cross platform conversion tracking tool which comes with their AdWords product. It works for tracking email ads, banner ads, and various PPC search engine ads.

On top of the free built in tracking feature Google also bought out Urchin and rebranded the tool as Google Analytics. Google Analytics is free, and perhaps as full feature as most premium conversion tracking tool, but if you use it you are sending your valuable market data back to your source of traffic. That may work against you if they use your best converting terms and most frequent referrals to recommend keywords to your competitors. If you were Google and you sold traffic to multiple competitors would you recommend my best words to my competitors?

Bid Management Software:

There are automated software programs which will track your bids and change them multiple times a day so that you achieve optimal efficiency with your ads. These programs can do various things such as: list your site relative to another website, bid gap management (list your site right where the first large bid gap is), bid trapping (bidding 1 cent underneath your competitor) and various other functions.

The best part of bid management software is that good bid management software can allow you to dynamically change the bid price from price-per-click to other metrics such cost-per-action or ROI.

If you get big into pay per click search engines and are managing multiple accounts it is worth the money to use a bid management program to help save time and money. Currently three market leaders in this field are BidRank (downloadable software), Keyword Max (hosted software application), and Atlas OnePoint (hosted software application). Yahoo! created a bid management tool by the name of Yahoo! Search Optimizer.

Fraud Prevention Software:

Most major pay-per-click search engines have fraud protection built into their system to protect the value of click prices. You should use your server logs to validate clicks if you are running a large campaign. Generally due to time overlaps and differences in reporting it is considered acceptable to have an error up to 10%. If your error is much larger than that be sure to notify the search engine.

If you have a good log file analyzer and understand how to use it then you have no need for a fraud prevention tool, but these tools make it quick and easy to spot potential fraud.

If you believe your competitors are clicking your ads or you are investing heavily in a competitive market you will want to take a look at additional fraud protection. Two of the current leaders in the P.P.C. fraud prevention software market are Who'sClickingWho and KeywordMax Click Auditor. Vericlix is a similar, but free product. Other analytics companies, such as ClickTracks, have also been getting into the click fraud monitoring market.

Even if a competitor only clicks on your ads every few days it still adds up over time. This software allows you to accumulate the evidence you need to reverse charges and potentially file a lawsuit, but you need to have a large enough spend to justify its cost.

Google Adwords

Google AdWords gets its own extremely long section because it is exceptionally more complicated and feature rich than other P.P.C. systems.

Google vs. Yahoo!:

Google AdWords and Yahoo! are in a battle for search distribution. These P.P.C. search providers deliver ads on nearly every major search engine or portal.

Google Bid Prices vs. Click Costs:

With Google you pick a maximum bid price which your click cost will never exceed. Their software has a bid discounter built in, so often times your average bid cost will be less than your bid prices.

Google bid prices are not transparent, so your competitors have no way to be sure exactly what your ads are costing (due to factoring in click through rates into effective bid price – which I will explain later). Often times, your actual price is much lower than your maximum bid price. Remember, that on Google it is average click cost that matters and that is often very different than your max bid.

A few Things you can do with AdWords:
Google AdWords is an advertising medium like no other.

- There is only a $5 signup fee (which is converted into bid credits).

- You can have ads across Google's network of sites with some ads appearing in less than 10 minutes.

- Google's broad match technology allows you to receive extremely broad distribution while keeping it quick, easy, and simple to use. Yahoo! now does this too.

- Google's vast distribution network makes it possible to test a business model without fully investing into creating that business.

- Google AdWords syndication allows you to reach AOL users, other searchers, and Google's vast content network.

- Google offers Geotargeting, so you can target your ad to a country, state, metro area, zip code, or geographic radius of your choice.

- You can run multiple ads for the same words and test them against each other or send them to different pages to A/B split test your site or ad copy.

The Importance of a High Click through Rate:
Google lets searchers determine the relevancy of the ads. Price for Google AdWords is a function of click cost * click through rate. I believe Google uses the average click through rate from the 1,000 most recent ads in this calculation, though for some markets with low search volumes they may use other quality indicatiors, like CTR for an ad group. This means if you know how to get a high click through rate you can dominate Google AdWords by serving up ads at a far cheaper rate than what your competitors are paying.

The following table gives examples of how the Google system calculates bid prices and ad positions. Observe how some low priced ads appear above high priced ads because they are more relevant. Also observe that actual click cost sometimes varies widely when compared to max bid price. Some clicks are at times expensive and at other times they are cheap. It is the average click cost that matters, since it is not practical to worry about the price of each and every click. Max bid does not matter since it can widely depart from actual click price. For example, I have seen a $6.00 max bid which had clicks go for 77 cents.

The best way to do lower click cost is to create ads with a high click through rate.

You should use the search words in the copy and make sure the ads are well targeted.

If your product is only relevant to a small percentage of searchers then focus your ad copy on conversions instead of just click through rate.

Ad Number	Max Bid	Click through Rate (relevancy)	Effective Bid	Ad Position	Actual Click Cost
1	0.40	5%	$2.00	4	$0.40
2	0.26	10%	$2.60	2	$0.26
3	1.00	2.53%	$2.53	3	$0.81
4	1.50	2%	$3.00	1	$1.31

Distribution buys further distribution. Off the start, you will want to overbid slightly as you will be competing against the best ads that have developed over time in your niche.

The bid prices Google suggest are often somewhat high. I usually cut the suggested bid price by 20-50% when I first start an account. I then monitor closely and change it to try to maintain decent ad position.

Quality Based Minimum Bids:

In the past, Google had a 5 cent minimum bid price and only allowed ads to display if their Google click through rate was above 0.5%, but in August of 2005 they shifted to a quality based minimum pricing.

This means that if your ad is deemed exceptionally relevant, you can get clicks for as low as 1 cent, depending on how competitors are bidding. If your ads are not exceptionally relevant you will have to pay a higher minimum bid to make up for the lack of ad relevancy.

Google has been making their ad system more black-box like. They stated they may include landing page quality into their ad relevancy scores. In other words, we can know the basis of how it works, but they will create a system that optimizes for maximum internal revenue, delivering value to advertisers, and ease of use. If they are vague about their exact ranking criteria the harder it will be for people to game the flaws in their ad system.

Ads which are disabled from search syndication due to low relevancy and bid price still appear in the Google contextual ad program. I describe syndication later on in the chapter.

Broad Match, Phrase Match, and Exact Match:

Google AdWords and Yahoo! both have different levels of word matching. Using [search term] will only return searches ads for the query **search term**, which is called exact match. Yahoo!'s exact match is a bit fuzzy, matching plurals and some

common misspellings. Google's exact match is more precise, only matching the exact search.

Buying the keyword "search term" will show your ads for **any search that has 'search term' in the query** (in the same order), which is called phrase match.

Buying search term (no quotations or brackets) will show your ads on **any search that has 'search' and 'term' in it**. With broad matching, synonyms to search term may also display your ad. If you decide to start off with broad matching you should view the synonyms to ensure none of them are wasteful. This is especially true with acronyms or other terms with multiple well known meanings.

Google offers all three levels of ad control. Yahoo! offers exact match and Yahoo! groups phrase match and broad match in a category called advanced match.

Examples:	Match Type	Will Show Results For	Will not show results for
[eat cheese]	Exact	Eat cheese	Any other search.
"eat cheese"	Phrase	Eat cheese, I love to eat cheese, you eat cheese	Cheese eat, or anything else which does not have both words together in the same order as the search term
Eat cheese	Broad	All above options and searches such as: cheese eating, ate cheddar, etc.	

Yahoo! combined broad match and phrase match into a single group called advanced match.

Google Ad Status:

If you do not understand something or are frustrated with something in particular feel free to ask at an SEO forum or ask your ad representative. Google AdWords has a blog (which does not want direct AdWords feedback), an online support center, and you can contact Google advertising via phone at 1 (866) 2 Google.

Due to trademark issues, some ad copy will be rejected by the automated review. When that happens you can request an exception and the ad will get a human review.

Google usually runs most ads before they have an editorial review, but they review them before placing them on partner sites. I have seen long review times in excess of a few days for Google site targeted AdSense ads.

Ads on Google.com have two states: active or inactive. If an ad is inactive you can make it active by bidding higher.

Google Keyword Suggestion Tool:

The Google Keyword Tool estimates search volume, trends, and advertising competition. You can enter keywords to analyzer or they can extract relevant keywords from a given web page.

The Google Traffic Estimator Tool roughly estimates the price required to rank #1 on AdWords 85% of the time and the traffic you could expect to get from Google AdWords for a given bid.

Google offers a search term suggestion tool by the name of Google Suggest which auto-completes partial search queries. It does not show search volumes, but search volume plays a heavy role in its output order. The tool is currently only available in some languages. Many Google Toolbar installs have this feature enabled.

Negative Keywords:

There is a negative keyword option in both Yahoo! and Google AdWords. Any word that you do not want your ad to appear for can simply be blocked by placing -badword beneath your keywords.

There are many words which would indicate a lack of desire to purchase anything. Words like crack, free, wallpapers, pic, or mp3 are often money losers if you do not remember to include these in your - keyword list.

Example keyword list showing a negative keyword: (should be much longer and more detailed, this is just an example though)

Eat cheese
Buy cheese
-free

Thus your ad would show up for many cheese queries, but for none that included the words free. Google also allows you to filter negative keywords at a campaign level.

Dynamic Keyword Insertion:

By including your keywords in your copy, you help boost the click-through rate. Keywords which occur in your ads will be highlighted on the search engine results page. This draws additional attention to your ad.

Google offers a tool which will place the active search word from your keyword list in the ad title automatically. If you have a group of similar keywords that will still use the same body text you can enable this feature by writing out your normal body text, and placing {KeyWord: default ad title} in the title of the ad.

When the chosen keyword is greater than 25 characters the default ad title will show. Otherwise the ad will show the search term as the ad title.

Note how I capitalized the K and W in keyword. This makes the words in your ad title appear capitalized. You also can place dynamic keyword insertion technology in the middle of sentences, such as "Buy Cheap {KeyWord: default keyword}."

Getting Feedback from Your Account:

When opening up a Google AdWords account many people are hesitant to spend much money. In spending a small amount the business is essentially ignoring the feedback loop Google has set up.

Is it better to loose $100 today, than to lose it over three months to finally come to the conclusion that you need to change? I would rather want to know that I need to change now. **Not all industries will make money from AdWords.** It is not a business model that will work perfectly across the board.

If you spend on targeted keywords your site should have a chance for success. Any marketed internet based business should leverage fast feedback loops to help it improve. Off the start you want to overspend on your ads so you can see which ones are effective. After a while you can regroup your ads by prices and then slash your bid price down. The ineffective ad groups or keywords will be disabled due to quality based minimum bids and the winners will keep displaying.

Google Advertising Professional:

The Google Advertising Professional program is a program which allows marketers to be certified as a Google AdWords expert. The requirements are that you spend at least $1,000 in a 90 day period after signing up, comply with their rules, and pass an online test. After the 90 day period is up you can place a logo on your site which will perhaps make many people assume that Google endorses all of your SEO/ SEM services.

This program also allows you to link together up to 500 AdWords accounts so that you can access and manage them from a single login. Google also offers many free online tutorials which can help prepare you for the test and help you learn more about AdWords even if you do not want to take the test.

Google AdWords is Responsible Advertising:

Add all the above features to the fact that Google also offers a free web based conversion tracking tool, and you can see how the AdWords system is a direct marketers dream. Everything is targetable, tangible, and measurable right down to the cent.

Google also offers a program by the name of Google JumpStart where they will help set up your account for you. Likely they will not be able to set up the best account for you, but they might be able to help you get your feet wet. The fee to join JumpStart is $299, and the fee gets converted to bid clicks.

Keep in mind their goal is to have you spend money, which may not necessarily have targeting the best ROI or best keyword buys in mind. Search engines would prefer that merchants get in bidding wars over a select small set of terms and miss out on some of the cheaper terms.

Bonus Info: How to Improve Click-through Rate and Slash Google AdWords Costs to Maximize Profits:

Determine Price By Position:

The top ad position sometimes loses money. To find out what the top position costs on Google AdWords you use their Traffic Estimator tool without entering a bid price. This price will roughly equate to the bid necessary to rank #1 for 85% of search queries. Keep in mind that since their factor in CTR ads which get a low CTR will need to pay more while ads with a high CTR not cost as much per click.

In mid 2006 Google created a bid to position feature, but typically it is best to use prices to control your position. If you find that the top 2 or 3 positions are cost prohibitive, but positions 4-7 work great then you can bid high enough to where you would normally rank in one of the top few positions and then use the bid to position feature to limit your exposure.

Determine how Competitive a Market is:

Markets may shift quickly. If you notice certain ads appearing again and again over time, they are probably ads that are generating profits. For a quick glance at how competitive a market is you can look at the estimates in the Google Keyword Tool.

You may also want to record the top 10 results every few days for a few weeks to up to a month. If an ad is in around the same position (which is not from a huge corporation) after a month has passed they are probably earning profits.

Listing Your ads on Top of Google Search Results:

While lower ad positions may have a better ROI in some markets they also may not provide adequate distribution to create significant profits. Google AdWords may list the top 1 to 3 ads above the regular search results (versus off to the right side like most other AdWords ads). The top ads usually have a high click through rate which helps lower click costs.

The ad position on the Google SERP right column is determined primarily by the equation max bid times ad click through rate. Before an ad can appear on top it has to be reviewed by a human and the ad has to be deemed extremely relevant. Relevancy is closely approximated by click through rate, so the ads which display above the Google search results factor in click through rate more heavily than max bid.

If you get an ad which is placed above the search results and edit it, your ad may take at least a few days appear back in a top position.

Find the Best Products:

If you see a lot of affiliate ads, typically there is a dominant player or system in that keyword term space. You may want to try purchasing your competitors product to see the whole sales path all the way through to the back end.

