Beginner's Guide to SEO
by Rand Fishkin of SEOmoz.org

Sections in this guide:

Prologue: Who is SEOmoz and Why is this Guide Free?

SEOmoz is a Seattle-based Search Engine Optimization (SEO) firm and community resource for those seeking knowledge in the SEO/M field. You can learn more about SEOmoz here. We provide a great variety of free information via a daily blog, automated tools and advanced articles.

This article is offered as a resource to help individuals, organizations and companies inexperienced with search engine optimization learn the basics of how the service and process operates. It is our goal to improve your ability to drive search traffic to your site and debunk major myths about SEO. We share this knowledge to help businesses, government, educational and non-profit organizations benefit from being listed in the major search engines.

SEOmoz provides advanced SEO services. If you are new to SEO, have read through this document, and require an SEO firm's assistance, please contact us. Along with the optimization services we provide, we also recommend a number of very effective SEO firms who follow the best practices described in this document.
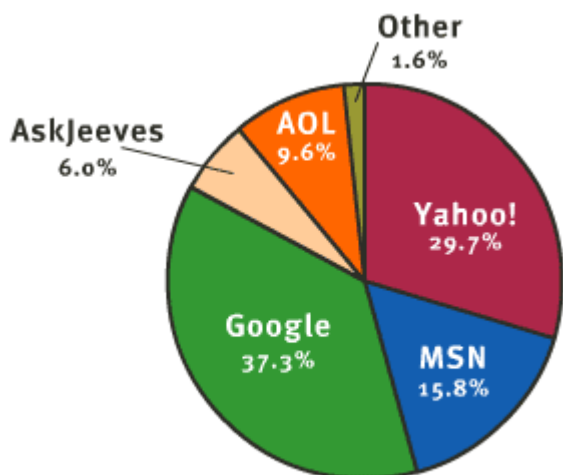
What is SEO?

SEO is the active practice of optimizing a web site by improving internal and external aspects in order to increase the traffic the site receives from search engines. Firms that practice SEO can vary; some havea highly specialized focus while others take a more broad and general approach. Optimizing a web site for search engines can require looking at so many unique elements that many practitioners of SEO (SEOs) consider themselves to be in the broad field of website optimization (since so many of those elements intertwine).

This guide is designed to describe all areas of SEO - from discovery of the terms and phrases that will generate traffic, to making a site search engine friendly to building the links and marketing the unique value of the site/organization's offerings.

Why does my company/organization/website need SEO?

The majority of web traffic is driven by the major commercial search engines - Yahoo!, MSN, Google & AskJeeves (although AOL gets nearly 10% of searches, their engine is powered by Google's results). If your site cannot be found by search engines or your content cannot be put into their databases, you miss out on the incredible opportunities available to websites provided via search - people who want what you have visiting your site. Whether your site provides content, services, products or information, search engines are a primary method of navigation for almost all Internet users.

Search queries, the words that users type into the search box which contain terms and phrases best suited to your site carry extraordinary value. Experience has shown that search engine traffic can make (or break) an organization's success. Targeted visitors to a website can provide publicity, revenue and exposure like no other. Investing in SEO, whether through time or finances, can have an exceptional rate of return.

Why can't the search engines figure out my site without SEO help?

Search engines are always working towards improving their technology to crawl the web more deeply and return increasingly relevant results to users. However, there is and will always be a limit to how search engines can operate. Whereas the right moves can net you thousands of visitors and attention, the wrong moves can hide or bury your site deep in the search results where visibility is minimal. In addition to making content available to search engines, SEO can also help boost rankings, so that content that has been found will be placed where searchers will more readily see it. The online environment is becoming increasingly competitive and those companies who perform SEO will have a decided advantage in visitors and customers.

How much of this article do I need to read?

If you are serious about improving search traffic and are unfamiliar with SEO, I recommend reading this guide front-to-back. There's a printable MS Word version for those who'd prefer, and dozens of linked-to resources on other sites and pages that are worthy of your attention. Although this guide is long, I've attempted to remain faithful to Mr. Strunk's famous quote:

"*A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.*"

Every section and topic in this report is critical to understanding the best known and most effective practices of search engine optimization.

How Search Engines Operate

Search engines have a short list of critical operations that allows them to provide relevant web results when searchers use their system to find information.

1. **Crawling the Web**
   Search engines run automated programs, called "bots" or "spiders" that use the hyperlink structure of the web to "crawl" the pages and documents that make up the World Wide Web. Estimates are that of the approximately 20 billion existing pages, search engines have crawled between 8 and 10 billion.