If there are more non-affiliate ads than affiliate ads, odds are that there is no dominant player/ system in the marketplace yet.

Checking Broad Match, Phrase Match, & Exact Match:

Using exact match may drastically improve click through rates. To determine if a person is using exact match do a search for
keyword A adfkafdjsadf keyword B

If their ad still shows up they are using broad match.

If their ad does not show up for broad match check *keyword A keyword B dfadfkadfa.* If it shows up for this check they are using phrase match.

If their ad does not show up for the phrase match, then they are advertising via exact match. Any time you are checking competitors' ads you will want to refresh the screen multiple times as sometimes certain ads rotate in and out of the system.

Keep in mind you can use different bid prices to bid on all matching variations at the same time.

Extreme Local Targeting:

Google will allow you to target your ads to:

- any zip code or metropolitan area

- a radius near your business

- the defined coordinates of any polygon you enter

Using Syndication:

Google has various levels of ad syndication explained in the below chart. Google.com is part of all search ad delivery options. You may chose to deliver content ads in conjunction with search ads by setting up separate content bids, or you may wish to deliver some ads just to the content network.

Syndication Type	Where Ad is Shown
Google	Google.com
Search	Google.com + AOL, Earthlink, & other search sites.
Content	Many contextual AdSense partner sites.
Site Targeted Branded Content CPM	Whatever sites you pick. Charged per impression.

If you set up ad syndication you can bid separately on content ads. Bid whatever you determine to be fair market value for the Google AdWords distribution and then bid a separate lower value for content ads.

Some people like to use different campaigns or ad groups for content and search ads so it is easier to track the R.O.I. Some terms convert far better on search than content, and if these stats are blended it may be harder to notice the trends at a quick glance.

On some occasions it may make sense to make content only ads if you are trying to increase branding without spending a significant amount of money. Content ads are generally clicked on at a much lower rate than search ads.

In some rare cases content ads are worth more than search ads, but in most cases there is not as much implied buying demand when a person reads an article about a subject as when they are actively searching about that topic.
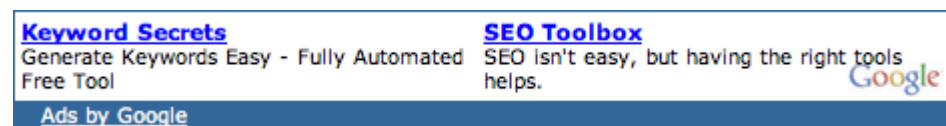
With your content ads you may also want to try using image ads to lock out competition from being able to advertise against you. Some ads disabled from search distribution due to low click price and low relevancy still may appear in the content network.

Syndicated ads do not appear on partner sites until they are approved by an editor. Many ads appear on Google.com prior to editorial review.

How Google Determines AdSense Relevancy:

Google reads the content of AdSense publisher web pages to determine what their pages are about. When attempting to match ads with those pages Google considers:

- Not a single keyword, but the entire keyword list associated with an ad group.

- You want to use well themed keyword adgroups to help ensure your ads are delivered properly. Including generic words like computer can make it harder for Google to understand what your adgroup is trying to sell.

- Textual Adgroup creatives are also used to help understand what ads to display.

- Max PPC and clickthrough rate play into the order of the ads displayed.

- Using appropriate campaign negative keywords can also help further target your ads.

- Google offers effective contextual advertising tips in their free 9 minute video: http://www.google.com/adwords/context/webinar/1971/index.html

Google AdSense C.P.M.:

Most AdSense publishers do not make an exceptional amount of money for publishing AdSense since the ads do not usually have a high click-through rate. To help compensate for that, and to make AdSense more appealing to large traditional media buyers, Google also sells AdSense ads on a C.P.M. rate.

Advertisers can buy ads on off-topic sites for branding, but they have a 25 cent C.P.M. minimum, and will have to compete with the revenue earned by other advertisements, which could drive the price much higher. This will eventually cause people to significantly bid up the ads on some of the larger & more important AdSense partners.

Large publishers who do not want to compete with Google selling direct ads can optionally turn off the C.P.M. feature.

C.P.M. ads can also be targeted to a specific page or section if an advertiser does not want to buy ads across an entire site.

A good way to get your ads syndicated to content sites you want to be on without being forced to pay C.P.M. rates is to bid on common page text or names of sites you want to be on and only enable that ad to be displayed on the content network. That should roughly let you target some of your favorite sites and still only pay when people click on your ads.

Google also allows you to target AdSense site targeted ads via demographics data.

Losing Small Money on Contextual Ads:

Sometimes it makes sense to lose a bit of money on contextual ads. In some cases you can get around 5 or 10 million ad impressions for around $1,000 or so.

Those ad impressions give you a brand lift and may cause increased search volume for your brand, which you may later convert on. Just make sure you do not bid so much on contextual ads that click fraud becomes appealing or your ads start getting syndicated to loosely related sites just because your bid price is so high.

Filtering Junk AdSense Clicks:

Click fraud is a huge issue. Google now allows you to filter out sites that you do not want to advertise on. If a site sends you significant traffic that does not convert you can block your ads from appearing on their site.

Apogee has a tool (reference link at the end of the chapter) which I have not yet tried. It tracks where your AdSense ads are appearing. Sometimes, low quality scraper sites actually convert well since people only find them via search and immediately click an ad while still in search mode. You can't determine how well a site will convert without tracking it, although if you are getting a ton of clicks and suspect fraud, then it is best to block the URL.

If you enable content syndication (displaying your ads on AdSense) make sure you filter out regions which have notoriously high click fraud (India and most of Asia) unless you are trying to target those regions.

Why Lower Ads Often have Better ROI:

The lower ads have a lower bid price, which can help save money if the top placed ads are overpriced. Another great benefit of having a lower ad is that a user that scrolls down the page to click is more prequalified to make a purchase. By scrolling through a bunch of ads they have displayed a greater intent to make a purchase.

These two mathematical facts often mean that listing lower often provides a better ROI than listing at the top. If the top ads seem too expensive you may need to test the profit elasticity for your market to see what ad locations will return the highest overall profits.

Lowering Click Price after Bidding:

After you get 10 or 20 clicks and have a decent click-through rate you may want to slash your bids in half or by 2/3. Often it is best to start off with your ad around the #1 or #2 positions to collect feedback and then let it fall back after you drop ad price.

Instead of lowering your bid all at once lower it slowly over time and monitor your ad rank position as indicated in the AdWords interface.

Expanding Breadth:

If you are running your ads correctly, **the availability of well targeted ads** should be what is limiting your spend.

If your ad spend is limited by a budget and you are ranking high for many of the search terms, you may want to lower your max bid to lower the position down to 3 to 7. In doing so you will be able to show up on more search results and people who are looking at the lower ad positions are more prequalified to buy.

Dynamic Keyword Insertion:

If you have a group of similar keywords that could still use the same body text you can enable this feature by writing out your normal body text, and placing {KeyWord: default keyword} in the title of the ad.

When the keyword matching the search is greater than 25 characters, the default ad title will show. Otherwise the ad will show the search term as the ad title. Also note how I capitalized the K and W in keyword. This makes the words in your ad title appear capitalized.

Having keywords in your title can help your title jump out at people and improve click through rates.

Google now also allows you to pass the referring keyword trigger as a variable in the actual destination URL. To pass the trigger keyword as a variable, use &kw={keyword}. You can also track whether the clicks came from Google content ads or Google search ads by adding the following to your URL referrer={ifsearch:GoogleAdWordsSearch}{ifcontent:GoogleAdWordsContent}.

Use Keyword Rich URL's to Your Advantage:

Some people may view the URL as one of the most important parts of an ad. The ad title sticks out the most, but many people factor in the URL more than the copy. By changing your URL to a descriptive URL, you can sometimes raise your click through rate by 50 – 200%. A new throw away domain name only costs $8 at GoDaddy.

Bid on Competitors Names:

I believe this is illegal in France (and maybe some other areas), but trademark laws still have not been firmly set in this field in the US. Unlike Yahoo!, Google allows US and Canadian advertisers to bid on trademark names of their competitors. The competitors trademark names may not appear in the ad (unless the landing page is relevant to it), but they can be used as the ad trigger word.

If you use competitor names as the triggering word, then you need to group that in an ad that is not using dynamic keyword insertion or your ad title will put you in trademark violation.

Keep in mind that since the laws are gray in this area, you may run into some problems if you push the envelope and do not respond to complaints. I believe in the US trademark owners are required to inform you of the problem and give you a chance to fix it before they have a chance to sue you for damages (whether or not they can sue you is still somewhat up in the air).

I did this particular technique and ticked off about a dozen S.E.O.'s who made a few hate threads in various forums. I primarily was looking for AdSense ad space in articles, but some S.E.O.'s offered nasty comments about the technique (although it is rather common technique).

You may want to ask people before using their names if you think they may take it the wrong way. Another good way to appear on many content sites is to run your ads on phrase match for some of the more popular article titles in your industry.

A way to avoid the controversy associated with bidding on competitors names is to only bid on their names on content matched ads (ie: disable search ads in the ad groups focused on competing products).

Viewing Geographically Targeted Ads:

You can target ads to a specific country. If you are not in the country you will be advertising in you can view the country specific ads by adding &gl=country code to the search string (ca for Canada, US for United States, UK for United Kingdom, etc).

If Google is mixing in state regional ads, it will list the state name at the bottom of the ad.

Geotargeting can allow you to afford words which may be broader than your globally effective keywords since geotargeting only delivers ads to locations you are interested in advertising.

You may want to break your ads down by different price levels by country codes. One of my friends nearly doubled his ROI by placing ads from low converting countries in their own cheaper ad groups.

Sending Users to a Landing Page:

The conversion process works best when you remove unnecessary steps. By sending a user to a focused landing page versus your home page you should improve conversion rates.

Use Capital Letters:

Google will allow you to use capital letters at the beginning of words in the title and in the description. Using capital letters at the beginning of each word in your ad title and ad description may help boost your click through rate. Most people do not capitalize short words like *an*, *or*, and *a*.

Split Testing:

Google will allow you to test multiple ads at any given time. Every week or month you might want to try to make a new ad and place it up against the best prior ad. If you have an ad that is getting an exceptionally low click through rate and another pulling decent you can usually get rid of the bad ad after a few clicks on it, but it doesn't hurt to let these ad tests run long.

Perry Marshall created a free online Split Testing tool which will help guide you using mathematics to determine whether or not you have collected enough data do stop testing. He said he usually recommends waiting until it is at least 90% to 95% sure of the results (as determined by the software).

You can also make two copies of the same ad and send it to different URLs to test different landing pages.

When split testing you will want to turn off the auto optimization tool and you may want to limit the test only to Google so you can get the most accurate data.

More Advanced Ad Testing:

I do not work with large enough accounts to have put extreme effort into some of my tracking, but a few other ad testing options are:

- **Split Testing:** explained above, but you can keep doing split testing over and over again, creating smarter and smarter ads

- **A/B/C testing:** make two identical copies of one of the ads and compare it to another. Run until the CTR of the same ads are nearly identical and then compare that rate to the other ad.

- **Quadrants:** use two title sets and two description sets which make 4 ads. Leave them unoptimized and run the AdWords account until a clear leading ad is found.

- **Taguchi Method:** a bit complex for this guide, as I have not deeply researched it and most people probably will not use it, but the Taguchi Method allows you to set up a large matrix of variables and determine what the best combinations are using advanced mathematics and minimal testing.

If You Are Having Problems with a Word:

For your highest traffic and most expensive keywords you will usually want to make custom ads groups or ad campaigns specific to each one. If you have a word that is giving you problems in an ad group, remove it from the ad group and set it out on its own.

Off the start, you can try to exact match it as well. If you try multiple exact match specific targeted ads for that keyword and still can not get it to run profitably, then that might not be a word worth running an ad for.

Cheap Traffic:

Some AOL users have 'type search term here' in their search queries. Some of them accidentally run searches with the word 'here' attached to a term, like *hereViagra* or *hereYourTerm*. Some people search for stuff like NBA Basketball**.com**. There is a ton of cheap targeted traffic if you are creative.

Affiliate Ads:

Google only allows one affiliate or merchant ad per keyword per URL. This means that whoever has the ad with the highest effective price (CTR * max bid) between the merchant and all of their affiliates gets their ad displayed.

Affiliates can still have their ads show up if they create white label affiliate sites with information about the products.

Creative PPC Techniques:

Mikkel deMib Svendsen wrote a few good P.P.C. tips. A few pointers he offered were:

- Think creatively.

- Do not point P.P.C. ads directly at landing pages. Instead, use intermediate pages. This way you can redirect the ads to a page with new sales copy without needing to change the ad URL.

- You may be able to cloak pages that the ad editors see.

- Do not use the budget function. Your budget should be determined by the amount of relevant profitable traffic you can buy.

Someone at ThreadWatch.org also mentioned that some of your most creative AdWords ad ideas might be best to try out on a Friday evening so that they may be able to run a full weekend before being spotted by an editor.

If you have the top premium AdSense position and also rank well in the organic listings, you can help bump the #2 premium ad position down to the right rail if you edit your copy. It may take up to 3 days for an editor to read your new ad and raise both ads to the top of the results again.

Getting Quicker Business Feedback:

When starting a B2B account it is a bad idea to start an account on a weekend since there will be few buyers over the weekend. Monday is usually the biggest spending day for most B2B purchases and is the best day to start your ads.

Lead generation may be a smarter way to dive into Google AdWords than trying to sell affiliate products. Since it is common to have a lead generation rate of 10-20% the feedback loop is about 10 times as fast as selling a product that may convert at 1-2%.

Google AdWords Competitive Analysis Software:

Google does not give its users very much information about competing sites. Recently, a couple software products hit the market which ping Google and determine the ad display rate and average ad position for your ads and competing ads. You can use this information to see which competitors are most sophisticated and what positions have the most competition and perhaps profits.

AdArchiver is a cheaper lower end product. AdGooroo is a higher end more sophisticated system. Google also released an A.P.I. which allows people to build similar interfacing software.

Bidding on Your Brand (Important):

If you rank at the top for your brand name should you also buy the associated ad? My answer is usually yes for the following reasons:

- You can control the branding statement on your ads. You may not be able to do that with your regular listings.

- You can point people at your landing pages or make special offers with the ads. Usually your home page ranks in the regular search results.

- If you are not advertising there then your competitors may be.

- If the top ranking ad is from the same site as the top ranking regular result then more people may click on your regular result.

- If you have affiliates make sure you are not getting in bidding wars with them. Create a consistent affiliate marketing plan that makes sense.

Creating Ad Groups:

- Your most competitive or most important terms should usually be in their own ad groups (or perhaps ad campaign) so they are easy to monitor and so you can write ad copy that is precisely targeted to those terms.

- You may want to create a group for misspelled terms.

- You may want to create a group for mistyped domain names.

- You may want to create ad groups based on personality types.

- You may want to create ad groups for your most important products.

- You may want to create ad groups for seasonal or special promotions.

- Some people also use different groups for contextual ads due to different ad value and the desire to use different ad copy.

There are many ways you can split up your account. By creating and tracking various ad groups it makes it easier to monitor your return on investment, and adjust you're your ad spend accordingly.

Deep Keyword Research:

Using deep keyword research is hugely important.

Yahoo! Search marketing places exact matches ahead of broad matches, so if your competitor bids $2 for widgets and you bid 11 cents for buy widgets when people search for buy widgets your ad will list above your competitors ads even though your ad is a lower price. This allows you to get more targeted clicks at a lower price, which increases your advertising return on investment.

There is something to be said for simplicity and ease of management, but using targeted permutations of your most important terms should drastically increase your ROI.

With Google AdWords they allow dynamic keyword insertion (mentioned above), that allows the search query to drive the ad copy. That increases your chances of having a higher click through rate and lowering your cost-per-click if you bid on many variations of your most important Google AdWords keywords.

Below is a chart of some example term ideas (with the words slightly modified) and the associated conversion data from an actual AdWords account. Notice how the cost per conversion drops off when modifiers are added to the root term. By bidding on these additional keyword phrases I am paying less for higher targeted leads.

Keyword Phrase	Cost Per Click	Click through Rate	Conversion Rate	Cost Per Conversion
abc tires	$0.77	7.8%	1.86%	$41.37
abc car tires	$0.64	10.9%	1.92%	$32.96
[abc tires]	$0.75	10.1%	2.32%	$32.01
abc sports tire	$0.74	12.4%	2.91%	$25.29
abc tire co	$0.59	15.1%	2.70%	$21.73
[a b c tire company]	$0.56	**38.2%**	11.11%	$5.03
abc tire products	$0.74	17.3%	**22.22%**	**$3.30**
misspellings	**$0.21**	3.6%	1.82%	$11.37

Adding modifiers will split up the traffic volumes to make some terms seem more profitable than they are and make other similar permutations seem less profitable than they are. The math from the above campaign was compiled over a year with hundreds of thousands of ad impressions to help smooth out some of the discrepancies.

You have to consider the cost of building and managing the account when building out your keyword list, but I tend to like using various matching levels and modifiers on my most important keywords.

Pay Per Call:

Google has started testing pay per call. To some businesses pay per call will not have much of an effect, but high end local based businesses (legal, loans, real estate, etc.) will find their competitive landscape drastically different in the next year.

Google has also been beta testing an offline Google AdWords ad manager software program to invited individuals only.

Additional AdWords Resources:

- Google offers a free e-book to help you get the most out of your Google AdWords account. (url: http://www.google.com/ads/library/maximimum_effect_dec03.pdf)

- Andrew Goodman's Google AdWords report. (url: http://www.page-zero.com)

- Perry Marshall's Definitive Guide to Google AdWords. (url: http://www.perrymarshall.com/adwords/)

- Greg Heslin's Google AdWords 123 – talks about affiliate marketing using AdWords, mentioning specific testing numbers, and marketing based on human emotion. (url: http://www.google-adwords-123.com/)

- Google Advertising Professional Program
  https://adwords.google.com/select/ProfessionalWelcome

- Google's learning center
  http://www.google.com/adwords/learningcenter/

- Many of the Google AdWords tips I learned came from Andrew Goodman's and Perry Marshall's reports.

Microsoft AdCenter

Microsoft fully launched AdCenter on May 4th of 2006. Their system operates more like Google AdWords than Overture, by factoring in both cost per click and clickthrough rate into their ad positions.

Microsoft AdCenter will operate much like Google AdWords, but also allow:

- day parting ads (turning bidding on or off at different times)

- search bidding based on demographics details

Given Microsoft's newness to the field and small search market share one would expect that some of their traffic might be highly underpriced. Microsoft is still in the early stages of development on AdCenter, so it is only accessible via Internet Explorer, and they are still adding important features like bulk keyword upload.

Like Google, Microsoft offers dynamic keyword insertion, but Microsoft also allows you to use one dynamic insertion to drive other ad copy offers. For example,

Keyword	Dynamic text parameters
"sedans"	5% off
"SUVs"	7% off

When you are ready to build your ad, you will enter "All {keyword} {param2} as the ad title. When a user queries "sedans," the ad that appears will be "All sedans 5% off."

You can also use {param1} to drive ad URLs.

Microsoft also announced the purchase of DeepMetrix, an analytics company. They stated that eventually that software will be upgraded and integrated into the Microsoft AdCenter platform.

While MSN Search has roughly a 10% of the US search market you can expect that number to increase in the coming year, largely because:

- in the next version of Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser search will be integrated into the browser

- they may also integrate web search into the operating system

- some companies like Amazon have dumped Google in favor of Microsoft

Visit https://adcenter.msn.com/ to sign up for AdCenter or http://advertising.msn.com/microsoft-adcenter/faqs to find answers to common questions.

Resources Cited

Literature:
- MarketingSherpa's Landing Page Handbook (http://www.sherpastore.com/store/page.cfm/2182)

- Yahoo! Advertiser Workbook: (free) (http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/rc/srch/eworkbook.pdf)

- Google's Maximum Effect Guide (free) (http://www.google.com/ads/library/maximimum_effect_dec03.pdf)

- Andrew Goodman's 21 Way AdWords Report (http://www.page-zero.com/)

- Perry Marshall's Definitive Guide to Google AdWords (http://www.perrymarshall.com/adwords/)

- Greg Heslin's Google AdWords 123
  (http://www.google-adwords-123.com/)

- Google Advertising Professional Program
  (https://adwords.google.com/select/ProfessionalWelcome)

- Google AdWords Blog (https://adwords.google.com/support/)

- Google AdWords Support Center (http://adwords.blogspot.com/)

- Google's learning center
  (http://www.google.com/adwords/learningcenter/)

- Google click to call (http://www.google.com/help/faq_clicktocall.html)

- Black Hat PPC
  (http://www.e-marketing-news.co.uk/Mar05/black-hat-ppc.html)

Software:
Customer Tracking & Bid Management

- ClickTracks - log file analyzer...awesome (http://www.clicktracks.com/)

- Google Analytics – free analytics software, but if you send it you are
  sending your traffic and conversion information to Google
  (http://www.google.com/analytics/)

- Index Tools – web based tracking software (http://www.indextools.com)

- WebSideStory – (http://www.websidestory.com)

- ConversionRuler – web based PPC click tracking
  (http://www.conversionruler.com)

- Extreme Tracking - free tracking software (http://extreme-
  dm.com/tracking/)

- SiteMeter - free tracking software
  (http://www.sitemeter.com/default.asp?action=newaccount)

- BidRank - downloadable bid management software
  (http://www.bidrank.com)

- KeywordMax – web based software (http://www.keywordmax.com)

- Atlas OnePoint - web based software (http://www.atlasonepoint.com/)

- Yahoo! Search Optimizer (http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/mt/so.php)

- Google also offers a free cross platform tracking product with AdWords which can track email ads, banner ads, and various PPC search engine ads.

- Google AdWords offline ad editor – for invited beta participants only (http://services.google.com/adwordseditor/)

Fraud Prevention Software

- Who's Clicking Who (http://www.whosclickingwho.com/)

- Click Auditor (http://www.keywordmax.com/click_auditor.html)

- Vericlix – free (http://www.vericlix.com/)

- Track which pages your AdSense ads appear on (http://www.apogee-web-consulting.com/tools/track_google_content_ads.html)

Keyword Suggestion Tools

- **SEO Book Keyword Research Tool:** cross references the Yahoo! Search Term Suggestion Tool, the Yahoo! View Bid tool, and all the Google keyword research tools. (http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword/)

- Google Keyword Suggestion Tool (https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal)

- Google Traffic Estimator (https://adwords.google.com/select/TrafficEstimatorSandbox)

- Google Search Suggestion (organized by search volume) (http://www.google.com/webhp?complete=1&hl=en)

- Yahoo! Keyword Suggestion Tool (http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/)

- Yahoo! View Bid Price Tool (http://uv.bidtool.overture.com/d/search/tools/bidtool/?Keywords=casino&mkt=us&lang=en_US)

- Digital Point Keyword Suggestion Tool (http://www.digitalpoint.com/tools/suggestion/)

- Keyword Discovery (http://www.keyworddiscovery.com/)

- Good Keywords (http://www.goodkeywords.com/)

- Keyword Typo Generator (http://tools.seobook.com/spelling/keywords-typos.cgi)

Keyword List Creators
- Free web based (http://tools.seobook.com/keyword-list/)

- Free downloadable software (http://www.googedit.com/)

- $50 downloadable software (http://www.thepermutator.com)

AdWords Competitive Analysis Software
- AdArchiver – cheaper competitive analysis software. (http://www.adarchiver.com)

- AdGooroo – more expensive and more sophisticated software. (http://www.adgooroo.com/)

- Google AdWords API (http://www.google.com/apis/adwords/)

Websites:
- ZoneEdit (http://www.zoneedit.com)

- Split Tester (http://www.splittester.com/)

- Google Contextual AdWords Tips (http://www.google.com/adwords/context/webinar/1971/index.html)

Large Pay Per Click Search Engines
- Google AdWords (https://adwords.google.com/select/main)

- Yahoo! Search Marketing (http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/)

- Microsoft AdCenter (https://adcenter.msn.com/Default.aspx)

Smaller Pay Per Click Search Engines
- Miva (http://www.miva.com)

- Business.com (http://www.business.com)

- Kanoodle (http://www.kanoodle.com)

- Enhance Interactive (http://www.enhance.com)

- 7Search (http://www.7search.com)

- Findology (http://www.findology.com)

- Search123 (http://www.search123.com)

- Epilot (http://www.epilot.com)

Some Notes

- Sign up for a Google AdWords account (one time $5 fee which is converted into bid credits) (https://adwords.google.com/select/main)

- Write down 5 generic terms for your website. If your business is local remember to search for local words. Check the traffic for these terms using the Yahoo! Keyword Suggestion Tool. (http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/)

- Search for these terms and view how much people are bidding using the Yahoo! bid price tool. (http://uv.bidtool.overture.com/d/search/tools/bidtool/?Keywords=yourkeyword&mkt=us&lang=en_US)

- Do the words seem like they are worth their price? Do these prices or search volumes surprise you?

- Check the price of these same words with your Google account. Are these prices close to one another?

- What type of searchers would you like to avoid? Write down 5 negative keywords for your site. Why are these words bad?

- Write down 10 specific phrases that describe your business (think of problems you solve, not just your core keywords). Check the prices and search volumes.

- Are these generic terms? If they are generic write down ten more terms and compare their prices.

- Before spending large sums of money on pay per click you should spend hours writing ad copy and many hours performing keyword research.

- If you intend to spend heavily on Google AdWords you may want to read the additional reports I linked to. You only need to find one or two good tips from a different perspective for those reports to pay for themselves.

Monitoring Results

S earch engine marketing is an ongoing process which is never really done. You should reserve some time each month for viewing the competition and working hard to create new ideas to help spread your popularity.

The web grows with or without you, so if you are stagnant then you are falling behind.

When Results Don't Show

Think Big:

With pay-per-click accounts or regular search engines optimization you should always be looking to improve your bottom line. Hosting has gotten so cheap that more traffic does not usually cost much more money. Most people rarely come near their hosting limits.

Pay-per-click advertising it is the same thing that Don LaPree preached with his newspaper ads, except that it is more track-able and has faster feedback loops. You find something that is marginally profitable and repeat it many times over. Keep refining the ads and increase profit margins.

The Value of Large, Reputable Services:

Sometimes, results never show up. That is why it is important to **stick with the larger pay-per-click search engines** when you use them. If you start using small ones you not only have to spend more time managing many accounts, but you may also buy junk machine generated traffic. The things you need to focus on are your site, your ads, and your conversions. It is easy to lose focus of the big picture if you are trying to maintain 25 accounts.

Why Isn't It Working?

With regular search listing it can take months of optimization and gathering links to rank well. If your site does not list at all after a month or two (especially for really focused terms such as your own domain name or domain string), then it indicates a problem. You have either not created enough inbound links for the search engine to find you, or your domain also is a generic and competitive phrase, or you are being penalized for spamming, or you do not know how to find your site, or have technical problems with your site.

SEO Worst Practice Manual

This chapter is dedicated to some of the tricks people try to play on search engines. Much the same as people spam your inbox; many others are spamming the search engines. Some of the most common current techniques are:

- free for all link exchange – not effective

- page onload redirects – risky, but some do well with it

- cloaking (if done incorrectly) – cheap cloaking is usually bad cloaking.

- hiding text either on or off the page – not effective.