2. **Indexing Documents**
   Once a page has been crawled, it's contents can be "indexed" - stored in a giant database of documents that makes up a search engine's "index". This index needs to be tightly managed, so that requests which must search and sort billions of documents can be completed in fractions of a second.

3. **Processing Queries**
   When a request for information comes into the search engine (hundreds of millions do each day), the engine retrieves from its index all the document that match the query. A match is determined if the terms or phrase is found on the page in the manner specified by the user. For example, a search for car and driver magazine at Google returns 8.25 million results, but a search for the same phrase in quotes ("car and driver magazine") returns only 166 thousand results. In the first system, commonly called "Findall" mode, Google returned all documents which had the terms "car" "driver" and "magazine" (they ignore the term "*and*" because it's not useful to narrowing the results), while in the second search, only those pages with the exact phrase "car and driver magazine" were returned. Other advanced operators (Google has a list of 11) can change which results a search engine will consider a match for a given query.

4. **Ranking Results**
   Once the search engine has determined which results are a match for the query, the engine's algorithm (a mathematical equation commonly used for sorting) runs calculations on each of the results to determine which is most relevant to the given query. They sort these on the results pages in order from most relevant to least so that users can make a choice about which to select.

Although a search engine's operations are not particularly lengthy, systems like Google, Yahoo!, AskJeeves and MSN are among the most complex, processing-intensive computers in the world, managing millions of calculations each second and funneling demands for information to an enormous group of users.

Speed Bumps & Walls

Certain types of navigation may hinder or entirely prevent search engines from reaching your website's content. As search engine spiders crawl the web, they rely on the architecture of hyperlinks to find new documents and revisit those that may have changed. In the analogy of speed bumps and walls, complex links and deep site structures with little unique content may serve as "bumps." Data that cannot be accessed by spiderable links qualify as "walls."

Possible "Speed Bumps" for SE Spiders:

- URLs with 2+ dynamic parameters; i.e. http://www.url.com/page.php?id=4&CK=34rr&User=%Tom% (spiders may be reluctant to crawl complex URLs like this because they often result in errors with non-human visitors)

- Pages with more than 100 unique links to other pages on the site (spiders may not follow each one)

- Pages buried more than 3 clicks/links from the home page of a website (unless there are many other external links pointing to the site, spiders will often ignore deep pages)

- Pages requiring a "Session ID" or Cookie to enable navigation (spiders may not be able to retain these elements as a browser user can)

- Pages that are split into "frames" can hinder crawling and cause confusion about which pages to rank in the results.

Possible "Walls" for SE Spiders:

- Pages accessible only via a select form and submit button

- Pages requiring a drop down menu (HTML attribute) to access them

- Documents accessible only via a search box

- Documents blocked purposefully (via a robots meta tag or robots.txt file - see more on these here)

- Pages requiring a login

- Pages that re-direct before showing content (search engines call this cloaking or bait-and-switch and may actually ban sites that use this tactic)

The key to ensuring that a site's contents are fully crawlable is to provide direct, HTML links to to each page you want the search engine spiders to index. Remember that if a page cannot be accessed from the home page (where most spiders are likely to start their crawl) it is likely that it will not be indexed by the search engines. A sitemap (which is discussed later in this guide) can be of tremendous help for this purpose.

Measuring Relevance and Popularity

Modern commercial search engines rely on the science of information retrieval (IR). That science has existed since the middle of the 20th century, when retrieval systems powered computers in libraries, research facilities and government labs. Early in the development of search systems, IR scientists realized that two critical components made up the majority of search functionality:

Relevance - the degree to which the content of the documents returned in a search matched the user's query intention and terms. The relevance of a document increases if the terms or phrase queried by the user occurs multiple times and shows up in the title of the work or in important headlines or subheaders.

Popularity - the relative importance, measured via citation (the act of one work referencing another, as often occurs in academic and business documents) of a given document that matches the user's query. The popularity of a given document increases with every other document that references it.

These two items were translated to web search 40 years later and manifest themselves in the form of document analysis and link analysis.

In document analysis, search engines look at whether the search terms are found in important areas of the document - the title, the meta data, the heading tags and the body of text content. They also attempt to automatically measure the quality of the document (through complex systems beyond the scope of this guide).

In link analysis, search engines measure not only who is linking to a site or page, but what they are saying about that page/site. They also have a good grasp on who is affiliated with whom (through historical link data, the site's registration records and other sources), who is worthy of being trusted (links from .edu and .gov pages are generally

more valuable for this reason) and contextual data about the site the page is hosted on (who links to that site, what they say about the site, etc.).