- interlinking many small sites to gain popularity (**this one still usually works exceptionally well if done correctly**)

- keyword stuffing – not effective

Why They Usually do Not Work:
Free For All:
Free for all link exchanges are very easy to spot for search engines. Once they are spotted they get issued a spam penalty and many get deleted from the search engine index.

As long as there is some small amount of value, adult or drug website webmasters will find it. After one finds it many follow and then the site becomes worthless.

Page Onload Redirects:
Meta redirects with short time duration may be offered a small penalty to lower their relevancy. Google has been doing a better job of spidering java redirects recently and has penalized many sites that were using mouseover redirects. Yahoo! editors may remove your site from their search index if they notice deceptive redirects.

If you do move a site or page you can use a 301 redirect to allow the link popularity to pass through to the new location. That is not considered deceptive to do.

If you do move site locations you will want to leave the old site up for a few weeks to ensure search engines and Internet service providers have updated the old DNS details for your site before taking it down. Ensure you keep the old domain registered after you move your site so that the links from your redirects stay active.

Link Renting & Creating a Link Network:
Link renting and creating link networks are exceptionally effective S.E.O. techniques if done correctly (though if your link renting or site networks are done exclusively to manipulate search results, and it is easily detectable, you may get penalized).

When renting links it is usually best to focus on quality and relevancy over quantity. That provides the maximum return potential while providing the minimum exposure to risk.

Linking a bunch of small sites together also shows up easily if you do not have a bunch of different external links pointing into your link network. Many search engines also have the ability to devalue links from the same C block IP range or from the same owner. Make sure if you do this you use mixed WhoIs data, various hosts for different sites, and get many links pointing into your sites from outside your network if you are trying to create a somewhat sketchy network.

If you create link networks and do not have original useful content on each site (and reasons for creating many sites) then you are taking a risk that your site may be removed from search results.

Some people also use automated bots to scour the web for links. They still work for some spammers, **but they really annoy some people and can ruin your branding**.

Hidden Text:
Hidden text usually exists on sites that have other problems as well. If the search engines find it they may drop the site.

While it is sometimes hard for a search engine to find, fellow webmasters may rat you out to the search engines or not want to exchange links with you for using this practice. Yahoo! actively edits their search results; that would be a large amount of traffic to lose if they found you.

Using invisible text adds little on the reward side; there are far more effective SEO techniques to use.

Cloaking:
If cloaking is done correctly it is extremely hard to detect. The problem with cloaking is that **it builds no intrinsic value**. As the web grows your site stays stagnant. I would not be interested in chancing my long term financial stability on the ability of one software company to stay ahead of the major search engines indefinitely.

 If you do use cloaking I would recommend going with one of the best: Fantomaster.com.

***** Link Building / spam TANGENT************

Black Hat is the term given to some aggressive SEO practices. As a business label's do not matter. The only criteria that matters is if something is effective or not. Are the risks you are taking logical risks? Are you doing aggressive techniques with sites that can't afford the risk? Or have you factored the risks into your actions?

When in doubt if something is bad feel free to ask me. I also created blackhatseo.com as an example directory of promotion ideas which will typically waste your time and money. Creating Black Hat SEO.com caused some people to view me in a negative light.

Which brings me to another point: even if people hate something, they may talk about it. So, as the idea spreads, I will become more well known. **To be extremely successful on the web you either have to be really good or really bad**. That site is really bad, but it has a clear purpose. Now the entire industry has to either come up with a different catch phrase, or my site sticks as the official answer... either way, I get marketing power I can leverage in the future!!!

Within 6 months of making that site, Danny Sullivan (of SearchEngineWatch) mentioned it in a new article about spam. Since that site has came out it has cost less than $5 a month and has generated thousands of dollars worth of business, link popularity, and notoriety.

- It is hard for me to get people to link to "Aaron Wall: SEO Consultant."

- It is somewhat easier for me to get links into "SEO Book: free search engine news."

- It is extremely easy for me to get links into "Black Hat SEO: funny link directory."

*******END TANGENT**********

Why Frames are Evil:
Though it is not typically a spam technique, I recommend that you not use frames. The problem with frames is that everything on the Internet has a defined location, except frames.

While the home page of a framed site has a defined location the search engine will not group the other pages as part of their frame sets. All the internal documents will show as stand alone pages, which will require you to use redirects to display the frameset. You can use a noframes tag to allow search engines to read the content, but you still will have other major problems.

The most evil thing about frames is that if I do not know what the URL of one of your great articles is, **then how can I link to it**?

Aggressive S.E.O. Practices Which Still Help:
Some S.E.O. firms still do rather well by creating reciprocal link rings and by buying links. When a person is paying for placement in the Yahoo! Directory, they are renting links the same way that "unethical" S.E.O. firms are. Ethics is generally a bogus term to use in relation to S.E.O. 'Effective' vs 'ineffective' and 'risk' vs 'reward' are better ways of describing different S.E.O. practices.

When exchanging links, you do not want to exchange links with any site that does not add value to your user experience or offer you great strategic advantages. I have in the past reciprocated links with a few off topic sites, but usually I would only consider doing this if my site was new and theirs was extremely powerful. Junky link exchanges are probably unnecessary for most websites.

When buying links, you should look at local 501 C nonprofit sites, blogs, and other sites that sell high value authoritative links rather cheaply. Sometimes sites inside your industry will rent or sell links at reasonable prices as well. The more relevant a link is the less risk there is in the purchase.

Aggressive S.E.O. Firms:

Many people will play the ethics angle to promote themselves. 'Search engine ethics' is a rather bogus concept when you consider some S.E.O firms are getting paid a ton of money to promote corporations which use sweatshop labor.

It is important that you can trust your S.E.O., and you should know if they are doing anything which could get you punished. It is a fact, though, that the search engines and S.E.O. firms owe each other absolutely nothing when it comes to the organic search results.

I recently became more aggressive, though, I am still rather conservative in comparison to many S.E.O. firms. It is a balancing act.

Link purchasing is an effective form of advertisement, just like buying a billboard. Many people who sell links only care about their own gain. Quality underpriced links are not going to be easy to find unless you think of the web as a social network composed of people and ideas.

If you are marketing in an extremely aggressive category, I can help you find a link broker that suits your needs, but you will probably save money by hunting out cheap links from related sites and listing in directories first.

If something seems like a thing you have never heard of before, or it can not be easily explained, then it should probably be questioned. If the idea shows search engines one thing and then shows the user something else, it is generally not a good practice unless it is via paid inclusion, or is done by an extremely talented S.E.O. with the risk profile explained to you in depth beforehand.

Feel free to ask me if you have any specific questions on the topic.

Other Problems

Flash

Often people like to use flash to show off their web design talents. Many people are overwhelmed by flash content. Some dialup visitors will not wait for your flash to load. Search has become such an effective advertising medium in large part **because of its simplicity**.

I strongly urge not using flash on most websites because it gives search engines inadequate content to read. If you do not give search engines much text then you will need a larger linking campaign to get that page to rank well. If you do embed a flash object make sure you either use Flash Object for flash detection, or provide content inside noembed tags to help search engines understand what is inside the flash.

<NOEMBED> My happy textual content…with links to the other relevant pages</NOEMBED>

Session IDs & Do Not Feed Search Engines Cookies:

Assuming you have many incoming links and your site is still not indexed after an extended period of time, you should evaluate the crawlability of your site. If you have not received a spam penalty and your site was not previously banned you may have technical issues.

There are many dynamic websites which only get a fraction of their web pages indexed. Search engines are getting better at finding and crawling dynamic pages, but they still do not like cookies or session ids. Search engines will not accept a cookie, and if a search engine thinks you are giving it a session ID number it will not want to cache your page.

If search engines indexed sites that gave them session ID numbers they could draw too much from the site in a quick amount of time and crash the server, they could get the idea that the site is much larger than it actually is, or they could fill their index up with pages that no longer exist. If you have a shopping cart do not issue a session ID until an item is placed in the cart.

Dynamic Site Fiction

Some ill informed people say that search engines penalize sites for having a .asp or .php extension. **This is complete garbage**.

Search engines read any page as hypertext no matter what the file extension is. If a site is not getting indexed, it usually is lacking in sufficient inbound link popularity, is using java or other client side navigation that spiders cannot follow, or is issuing the search engine spiders a session ID or cookies.

Is My Site Cached?

To check whether or not your page is in the Google cache you can do a search in Google for cache:www.mysite.com/mypage.whatever. If the page is in their cache then Google is reading it just fine.

All search spiders are not the same though, and some other things can keep your site from getting indexed. Yahoo!, for example, has been known not to index some sites well if each page does not have a unique title.

Make sure each page of your site starts with unique page relevant content.

One URL for Each Unique Content Unit:

At the end of the day, search engines want as much useful valuable content as they can index. Each additional useful document improves their relevancy and allows them to sell more ad space.

Some people use rotating URLs or create many pages using printer friendly versions, and different versions based on size and color. If many of your pages are almost exactly the same, or if the URLs search engines index are usually dead when they go back to re-index them, there stands a good chance that search engines will not want to index your site very well.

Limit the options you offer search engines to the pages you actually want indexed.

Disable Cookies:

Search engines do not accept cookies. If your site gives cookies try turning cookies off and seeing your site how some search engines see it. If when cookies are disabled a session ID is placed in the URL to search spiders it could cause indexing problems.

Dynamic Site Tips:

To get dynamic content spidered I recommend doing the following:

- use two or less variables if possible. If you use many variables you may also want to try rewriting your URLs.

- keep each product or category ID variable at or below 10 digits

- **id=** is often associated with session IDs. Search engines do not want to index multiple copies of the exact same content and may avoid portions of your site if they think that a parameter is a session ID. Avoid using ID in your URL.

  Instead of using ID=345 or catID=345 use prod=345 or cat-345 in the URL.

- Building a site map can also help spiders find your inner pages

- If you do not have hundreds or thousands of inbound links into a large database driven site then only a small portion of your site is likely to get indexed.

If you have a database driven site with sensitive data you may also want to change the database error pages so it is harder for hackers to find their ways into your database.

Content Management Systems:

When debating what content management system to use, you may want to look to see what various people say about how search engines index it. Additionally, a few common problems with many content management systems are

- Many use the same content for the page title and heading tag. By making these tags slightly different you can rank for a broader set of search terms.

- Many content management systems have problems with URLs, session IDs, and cookies

- Many content management systems do not allow you to add custom fields for things like the meta description tag.

- Many content management systems are configured poorly to where the site title and category paths are included in the page titles ahead of the page specific relevant content. You want the most relevant words describing each page at or near the beginning of your page title.

URL Rewriting:

If you are using an Apache server you can use mod rewrite to write your inner pages as if they were static domains and not executed variables. Microsoft servers also have custom software solutions like Isapi Rewrite.

Wrong Server Status or Server Misconfigured:

If you use a custom error script make sure that the error page returns a 404 header code. Also make sure your regular pages return a proper 200 series status code.

Rarely, server clocks are misconfigured. If search engines do not think a document has changed since they last visited it then some of them will not spider the document again.

Free Help:

If you are uncertain if something is wrong with your site there is a ton of free feedback available at the S.E.O. forums listed in the S.E.O Forums section of my site. Often times you will get great free advice because the person giving it either likes to help people or realizes that it is great marketing to help people out.

Speeding Things Up - Paid Inclusion

Disclaimers:

- I do not usually use paid inclusion. It may be worth the fee for helping you learn how to do S.E.O., but I think the fees are rarely justified for most sites.

- **Yahoo! has been cracking down on low quality content.** If your site is less than 100% legit or does not have substantial original content I would

not recommend using Yahoo!'s paid inclusion program. If you submit it to their paid inclusion program and they reject you they may remove your site from their search index.

Paid Inclusion Benefits:

- The first benefit of paid inclusion is that you are guaranteed that your page will be in the index, even if your site would otherwise have a dynamic issue that was stopping it. You may not immediately list exceptionally well with it, but it will be in the index.

- Paid inclusion programs also offer a rapid refresh rate, which is perfect if you have rotating stock.

- Paid inclusion gives you the chance to tweak your page to match the algorithm and see the changes in the rankings within a couple days. This is invaluable if you are teaching yourself how to do SEO. It gives you a rapid feedback loop which helps you learn and change quickly.

- Yahoo! Search heavily weighs on page content into their algorithm. Yahoo! factors in links, but nowhere near as much as Google or Teoma does. Add a decent number of quality inbound text links to a page ranking well in Yahoo! Search and it should list well in Google and other major engines.

- Large sites and large partners may submit trusted feeds, which are usually a bit easier to tweak and optimize than changing page copy.

Why I Don't Use Paid Inclusion:

I do not recommend buying many paid inclusion programs unless you have a page of rotating stock that you need updated frequently.

Yahoo! is the only major paid inclusion program with a decent amount of traffic. They charge recurring fees for each click which does not work with many business models.

Yahoo! Site Submit Express:

Having a web page included in the Search Submit Express paid inclusion program costs $49/year, plus a flat category based cost per click of 15 cents or 30 cents.

Yahoo! Search's Info:

Yahoo! Search has a rather large index. Typically if you list well in Yahoo! and then add a quality linking program, you should rank well in the other major search engines which place more focus on links.

One of the good things about Search Submit Express program is that if an editor reviews and views your content as valuable then they may shift it over so that they use that page as a seed page to get the rest of your site indexed. Additionally Yahoo! offers free inclusion into the Site Match program to some 501C charity websites.

Most people spending money on paid inclusion programs would fair better to spend their money on building a more robust linking campaign.

Other Paid Inclusion Programs:

InfoSpace has a paid inclusion programs, but they do not get enough traffic to justify the fee for smaller websites. If you build up sufficient link popularity your site may get spidered by the major search engines frequently enough to where there would be no purpose to pay for InfoSpace paid inclusion.

InfoSpace powers maybe a few percent of the overall search market. Google and Yahoo! Search control the lion share of the market.

Many other small search engines such as EntireWeb offer paid inclusion, but generally I think they are not money well spent. I usually do not recommend paying for inclusion in sites or search indexes that do not provide a **spiderable static text link to your site** (ie: directory submission might have value, but paying for general search engine submission probably does not).

General and topical directories are important to list in, but you need to investigate the area thoroughly before spending. Make sure they provide you with a spiderable text link and that the page you will be listed on is in the Google index by checking cache:www.whateverdirectory.com/mycategory.html from Google and Yahoo!.

Free Inclusion Programs:

The best way to get indexed is through link building. In June of 2005 Google created a free program called Google Sitemaps, which is used to help their crawler know what pages are on your site. Google Sitemaps will tell you what Google searches send the most visitors to your site and if Googlebot is having any crawling issue with your site.

Numerous webmasters have also created free Google Sitemap generator programs that make it easy to create your Google Sitemap.

Other Search Engines

There are thousands of search engines on the web, but only a few control most of the traffic. Generally speaking if I did not mention a search engine in the e-book I do not think of it as a primary concern for most search engine marketers.

Smaller Foreign Search Engines:

Some Asian search engines operate using different functions for relevancy than their current worldwide counterparts since many of the characters are ran together. Recently Yahoo! and Google have both invested in this space and I would expect rapid shifts in relevancy in the next year.

Most of the other large search engines (domestic or international) can easily be found by checking the latest Neilson / Netratings figures from SearchEngineWatch.com.

Search is generally dominated by Google, Yahoo!, Microsoft and Ask. In some smaller markets some local players are important. Scandinavia has some strong local players (although I do not know their names), Russia has Rambler Media and Yandex, and China has Baidu.

Shopping Search Engines:
I did not cover shopping search engines extensively, but they usually operate similarly to how pay-per-click search engines work. They accept product feeds and charge you a set amount per click. Many of them collect consumer feedback on items and merchants as well.

Shopping search engines have a limited distribution compared with the larger search engines, but many of them rank well in global search engines due to their site authority and heavy ad buying on engines like Google.

The major shopping search engines are Bizrate, DealTime (owns shopping.com and Epinions), Kelkoo (a European shopping search engine purchased by Yahoo!), Froogle, Yahoo! Shopping, MSN Shopping, Price Grabber, and MySimon.

Expect to see significant consolidation in this market soon. Google has actively been promoting their Froogle product and Yahoo! bought Kelkoo toward the end of 2003.

SearchEnginneWatch.com has more information about shopping search engines at http://searchenginewatch.com/links/article.php/2156331

Local Search:
Local search has the potential to be a rather large market, as North America Yellow Pages bring in 16 billion dollars per year.

Various businesses will tell you that is not a big deal and other businesses will tell you that it is the best thing since sliced bread. Typically who is funding the report determines the outcome.

Local search is still somewhat underdeveloped. Google Local recently allowed businesses to list their local information for free. Yahoo! Local allows sites to be listed for free and charges a sliding scale for premium placement based on category and location.

If you have a local business you may also want to look at some of the other local search properties such as CitySearch, SuperPages, and SwitchBoard.

Ensure local engines have your correct street address and place the same address on multiple pages of your site if you want to do well in local engines.

A few S.E.M. firms focus on helping local small businesses market their sites in local search. I believe LocalLaunch and ReachLocal are the two most well known companies operating in this space.

Invisible Tabs:

A general search database can only provide a useful search service for a limited number of search queries. That is why so many vertical search engines exist. They can afford to buy leads from Google or Yahoo! and then funnel them through the sales cycle and sell them at a higher price to merchants.

All of the major search engines are also looking to build out their vertical search offerings. Sometimes at Google you will notice above the search results they have links to news, press releases, local search, Froogle (shopping search), stock quotes, weather, maps, books, and other types of information.

Google calls this area OneBox. Danny Sullivan wrote a great article about this concept called *Searching with Invisible Tabs* which helps explain what this technology does. Essentially, if search engines know enough about you or your query to assume that a smaller more specific database will provide better results than the general database, they will make that selection for you. Search engines are also experimenting with some technologies to try to answer some questions from within the search results page.

Inline Suggest and Query Refinement:

Some search engines, such as Google, recommend related and more focused relevant searches in the search results for broad queries.

When trying to compete in the SERPs if the broadest queries seem out of reach don't forget to look at related searches that search engines may push people toward.

New Verticals:

When a vertical is new search engines will desire content so much that they will under price or give away leads. Google will store your videos free of charge and allow you to sell them if you like. http://video.google.com/

YouTube is another popular video hosting service.

Yahoo!'s Terry Semel predicted that within a couple years video will become as commonplace on the web as text is.

Google Base:

Google Base is a huge database of products, services, and information. http://base.google.com/

Google Base is a free storage platform for information which is structured so that it is easy for Google to understand. Google allows you to advertise Google Base listings on Google AdWords. Eventually the Google AdSense program will move from just displaying advertisements to displaying recommended content which Google may be able to get a cut on selling.

Their goal is simply to create the most efficient marketplace possible.

More Eggs in More Baskets!

For the time being, general search is exceptionally important, but as time passes these niche databases will be used more frequently.

What is to prevent Flickr from adding a commerce capability and becoming the number 1 photo shopping destination?

If you have a local business it is probably worth the time to submit your business details to local search engines. If you sell a wide variety of products it is probably worth your time to submit a Froogle feed.

Creating and positioning a site which is able to be listed in some of the vertical databases (like Google News for example) gives your business an unfair advantage over other businesses that are not. Yahoo! recently started placing blogs in their news search results as well.

Search engines vying for buzz and market share will tap the vertical databases using increasingly aggressive and creative techniques. The line between vertical search and global search will only blend more as time passes.

Websites:

- SearchEngineWatch search engine ratings and reviews (http://searchenginewatch.com/reports/index.php)

- Shopping Search Engines (http://searchenginewatch.com/links/article.php/2156331)

- Black Hat SEO (http://www.blackhatseo.com)

- Old article I wrote about SEO Forums (http://www.search-marketing.info/newsletter/articles/seo-forums.htm)

- Yahoo! Search Submit Express – paid inclusion program – not recommended to most webmasters (http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/srchsb/sse.php)

- Lycos Insite paid inclusion – not recommended to most webmasters (http://insite.lycos.com/inclusion/searchenginesubmit.asp)

- Excite Paid inclusion – not recommended to most webmasters (https://secure.ah-ha.com/guaranteed_inclusion/teaser.aspx?network=ah-ha)

- Google Sitemaps (https://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps)

- Searching with Invisible Tabs (http://searchenginewatch.com/searchday/article.php/3115131)

- Google Video (http://video.google.com/)

- YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/)

- Google Base (http://base.google.com/)

- Google Local (http://local.google.com/) Add your site to Google Local (http://www.google.com/local/add/)

- Yahoo! Local (http://local.yahoo.com/) Add your site to Yahoo! Local. (http://listings.local.yahoo.com/)

- CitySearch (http://www.citysearch.com/)

- SuperPages (http://www.superpages.com/)

- SwitchBoard (http://www.switchboard.com/)

- Local Launch (http://www.locallaunch.com/)

- Reach Local (http://www.reachlocal.com/)

- Flickr (http://www.flickr.com/)

Software:

- Fantomaster – industrial strength cloaking (http://www.fantomaster.com)

- ISAPI rewrite software – url rewrite software from Microsoft servers (http://www.isapirewrite.com/)

- Mod Rewrite – url rewrite instructions for Apache servers (http://httpd.apache.org/docs/mod/mod_rewrite.html)

The Social Web

S earch engine aim to emulate searchers and web users. If you acquire links which real people click on and buy from then your site will tend to rank well.

The days of working your way to the top of Google by buying or automating thousands of junky links at a new domain have came and went. The opening post in this thread http://www.webmasterworld.com/forum12/3047.htm describes how S.E.O. and link building have become a more holistic game.

Problems with Manufacturing Relevancy

Artificial Reputation:

No matter how smart you are if you artificially manufacture 100% of your website reputation Google can probably detect that one way or another.

Google collects an immense amount of data, and user data may eventually replace (or at least heavily augment) link text as being the most important piece of the algorithm.

There will always be good ideas you can do and underpriced marketing opportunities, but if something is not working odds are that it may help to look at what you are doing from a more holistic approach.

From what I have seen, most people selling S.E.O. services are not highly focused on relationships. Real marketing based on social relationships is going to be much harder for your competitors to compete against. You can't just ask for a quality editorial link from the Wall Street Journal.

Real vs Artificial

On Being Real:

Sites that are real and useful tend to get far more quality editorial links than bogus sites. Even mildly interesting sites pick up links. Sure you have to give yourself a push around launch time, but after that most sites will float or sink based on how interesting people think they are.

I have a personal rant blog which has about 4 subscribers, and yet a writer for Ziff Davis added my site to his blogroll. It also has some other editorial links that I am

uncertain how it acquired, but exposure leads to more exposure. Being real means that your site snowballs quicker than cheesy sites could.

While I did not work hard to optimize my personal blog that site still gets about 20% to 30% of the traffic that my main blog does, while only requiring about 3% of the effort.

Why New Sites Can't Compete With Old Ones in Google:

You can look at the search results and see a lead generation site at the top of the results and do almost everything they are doing and still get nowhere. Why?

The answer is five fold:

- **Domain history:** Google has learned to trust their site more as it aged

- **Link quality:** links used to flow much more easily than they do now. If you try to replicate a competitor's links odds are you will not be able to get a few of their most important links. The editorial quality links are the hardest to gain and pull the most weight in the search results. Since the web has more content on it now the quality needed to be interesting or linkworthy is much greater than they once were.

- **Link age:** In a similar fashion to how Google may trust older domains more than new ones they may also put greater weight on a link as it ages.

- **Usage data:** If a site has been serving visitors for many years it will take you a while to build up that much usage data.

- **Flipping the switch:** Many high profit authoritative sites only had the profit element added long after they became authoritative. Many people like me only accidentally stumbled onto business models. You can visit Archive.org to see how most sites looked in the past.

  Some of the sites that later became highly commercialized may not have been worthy of a link in their current form, but were easier to link at when it was less commercial and there were fewer resources on the web.

Shortcuts:

There are three main ways around the problem of trying to rank new sites in Google:

- **Waiting:** Perhaps it is worth creating a few new sites, building them a few decent quality links, and then letting them age. This is the boring option, but eventually one of your channels may start to do well and then you can pour more resources into it.

  If you are starting from scratch with limited resources it may also be worth it to make your site lean on the information / non-commercial site so it is

easier to link at. If a new site is not getting many visitors then the odds are pretty good it would not make much money anyway. So make the site easy to link at and then after you get some links introduce more commercial elements to it.

If few people in your industry have useful meaningful journals about your topic who do you think the media will find when they use search engines to try to find information about it? You!

- **Buy an Old Site:** One of the best ways to build a natural link profile is to go buy an old non commercial site. Search for things related to your field and add words like history, organization, or other non commercial terms.

  Some sites will go far cheaper than you would expect because if the owner is not profiting from it they may not know what their market position is worth.

- **Viral marketing:** If you can bake viral marketing into your product or website that can help you gain many natural editorial links and a bunch of usage data quickly. Sometimes the viral marketing bubbles up to reach the mainstream news.

  Within 5 days of accidentally launching a viral marketing campaign (by announcing I was sued) I ended up getting links from the Wall Street Journal and many other mainstream sources.

- **Niche:** If an area is hyper saturated create your brand around a sub sector which is not yet hyper saturated.

Examples of Things Google Can Track

Things Google Can Track:
Here is a sample of some of the things Google may be able to track:

- Domain history

  o Has it changed ownership?

  o Has it expired?

  o How long has the site been live?

  o Is it about the same topic as older versions of it?

  o Where is this site hosted? Local hosts for local indexes are good. Free hosting sites or sites associated with spam might be a bad call.

- Link history & quality

- o Have links grown naturally over time?

- o If the link growth is spikey, were there also associated news spikes, or many pages generated on other blogs and news sites about this topic around the same time?

- o Is the anchor text mixed up? Does the anchor text look natural?

- o Are there a large number of deep links and multiple inbound citations from quality sites?

- o Do any of the new citations come from new pages on old trusted sites? That is how viral stories typically spread – most new links come from new content, not people editing links into their old content.

- o Are any of the links from high quality pages? Who links at the pages linking at you?

- o Are any of the links from related pages?

- o Do people actually follow any of the links pointing into this site?

- o Do people who click links and land on this site stay there for a while?

- o Has this site been losing many old citations from old trusted sites like DMOZ and the Yahoo! Directory? If so, why would they?

- Content history and content generation spikes

  - o Is the content growth natural? Why would a real quality 12 page site gain 100,000 new pages overnight?

  - o Do most pages have unique content?

  - o Are pages so similar that the site is just an empty product database?

  - o Is it an automated content generation or thin affiliate site?

  - o Is the site well themed or random in nature?

  - o Does it link out to quality sites or does it hoard link popularity? It is hard to get natural citations to your site if you are not willing to cite any other sites.

  - o Is the site content biased toward information or commerce?

- Usage data

- o Is the site brand new or does it have years of trusted usage data?

- o Data from Google Toolbars and Google Accounts.

- o User acceptance via data gained from Google Analytics.

- o User acceptance via user action after Google searches (or perhaps even searches on other engines if you have the toolbar installed). If most people click the back button right away that is probably a bad sign.

- o Are people bookmarking your site?

- o If you have a feed are people adding your RSS feed to their Google Toolbar or Google Reader?

- o How frequently do visitors revisit your site?

- o How frequently is new content added?

- o Are people emailing each other or chatting about your site? Google has Gmail and Google Talk. They could look at that information to determine brand reach.

- Brand / site awareness

  - o Are people searching for your site name or brand names frequently?

  - o Is that search frequency increasing or going down?

  - o Do people refine their query or use a different engine if your site is not in the results? Do they eventually find their way to your site? Are the search results incomplete without your site showing up?

  - o Offline awareness can translate into online awareness.

  - o Are people blogging about your site on blogger?

  - o Google also bought MeasureMap, so they will further be able to track temporal blogging activity and linkage data.

  - o Google News can track news and citations about your site.

  - o Are people emailing each other or chatting about your site?

- Keyword value

  - o Are the keywords that this site targets expensive? Are they commercial or informational in nature?

- How many people are bidding on them?

- Commercial keyword markets may have additional algorithmic relevancy elements than non commercial or low value terms.

- What is the average lead value or conversion rate for sites in this market?

- Are people advertising for your brand? What are those sites related to?

- What sites you visit often

  - Do they have the same WhoIs data?

  - Are they known to spam search engines? Are they trusted sites?

  - Do they have trusted linkage data?

  - Are they topically related?

  - Do other people visit them often as well?

My Tinfoil Hat Theories…

Does Google Track All of the Above?
I do not want to sound like a conspiracy theorist, and I doubt Google actively tracks all the above for all domains. The point is, if they find it computationally valuable they can mix in just about any of those variables. The ones that do not add enough value can get pulled right back out while other variables are tested.

They are buying up dark fiber, creating better algorithms, and the cost of their hardware is negligible when compared to their revenue. More and more people are creating both fake content and exceptionally high quality content every day. Many businesses are getting marginalized from both edges.

Domain Trust:
Most new sites using the Digital Point Coop link exchange network get negligible results from using it. Some older trusted sites may pack more punch in using it (keep in mind using it may have some associated risks).

It all comes down to earning trust and computational power. If your site has proven trustworthy you can also get away with having more potentially negative signals.

Building Quick Trust:
The best ways to build lots of quality trust signs quickly are to

- Give away useful information and services

- Participate in the community

- Create a holistic marketing that creates brand evangelists.

If you build all of those things you will get loads of search traffic, but search traffic will not matter as much since you will also have other traffic streams.

Is Your Site Future Ready?

Some companies, like Olive Software, are working at formatting offline content to make it accessible online. Imagine if a search engine buys them and works out deals with many publishers to bring offline content online.

Think about BILLIONS of quality offline articles, magazines, newspapers, and other documents that are searchable online. When people have the ability to search through that information AND link at it, those documents are going to be hard to compete with on the relevancy front unless your site or business has a strong brand, multiple reasons to link or deep link at it, or some social aspect to it.

Millions of spammy AdSense sites will die away as no longer being viable business entities when higher quality content is readily available for free.

Don't Discount the Present Opportunity

Google may continue to grow more complex and harder to manipulate, but if you have an old trusted site Google is not hard to game. And, as it stands, Yahoo! and MSN are rather easy to spam.

While Yahoo! and MSN have less marketshare than Google does I would be willing to wager that on average MSN searchers are not as smart as the average Google searcher.

People searching at MSN and Yahoo! may be less web savvy, more gullible, and click on more ads on your site if they are unable to distinguish ads from content. They may also believe what you say in your salesletter more, and thus be easier to sell to.

Resources:

- Good thread about building value, traffic and linkage data (http://www.webmasterworld.com/forum12/3047.htm)

- Internet Archive – view how a site looked in the past (http://www.archive.org)

- Olive Software – company that formats offline content in a machine readable xml format. (http://www.olivesoftware.com/)

Hiring a Search Engine Optimizer

The Goal of this e-book:

The goal of this e-book was to be a do it yourself guide to S.E.O. Some people read through this and say that it's too much and they do not want to do it.

The core of S.E.O. is a simple concept…you want other people to link to your site with your primary keyword phrases in their link text. You want people talking about your site and brand. That is what good SEO is.

If you do not remember parts of the e-book, you can look at it later or ask questions at S.E.O. forums. Additionally, the last chapter is a quick start checklist. I decided to add this section to the e-book because I know some people who read this e-book end up wanting to buy S.E.O. services and hopefully, I can help them find a good partner.

The only time I have ever bought S.E.O. services I paid too little and thus bought from a shady vendor. That is part of what caused me to learn S.E.O. and write this e-book. I might not have all the answers, but I have likely read millions of forum posts and have seen many complaints and common questions. If you need help finding someone to do S.E.O. please let me know and I will recommend someone to you. Below are some resource links and important questions associated with buying S.E.O. services, as well as brief descriptions of some of the S.E.O. business models.

What are My Goals?

Sales:

That is what most businesses or webmasters want. Some people think they need a number one ranking, but ranking number one in and of itself may not mean a bunch.

Each day probably half of all web searches are unique. If you do S.E.O. well then you site not only shows up ok for some of the generic terms related to your products, but also lots of specific terms.

Hopefully when people search at Google your information and site structure caused them to land on relevant information that helps you make sales.

Buying Rankings:

When you buy S.E.O. it is best to pay for targeted traffic instead of just trying to buy a number one ranking. You should communicate clearly with your S.E.O. so they understand what your specific goals are. You also should feel comfortable with them and trust them before you give them any money. If you do not feel comfortable then you are likely better off to keep shopping around.

Pay for quality targeted traffic, do not pay for rankings!

Risk vs Reward:

Some S.E.O. techniques are more risky than others. Make sure you understand what risks are associated with your promotion techniques.

There are exceptionally cheap and effective automated techniques which eventually may cause your site to get penalized. If you are setting up throw away domains that may be fine, but if you are not using a throw away domain you will want to avoid those types of techniques.

Timetable:

Most S.E.O.'s are not able to gain top rankings or tons of traffic overnight. Make sure you know what to expect and when. If you need traffic in a hurry then you will probably want to use pay-per-click search engines.

S.E.O. Business Models

Profit Share:

Some S.E.O.'s may be interested in working using a profit share business model. This type of relationship requires a great amount of trust from both parties. Usually people who do not know you well will not want to work for a potential share of future profits.

I can not even tell you how many people set up a generic pharmacy template driven affiliate website and want me to work for future profits for them. I tell them no, but someone asks me about every month.

Most S.E.O.'s are not going to want to work via profit share off the start unless you have a REAL tangible brand. If you have an original great idea some may, but generally it is going to be hard for most webmasters to find a profit share S.E.O. partner.

Pay Per Click:

Some marketers specifically sell services for setting up and managing pay per click search engine accounts. Some people charge anywhere from $300 to $10,000 to set up the campaign, then 10 to 20% of ad spend for management. Some people

charge for account setup and let you run things from there, and some people charge recurring fees.

Different business models will be better for you depending on how competitive your market is and how complex your campaign needs to be. If you have an exceptionally cheap campaign then it will be hard to get people to do a quality job for 20% of a few hundred or few thousand dollars.

Sell All Clicks as Pay Per Click:

Some S.E.O.'s sell both organic traffic and pay per click ads on a cost per click basis. This has recurring fees, but also may limit your down payment risk since you are only paying for traffic you get.

Some networks that do this have you pay to create content where they also place ads for others, and they may take years to deplete your initial deposit. Make sure you define how the ads will appear (ie: I would recommend buying exclusivity) and get an approximate time range to deliver traffic. Also ask around to ensure their traffic is legitimate traffic and not automated traffic bots.

Cloaking and Doorway Pages:

Some software allows people to automatically generate thousands of keyword rich pages a day. Obviously search engines do not like this technique. Some people are exceptionally good at cloaking, but you still may get caught if you use it.

If you find yourself paying only a few hundred dollars you will want to set up different sites for those types of services and you will not want to connect those other sites to your main business site in any way. Multiple sites can get penalized because one of them was doing something shady. The wrath of Google can be unpleasant to experience.

Create a Content Network for You:

Some S.E.O.'s create a content network for you and charge you for the traffic. In a sense this is leasing traffic in a way similar to using pay per click search engines. If they know what they are doing they should be able to provide you targeted traffic cheaper than pay-per-click search engines do, but there are a couple major downsides to this business model.

- Some of these networks also sell traffic to your competitors…meaning you could be paying to set up networks that send traffic at competing websites.

- Some of these networks may require a down payment which takes many years to pay itself off. After they already have your money there is no guarantee that they will care about you.

- When your clicks run out you have to pay again.

- If you decide not to renew then in the end you paid to create another competing website which will continue to drive traffic at competing websites.

One Time Fee for S.E.O. on Your Site:

Some niche fields have little competition. If you do not have many competing websites in your field you may be able to rank well by doing on page S.E.O., performing a bit of directory registration, syndicating a couple articles and getting a few other quality links. In niche fields you may be able to get by with only paying a one time fee.

Most quality S.E.O. services (even for a niche site) will cost over a thousand dollars since there is great value in it. Some people who do not realize what their services are worth may charge less, but if you pay only a few hundred dollars you stand a good chance of wasting time and money. If a marketer does not know how to effectively sell themselves for anywhere near their market value why trust them with control of key aspects to your business?

Ongoing Fees for S.E.O.:

If you are in a competitive field, doing a good job of S.E.O. may require ongoing fees. Many internet marketers also require a down payment before they begin work. The competitive nature of the market will determine what rates work.

Some S.E.O.'s will be cheaper than others, while some charge a hefty premium for their knowledge and experience. If you are in a field such as gambling or pharmacy then the associated S.E.O. fees are going to be much greater than they are for a person selling pillows or dog toys.

Size of Firm:

As an individual I am somewhat biased in saying that I think small S.E.O. firms generally do a better job than larger ones. Having said that I would hope I have earned your trust enough to see why I have that belief.

There are a ton of problems with scaling out a large S.E.O. firm.

- Most people inherently are not going to be as creative or knowledgeable as some of the better Search Engine Optimizers.

- As the size of the firms increase, cost increases exponentially.

- It is hard to keep good S.E.O.'s working at larger firms because they might feel like they are lost in the shuffle. When an S.E.O. sees the value they are creating it can be easy to get a big ego about it.

- Doing S.E.O. does not necessarily require a ton of expenses or an office. If a person could make $50,000 - $100,000 or more per year working out of their house why would they want to work for a firm for much less?

More Information on Buying S.E.O. Services

S.E.O. Trade Unions & SEO Directories:

Any trade union or S.E.O. directory will have some people (likely marketers) at the center of it. This may of course cause conflict. SEMPO, for example, has been ridiculed to death by many prominent members of the internet marketing community. I do not recommend SEMPO since it seemed like it was primarily organized to be a promotional organization for selfish powergrabs.

There are a few more reputable locations you can find search engine optimizers. S.M.A. is comprised of many regional S.E.O./ S.E.M. trade associations which intends to be a bit more reputable than SEMPO. A couple other spots where you can hunt for S.E.O./ S.E.M. professionals are:

- SEO Pros.org – reviewed best practices guide of S.E.O. firms.

- S.E.O. Consultants.com – reviewed directory of S.E.O. firms.

- MarketingSherpa – has a Buyer's Guide to S.E.O. for sale. I have not yet read it.

- Forums – much of the information in S.E.O. forums will be outdated or over hyped information with an agenda, but it is an additional location where you can seek feedback about S.E.O. firms.

  People made a bunch of fake forums to promote one company's less than stellar services, but on most S.E.O. forums you will find a few friendly people who provide good answers to S.E.O. questions.

  Some of the people who seem like they would be compatible with you may be worth contacting to see if they are available to perform S.E.O. services. At various S.E.O. forums you will find various different biases, so it is a good idea to ask questions at a bunch of different forums to get a feel for them. You may want to space out your questions and ask slightly different questions at the different forums so that people who frequent various forums do not think that you are using some sort of automated forum spamming software.

You can also find further information about hiring an S.E.O. at HonestSEO.com, although that guide could use an updating if the author could get some time to do another update.

Resources

Sites:

- SEO Pros (http://www.seopros.org)

- SEO Consultants (http://www.seoconsultants.com)

- Marketing Sherpa's Buyer's Guide to SEO (http://sherpastore.com/store/page.cfm/1759)

- SEO Forums – list of some SEO forums (http://www.seobook.com/archives/000161.shtml)

- Honest SEO – (http://www.honestseo.com)

Selling SEO Services

When I originally created this guide, it had no information about selling services. The two main reasons for that are that I was bad at selling services (I tend to underprice them until I brought on a partner) and that as time passes most of the most successful S.E.O.'s end up moving closer to the profit stream by setting up their own e-commerce sites or partnering with local merchants they know.

If you want to sell services I highly recommend talking to Dan Thies. Taking his 16 week course or a one or two hour consultation with him would likely help you develop a brand strategy and help you scout out leads. Below are tips I can offer from my limited experience in selling services and from listening to some of the tips Dan gave me.

Online Auctions

Some sites like Elance.com run auctions which allow people to buy various services. Most of these auctions will be from:

- Competitors looking at how to price their services.

- People who are not interested in, or do not know the value of quality S.E.O.

- People looking for a steal. These are customers who will waste your time and never be happy, even if their $100 spend makes them $10,000 or more.

I personally only ever placed a few bids at online auctions, but the things you want to look out for when trying to sell services are to make sure that the leads are

- ones you would want to take (ie: would I feel comfortable marketing this?)

- ones you have the technical know-how and time to work on

- ones that appear willing to listen to feedback and have reasonable expectations

- ones that are interested in bid quality instead of bid price

Forums

You can't expect to learn everything, especially when you are new. One of the fundamental flaws when I started learning was that I thought it was my job to learn marketing, html, graphics, S.E.O., PHP, ASP, MySQL, etc. In trying to learn everything you can spread yourself too thin.

The time I have spent editing ASP code would have been spent much better doing other things. ☺

The nice things about forums are that you get to learn and teach at the same time. Some of your posts can act as mini sales letters which will drive targeted leads your way. Reading other threads will help you learn nuggets. On top of selling and learning, you also get to make friends and learn who knows what. This can help immensely when issues come up that you are unsure of how to handle, and I have referred many leads to friends I met from S.E.O. forums.

I usually try to stick with smaller to mid-sized forums off the start as they are easier to get noticed at than in large forums. Forums like Cre8asite and SearchGuild might be good places to get started.

Writing Articles

Not everyone is a good writer, but I believe most people can be trained or practice to become at least a decent one. I no longer write articles as much as I did in the past, but for a while I was featured in WebProNews almost weekly.

The key to writing articles is to write something so compelling that people will want to link to it, or write something decent and work to get it syndicated on networks with many eyeballs.

When I started S.E.O. I was exceptionally poor. It took a while for me to get around to writing articles, but when I did write one I noticed a flurry of leads the next couple days. $300 was a lot of money to me back then, and it was not uncommon to make that in consulting to leads generated from each of the articles I wrote.

Well executed research articles tend to get significant media coverage. Kalena Jordan did a study on the lack of search engine visibility of the top 100 New Zealand companies and got a ton of leads from it. Fathom Online created a Keyword Price Index rating which tracks P.P.C. ad prices by category each month. Many search related sites give Fathom Online free exposure every month by mentioning these statistics. SEO-PR was the first S.E.O. company purely focused on the public relations aspect. It is easier for them to get links from other S.E.O. sites than it is for most other S.E.O. businesses. Brad Fallon created an S.E.O. radio show which makes it easy for him to get on topic links.

In an industry with a rather tarnished reputation the value of having a voice that is seen or heard by many is something you can't place enough value on. For example,

there is probably about a 99% chance you would have never bought this e-book if I did not have the associated blog.

Ideal Clients

There are many ways to find customers for S.E.O. One of the common problems is that many people do not know they need S.E.O. services or what those services are. If you think of prospects in terms of the ideal prospect what would be their common characteristics?

- they have a profitable business

- they are in a market position that is not hyper-saturated

- they sell non-commodity products or things that are not easy to get elsewhere

- they already have websites

- they already have a rank ok (the top 100 or so) for some of their keywords

- their business model makes sense for the web (item is cheap to ship or requires customization which makes it more convenient to buy online than to hunt at various offline stores)

- they are well established on the web

- they are willing to spend enough money to see results

- they already know a bit about S.E.O.

- they have reasonable expectations

- they are a similar sized business or one that you would feel comfortable working with

Odds are that most leads are not going to line up with all your most desirable characteristics. Some people will align with many of them though. You probably do not want to spend the same amount of effort on all leads. Instead it is wiser to place more effort on leads which seem close to conversion and leads which seem like they are a great match for your business.

It is also important not to rely too heavily on any one potential client. Some people may just be feeling out the market or trying to learn as much from you as they can for free before doing their own services or trying to replicate your business model.

Where to find Clients

Again I would like to emphasize how well articles worked for me in the past. Almost every single person I worked with found me from articles I wrote.

Some common places to look for clients:

- business & shopping categories of What's New at the Yahoo! Directory – these people have spent $300 on a single link and are actively promoting their websites.

- Some services (used mostly for e-mail spamming) also track sites which are newly accepted to DMOZ.

- Pay-per-click ads for somewhat expensive keywords. Make sure you do not click their ads to visit their sites.

- Local business meetings.

- Search conferences.

- Create lists or review products on Amazon.com (which has worked for me once).

- Leave testimonials in proper places.

- Product demo meetings from companies like WebTrends, Verizon SuperPages, or Google AdWords. Watching them demonstrate and sell their products will help you learn how to sell, and you will be surrounded by qualified leads.

Questions to Ask Clients

Many times clients will not tell you of past experiences. Research the clients before accepting the job.

- they may have had their site banned

- Do they have any past S.E.O. experiences?

- they may have shadow domains and / or duplicate content or other problems

- they may think they know everything already, and may not give you room to breathe or do your job correctly

- There are limits to how blunt you can be, but you need to find out who makes the decisions.

- get a baseline of where the client is currently at so you can compare the outcome to their current market position

- Agree on goals and payment structure before commencing work.

Make sure you understand the short and long term goals of the client and that they are willing to listen to you and provide you with the resources necessary to make them possible.

It works best if they understand the process and have their expectations inline with what you plan on delivering before you accept the project. It also works out best when you work with people you feel you would like to work with.

Off the Web & Major Changes

What does their company deserve to be ranked in the top ten available resources? What is their unique sales proposition?

Is their business healthy? Are other disruptive technologies entering or replacing their market? Are they continually losing market share? Do they plan on launching new site technologies?

If they contacted you, what prompted them to think they needed a S.E.O. consultant now?

Do they intend to use search engine marketing as one of many marketing channels, or are they expecting their whole business to succeed or fail based on S.E.O? Is their site good other than search engine marketing? Are they willing to accept your feedback on usability and other issues related to conversion?

Some of the stuff you can't know fully, but your gut can get a good sense of how flexible the company is.

Being Your Size

Many people desire huge corporate clients who may have so much red tape that they bog them down and prevent them from doing well. Some small firms try to act big and conversely some large firms try to act small. Usually it works best if you act your size and attract clients you can handle.

Partner with other firms so that if you feel that a company would be too much of a research hog or not profitable enough you can get a referral commission by sending them to someone else.

Don't be afraid to mention some of the cons of S.E.O. services. If you are the only one who they talk to who sounds honest and mentions risks (such as large algorithm changes or no guaranteed results) then you may get hired. It is usually best to fail on the conservative side when estimating return so that you can meet your goals.

Some of my friends with small firms have beat out larger firms by having better proposals and being more honest about some of the cons of S.E.O. Some small firms also have the advantage of being able to move fast since they do not have the associated legal and IT related wait times.

Contracting & Outsourcing

Can't do everything yourself? It is not uncommon to work out partnerships to make a percent commission off of sales or mark up the price others charge you for work.

Don't know all the answers? Nobody really does. It is best to have a network of friends you trust who you can work with and who can find answers to questions when you are unsure of the answer.

Some people are also willing to work representing your company, so you may be able to scale out to handle a decent number of clients without needing to hire a ton of employees. When you outsource work to another it is not uncommon to double or triple their fees to make sure you account for your own time and still have adequate profit margin. Don't forget to include credit card fees and pay yourself for your time.

With how fast things change in the S.E.O. space, having a large number of employees can be more of a negative than a positive.

Cold Calling

If you actively harvest leads and pursue them you will either need to email them, call them, or find another way to contact them. Cold calling is not something I am well versed in, but if you actively seek out clients in this manner realize that most of them will not be interested.

The more personalized your pitch and the better you can show benefit to them and feed off their empathy the greater the chance of them saying yes. When you find out what their problems are, and restate their problems to them in your recommended solutions it appeals to their sense of logic and feeds off their empathy.

Many large S.E.O. firms get most of their clients from cold calls. In addition some firms have tainted the image of many S.E.O.'s with their cold calling and lack of follow through on services.

If you have to build trust from scratch it may make sense to deliver some pay per click traffic right off the start to show its value before trying to sell large organic search packages.

Niche: SEO Guy – Real Estate

A friend of mine, Morgan Carey, goes by the pseudonym SEO Guy. He was doing fairly well selling general SEO services, but eventually shifted over to primarily catering toward the real estate market.

He created a forum by the name of Real Estate Webmasters, where many people talk about promoting real estate websites. He picks up many leads from current client sites and that forum, and now is one of the few S.E.O. firms which is an exclusive expert in the real estate field.

Other S.E.O.'s have also done well by branding themselves as the link building expert, the keyword research expert, the S.E.O. copywriting expert, the site announcement expert, and other ideas in and around the S.E.O. scene.

Sales Cycle

It is important not to get stuck on one specific idea or technique to where you lose focus of the bigger picture. Work clients along the sales cycle without getting to focused or becoming to dependent on any one client.

Some people may want as much as they can get for free. Showing prices on your site may filter out some of the worst leads before they even contact you. When you become successful at S.E.O. more people will want to hire you than you could possibly work for. It is best to take on a few quality clients instead of trying to work cheap for many clients.

Make sure you do not put 10-12 hours into giving away free competitive research and an actionable plan. You may be able to sell an in depth analysis services prior to selling full services. It requires a smaller commitment of the client while protecting you from working free.

If you want to give away something it does not hurt to give away a PDF which describes your process.

Contracts

Dealing with large corporate lawyers can be a pain in the ___. If you have common tasks try to develop contracts and plans that automate and simplify them. Using your own standardized documents will save you significant legal costs as compared with paying a lawyer to review someone else's contract every time you have a potential project.

Some of my friends have recommended Proposal Kit.com for writing proposals. You might want to ask some S.E.O. friends for a proposal and contract examples to work from. It is probably wise to have a legal person look over a proposal prior to signing as well.

Proposal titles usually look something like "Increasing the Profitability of Company X by Maximizing Search Engine Visibility". Then, the proposal usually fits on less than a page.

When you first quote them a price, make sure there is some padding in it, this allows you room to work while still having adequate profit margin, and a higher price usually helps a person assume there is greater value. If you are selling S.E.O. services correctly, you should stress value instead of price and the clients should view it as a long term investment.

If a client has too many questions with the price then that might signal there are other issues, such as business partners, lack of confidence, or other decision makers. If the person you are talking to is the decision maker but is doubtful of the value perhaps you can try to sell pay per click marketing or start their account with a small test P.P.C. budget to let them see what type of traffic and conversions they could be getting.

Before you get too involved with a potential client it is good to know who all needs to sign off on a deal. On one occasion I was talking directly with a C.E.O. of a company who paid me thousands of dollars to do preliminary work. After I did that work he wanted ongoing S.E.O. services. He was ready to sign off on it, but the venture capital firm that backed his company did not believe in S.E.O. Given that lack of sharpness that V.C. company may have killed that company the day they invested in it.

Reports

I do not provide any sort of reports to any of my S.E.O. clients, but some people like to use software such as Web Position Gold, Web CEO, Internet Business Promoter, or Advanced Web Rankings to provide client ranking reports. To me it is important to track the end results (mostly for detecting algorithmic changes), but I usually track those on tools like Digital Point's free keyword tracker.

If you clients might be impressed by ranking reports those products cost somewhere between $50 and a few hundred dollars. I have always tried to focus my clients on results in terms of money in their bank account, so I never gave reports…just top rankings.

Dependency on Free Traffic

One of the largest problems many people face when they are doing S.E.O. well is that they become dependent on free traffic. This ends up hurting them in other areas since they can take that free traffic for granted.

Make sure you are working on sites that are: trying to build competitive advantages outside of S.E.O., maximizing conversion and profit potential, competitive in the paid ad market, or make sure the owner realized the free traffic can go away and that they should be establishing other marketing channels as a safeguard.

Being able to scale to handle large increases and decreases in traffic volume is exceptionally hard for some businesses. It is another great reason why many businesses should use P.P.C. to augment their S.E.O., to have a more reliable traffic stream that can be adjusted as needed.

Affiliate Sites & Passive Income Streams

As an individual, S.E.O. work comes in spurts. To help smooth out the demand curve you may want to create multiple affiliate sites around topics you know well and are interested in. You can profit from AdSense, link rentals, lead generation, or affiliate programs.

Some of these sites could even target ideal S.E.O. clients, working for you on multiple fronts (like Morgan Carey's Real Estate Webmaster).

Affiliate programs allow you to increase revenues without the burdens that clients place on you. If you are busy on other projects or want to work for few clients augmenting your income is exceptionally important.

Most S.E.O. compensation programs do not compensate the individual directly for the returns of their work. The nice thing about an affiliate programs are:

- You are compensated for each sale you make. Most S.E.O. business models do not do that.

- You do not need to spend time cold calling or looking for clients.

- You can chose to only work in high paying verticals or fields you are deeply interested in.

- Affiliate programs and contextual advertising can provide low effort passive income streams.

- Affiliate marketing is much more flexible than client work.

Resources

Sites:

- Kalena Jordan's press release about New Zealand sites being poorly optimized
(http://www.high-search-engine-ranking.com/Top100NZPressRelease.htm)

- What's New at the Yahoo! Directory
(http://dir.yahoo.com/new/)

- Proposal Kit – software for making proposals and contracts
(http://www.proposalkit.com/)

- Real Estate Webmaster – example of an SEO firm working hard to do well in one particular niche (http://www.realestatewebmasters.com/)

Chapter

14

Quick Start Checklist

S ome people have stated that they thought some of the stuff in this e-book was a bit complex or maybe too much information. Just in case you forgot some of the stuff, if any of it was confusing, or you need help getting a foot in the right direction I created this checklist to help out new webmasters.

SEO Tools

Often times using the right tools can save you a bunch of time and money. I created a free PDF checklist of all the SEO tools I use. Download it here: http://www.seobook.com/seo-tools.pdf

Picking a Product

- Are you interested in the product you are trying to sell? If no, why not chose a different product?

  The Internet makes marketing anything a possibility. You are far more likely to succeed if you are interested in what you are trying to sell. Also it is far easier to sell people what they want than to get them to want your product.

- Is the marketplace for your product over saturated?
  Example: posters, credit cards, prescription drugs, hosting, generic site design, & ink refills are all over saturated markets.

- Is the product something people would want to order over the web.

- Is there something you can do to make yourself different than everyone else on the market? (please note: cheaper usually is not a legitimate branding / business model for most websites on the hyper competitive web)

  Example: No other e-book covering S.E.O. was supported by a blog that keeps up with the S.E.O. industry every day (at least when I created this one).
  Example: I created a S.E.O. worst practice directory. Nobody else has made a site like that. It has earned me $1,000's in the first year with a marketing budget well under $100.

- Would people want to link into your site without you asking them to? If no, what creative or original ideas can you add to your site to make people want to?

Picking a Domain Name

- FOR NEW SITES: Pick a domain name that is either **highly brandable** or has your **primary keywords in it**. **Use a short & memorable domain name**. It is fine if it does not have your keywords in it if it is memorable. For serious long-term websites how memorable they are is one of the key ingredients to success.

- Register as a .com if possible if you have a global market.

- If you can't get a .com but a great .net or .org is still available it might be worth it to register one of those instead of registering a longer and less memorable .com domain.

- If you are targeting a specific country or language: register a domain name in that country's T.L.D. designation (ex: buy a co.uk website for a UK targeted site). Also buy the .com version of your domain name and point it at your country specific location.

  Often times certain directories and search engines will either be biased toward local sites or only let local sites in the index. Local may mean ending with a local domain and / or being hosted on a server in that country.

- If you are going to be working in competitive fields or if you will have large sites you may want to use a different domain for each different language you are targeting.

- Example Domain Names I own: BlackHatSEO.com SEOBook.com FattyWeightLoss.com ThreadWatch.org

Domain Registration & Hosting

- Register your domain with an ICANN accredited registrar. I use GoDaddy.

- Host your site with a reliable host. I recommend DreamHost or Pair.com.

- Fore dynamic sites: make sure your host supports the technology you will be using (such as ASP & PHP) before spending money.

Keyword Selection

- Use a keyword tool to help you find the most targeted keywords for your site. http://tools.seobook.com/general/keyword/ is free, and cross references just about every useful keyword research tool on the market.

- Pick themes or keyword baskets to optimize the various sections of your site around.

- Targeting keyword phrases is a much better idea than trying to target individual words. Keyword phrases tend to be easier to rank well for AND they typically convert far better than individual words.

- Target different keyword phrases on each page.

- Target no more than 1-2 primary and 2-3 secondary keyword phrases per page.

- If you write hundreds or thousands of pages of content make sure they read well to people. Over time if people cite your content it will start to rank for many different terms so long as it is unique and targeted around a theme.

Page Optimization

- Use your keywords in your page title. Place the most important keyword phrase close to the beginning of the page title. Do not put your site title on every page of your site unless you are really trying to brand that name. In that scenario it still is usually best to place the site name at the end of the page titles.

- Shorter site titles are usually better than really long ones.

- Sometimes I overlap related keyword phrases in the page title.

- Overlapping keyword phrases in the page title can help you pick up multiple search phrases. For example, "Professional search engine marketing services" helps me obtain good rankings for:

  - search engine marketing

  - professional search engine marketing

  - search engine marketing services

  - & professional search engine marketing services

- Create a unique page title, meta description, and content for each page. For large product database driven sites you can use wildcard replace and a formula to make each page title and meta description unique. Here is my free page title and meta tag generator: http://www.search-marketing.info/meta-tags/make-meta.htm

- Meta tags are not extremely important but they can help some. The meta description should be a sentence to a paragraph describing the page contents. The meta description tag can be seen in some search results so you want to write it for human eyes. The meta keywords tag is probably not worth the time to make, but if you do it should contain your primary keyword, common misspellings and synonyms. Each keyword phrase in the keywords tag should be comma separated.

- Use a single keyword rich H1 header on your page containing the same the primary keyword phrases. This helps reinforce the page title.

- Use keyword rich subheaders (H2 or H3) before every paragraph or every few paragraphs. This improves usability and helps define what the page is about to search engines without making the page look like it was wrote for a search engine.

- Use bulleted lists and bolding to make content easier to read.

- Write your content for human consumption. If you write all your sentences for the search engines the pages will read bad and nobody will read them.

Home Page Optimization

- Target your most competitive keyword phrase with the home page.

- Link to your home page from every page of your site. Include your site name and / or home page's primary keyword phrase in the text links pointing at it.

- If you think your site is being filtered out of the search results for being too focused on a word or phrase you may want to make the link to your home page just say something like "home".

- Link to the major theme pages from your home page.

Site Optimization

- Use text based navigation.

- If you use graphic navigation:

- o Use descriptive alt text for your image links.

    - o Link to your primary pages from every page of your site using footer text links.

- Use descriptive / keyword rich breadcrumb navigation to help search engines understand the structure of your site.
EX: home page link(use keywords in it) > level 1 > level 2 > page I am on

- Use a site map to help search engines spider through your site.

- Whenever possible use descriptive text when linking between pages of your site.

- Link to other resources that improve your users experience.

- Deep link to related articles and content from within the active content section of your page copy.

- If you want your site to convert assume many site visitors will ignore the global navigation. Actively guide people toward conversion from within the active content area of your website. http://www.AndyHagans.com does an excellent job of this.

- Use CSS to improve the look and feel of your pages. Put it in an external file.

Registering With Directories

Register your site with the major directories, second tier general directories. Try to register with about a half dozen to a dozen of the better general directories if you are targeting Google. If you are targeting the other engines first and can wait on Google you may want to register with about 50 or so general directories.

Register with at least a couple local or niche specific directories. More niche specific directories are located at http://www.isedb.com, but you should check to ensure they provide static links before spending money registering your sites. Also, directories which rank well may deliver quality traffic even if they do not provide direct links.

Search for things like "my keywords" + add URL to find other niche directories.

Often times I do not mind spending hundreds of dollars getting links from different sites (or directories) across many different IP ranges. Many of the tier 2 directories charge a one time fee for listing and some of them allow you to add your sites free if you become an editor.

In my directory archives, I have 50-100 general directories listed in the general directory categories. Most top ranking sites in mildly competitive fields do not have

text links from 50 different sites pointing at them (so if you can afford it, doing this offers a huge advantage to you for your Yahoo! and MSN rankings, but you need to chose directories carefully when considering how TrustRank may effect Google).

If you are in more competitive fields and rent some powerful links these listings in various directories can help stabilize your rankings when search engine algorithms shift.

If done correctly owning a directory right now has the potential to be a highly lucrative business model because there is a ton of value in getting links from different IP ranges.

Some directories I highly recommend are Yahoo!, DMOZ, JoeAnt, BOTW & Gimpsy.

Link Building

- Link building is the single most important part of achieving a high ranking website in modern search algorithms.

- Create something that legit webmasters interested in your topic would be interested in linking at.

- When possible try to get your keywords in many of the links pointing at your pages.

- Register with, participate in, or trade links with topical hubs and related sites. Be in the discussion, or at least be near the discussion.

- Look for free links from related sites and directories.

- If you have some good internal content try to get direct links to your inner pages.

- Write articles and get them syndicated at other sites.

- Participate in forums to learn about what your potential consumers think is important. What frequent questions do they have? How do you solve those problems?

- Issue press releases with links into your site.

- Leave super glowing testimonials for people and products you really like. Often times when they post them they will include a link back to your site.

- Leave relevant comments in blogs that do not send their comments through redirects.

- Sponsor charities, blogs, or websites related to your site.

- Consider renting links if you are in an extremely competitive industry. Adult, gaming, credit, or pharmacy categories will likely require link rentals and / or building topical link networks.

- Mix your link text up. Adding words like "buy" or "store" to the keywords in your some of your link text can make it look like more natural linkage data and help you rank well for many targeted secondary phrases.

- If you need help determining how competitive your industry is feel free to send me an email and I will give you my opinion.

- Survey your vertical and related verticals. What ideas / tools / articles have become industry standard tools or well cited information? What ideas are missing from the current marketspace that could also fill that niche?

- If you have a large site make sure you create legitimate reasons for people to want to reference more than just your home page.

- If you are looking to hire an SEO you may want to look at http://www.honestseo.com or feel free to ask me to recommend you to someone.

- Brett Tabke (owner of WebmasterWorld) wrote a quick couple page guide worth looking at before building your site. http://www.webmasterworld.com/forum3/2010.htm

When Changes Occur

Your rankings will improve. They will also get worse. Many people rush off to change things right away when the algorithms change. Sometimes they roll in new algorithms aggressively and then later roll them back. They can't fight off new forms of spam and determine how aggressive to go with new algorithms unless they sometimes go to far with them.

If you are unsure of what just happened, then you may not want to start changing things until you figure it out. Sometimes when algorithms are rolled back or made less aggressive, many sites still do not rank well because their webmasters changed things that were helping them. Nobody is owed a good rank, and just because a ranking temporarily changes it does not mean that a site has been penalized. It is far more likely that the ranking criteria shifted and the site may not match the new ranking criteria as well as it matched the old ranking criteria.

One of the greatest S.E.O. techniques is knowing when to do nothing at all. I had one client that I shared profit with that I did not do much work for after the first few months. Why? After I built his site up he had a strong market position. I could have kept building many links, but it would not help him reach much more of the

market. It would have added nothing but cost and risk. If you are too aggressive it adds to the risk profile without adding much on the reward side.

Tim Mayer, a well known Yahoo! search engineer once mentioned that it did not make sense to bring a knife to a gun fight (when referring to how to compete for terms like Viagra). The opposite also holds true, if you are using a shotgun and all the other competing sites are using less aggressive techniques then you stand a greater chance of being penalized.

All S.E.O. techniques are just a balance of risk vs reward, and while you want to rank at or near the top of the search results you probably do not want to use techniques that are exceptionally aggressive as compared to the other top ranking sites if you intend to build a site for long-term profits.

Common S.E.O. Abuse Techniques

I saved this idea for the end for a reason, because it is important and I hope you remember is when you are done reading this e-book. There is no such thing as a perfectly optimized page. Search engines do not want to return the most optimized page, but the page that best satisfies the searcher's goals.

If you have a page title and H1 header that are the exact same and all your internal and all 200 of your inbound links from other sites pointing at that page use that same text then that looks suspicious to some search algorithms. They may want to de-weight that.

How do you minimize your risks and make your site more stable? It's best to mix things up a bit and use various different versions. Another idea that might help you is looking at things like a search engine engineer.

There is a concept called poison words, where if you have things like link exchange, add url, or link partners on a page there stands a good chance a search engines may place less weight on that page or its outbound links. In the past some common poison words were things like forum and guestbook. The more likely content is to be of low quality or related to spam the more likely search engines are to want to de-weight it.

Maybe they could want to penalize the use of spammy sites using an H1 header, so instead people use an H2 header for the highest level header tag on the spammy sites. Maybe they look to de-weight site wide links to the homepage near the end of the page code using the exact same link text as the home page's page title, so instead you link to the home page from earlier in the page code and / or use slightly different anchor text than your page title and most of your link profile.

Some guys like DaveN end up mentioning lots of subtle tips like the ones I just mentioned. If you think like a search engineer, those techniques which are common in S.E.O. and not so common on regular websites are the most likely to be de-weighted or penalized. Optimizing content is about matching quality signs, but if you match too many too closely that could send a negative signal.

Some of the search relevancy algorithms are genetic algorithms which train themselves to test the relevancy of new result sets, but humans still program them. Google wants to have a bias toward informational resources. Yahoo! will be more biased toward commerce.

Appearing Natural

A big theme in S.E.O. recently is finding ways to appear natural. Search engines do not want the most optimized sites at the top of the search results. They want the best pages and best sites.

There are only so many things search engines can look at to determine the quality of a website. You can emulate many of them, but as search advances it will continue to get harder. Inevitably influencing people directly (instead of going after the algorithms) is going to have a higher R.O.I. for many webmasters.

How do you create a natural linkage profile? Create something that lots of people link at without you needing to ask them.

How do you write optimized content? Make the page title clear and then write content good enough that people will want to reference it.

Social Considerations

No matter how smart you are it is going to be hard to emulate a natural link profile if you manually build it all. Going forward the key to doing well in Google is earning natural citations. If you didn't own your site would you still visit it every week? What can you do to grab bloggers attention? What can you do to make some of your competitors want to link at your site without you needing to ask for the links?

Closing Tips

The web is nothing but a big social network. S.E.O. was my entry to the web, but I have bigger hopes, dreams, and goals in mind.

No matter what your goals are, S.E.O. can help you get there from the start, but at some point, it will be necessary for you to find ways to get other people to want to syndicate your ideas. Kind of like what Abe Lincoln was saying when he said "With public sentiment nothing can fail. Without it nothing can succeed."

I am somewhat altruistic in that I think if you study and do what you are interested in (even if it is on the side off the start) then eventually that will drive you toward success.

I also want to share a quote with you from *Weaving the Web* by one my favorite web personalities, and the man who created the web, Tim Berners-Lee:

> "People have sometimes asked me whether I am upset that I have not made a lot of money from the Web. In fact, I made some quite conscious decisions about which way to take my life. These I would not change - though I am making no comment on what I might do in the future. What does distress me, though, is how important a question it seems to be to some. This happens mostly in America, not Europe. What is maddening is the terrible notion that a person's value depends on how important and financially successful they are, and that that is measured in terms of money. That suggests disrespect for the researchers across the globe developing ideas for the next leaps in science and technology. Core in my upbringing was a value system that put monetary gain well in its place, behind things like doing what I really want to do. To use net worth as a criterion by which to judge people is to set our children's sights on cash rather than on things that will actually make them happy."

Most successful web based businesses do not need to actively practice S.E.O. Optimizing for search engines does help improve the bottom line and help get you found, but after you get found it is up to you to convert. It is up to you how hard and creatively you work to develop your business and reputation.

If this is the last book or e-book you ever read about running your business online, I would consider that a mistake. I try to read at least one book a month (it was about 3 a week when I was just getting started on the web). While not everyone has that much time, it is always a good call to keep learning new stuff. Rarely do I ever read a book without learning an important lesson or good idea.

The web is a big social network that gives quick feedback. Do not be afraid to read from and learn from competitors and people in other fields. Do not be afraid to participate in it…that is how you really learn. If you never make a mistake and never screw up bad then you probably won't do too many spectacular things either.

Search engines try to emulate users, which are largely driven by the social connections off the web. Create friendships and get media coverage and you win.

I am not a creative genius or a branding expert, but if you need help coming up with another angle to promote your business from or need S.E.O. help don't hesitate to shoot me an email and I will see if and how I can help in any way.

Also, create a blog to see if you like writing. Too few people ever actually speak their mind in this world. http://www.blogger.com is free and easy to set up, or if you are technically inclined I would recommend using http://wordpress.org/.

Best of luck with everything & to your success,

Aaron