Link and document analysis combine and overlap hundreds of factors that can be individually measured and filtered through the search engine algorithms (the set of instructions that tell the engines what importance to assign to each factor). The algorithm then determines scoring for the documents and (ideally) lists results in decreasing order of importance (rankings).

Information Search Engines can Trust

As search engines index the web's link structure and page contents, they find two distinct kinds of information about a given site or page - attributes of the page/site itself and descriptives about that site/page from other pages. Since the web is such a commercial place, with so many parties interested in ranking well for particular searches, the engines have learned that they cannot always rely on websites to be honest about their importance. Thus, the days when artificially stuffed meta tags and keyword rich pages dominated search results (pre-1998) have vanished and given way to search engines that measure trust via links and content.

The theory goes that if hundreds or thousands of other websites link to you, your site must be popular, and thus, have value. If those links come from very popular and important (and thus, trustworthy) websites, their power is multiplied to even greater degrees. Links from sites like NYTimes.com, Yale.edu, Whitehouse.gov and others carry with them inherent trust that search engines then use to boost your ranking position. If, on the other hand, the links that point to you are from low-quality, interlinked sites or automated garbage domains (aka link farms), search engines have systems in place to discount the value of those links.

The most well-known system for ranking sites based on link data is the simplistic formula developed by Google's founders - PageRank. PageRank, which relies on log-based calculations, is described by Google in their technology section:

> PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B. But, Google looks at more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves "important" weigh more heavily and help to make other pages "important."

PageRank is derived (roughly speaking), by amalgamating all the links that point to a particular page, adding the value of the PageRank that they pass (based on their own PageRank) and applying calculations in the formula (see Ian Rogers' explanation for more details).

Google's toolbar (available here) includes an icon that shows a PageRank value from 0-10

PageRank, in essence, measures the brute link force of a site based on every other link that points to it without significant regard for quality, relevance or trust. Hence, in the modern era of SEO, the PageRank measurement in Google's toolbar, directory or through sites that query the service is of limited value. Pages with PR8 can be found ranked 20-30 positions below pages with a PR3 or PR4. In addition, the toolbar numbers are updated only every 3-6 months by Google, making the values even less useful. Rather than focusing on PageRank, it's important to think holistically about a link's worth.

Here's a small list of the most important factors search engines look at when attempting to value a link:

- **The Anchor Text of Link** - Anchor text describes the visible characters and words that hyperlink to another document or location on the web. For example in the phrase, "CNN is a good source of news, but I actually prefer the BBC's take on events," two unique pieces of anchor text exist - "CNN" is the anchor text pointing to *http://www.cnn.com*, while "the BBC's take on events" points to *http://news.bbc.co.uk*. Search engines use this text to help them determine the subject matter of the linked-to document. In the example above, the links would tell the search engine that when users search for "CNN", SEOmoz.org thinks that *http://www.cnn.com*

is a relevant site for the term "CNN" and that *http://news.bbc.co.uk* is relevant to "the BBC's take on events". If hundreds or thousands of sites think that a particular page is relevant for a given set of terms, that page can manage to rank well even if the terms NEVER appear in the text itself (for example, see the BBC's explanation of why Google ranks certain pages for the term "[Miserable Failure](#)").

- **Global Popularity of the Site** - More popular sites, as denoted by the number and power of the links pointing to them, provide more powerful links. Thus, while a link from SEOmoz may be a valuable vote for a site, a link from bbc.co.uk or cnn.com carries far more weight. This is one area where PageRank (assuming it was accurate), could be a good measure, as it's designed to calculate global popularity.

- **Popularity of Site in Relevant Communities** - In the example above, the weight or power of a site's vote is based on its raw popularity across the web. As search engines became more sophisticated and granular in their approach to link data, they acknowledged the existence of "topical communities"; sites on the same subject that often interlink with one another, referencing documents and providing unique data on a particular topic. Sites in these communities provide more value when they link to a site/page on a relevant subject rather than a site that is largely irrelevant to their topic.

- **Text Directly Surrounding the Link** - Search engines have been noted to weight the text directly surrounding a link with greater important and relevant than the other text on the page. Thus, a link from inside an on-topic paragraph may carry greater weight than a link in the sidebar or footer.

- **Subject Matter of the Linking Page** - The topical relationship between the subject of a given page and the sites/pages linked to on it may also factor into the value a search engine assigns to that link. Thus, it will be more valuable to have links from pages that are related to the site/pages subject matter than those that have little to do with the topic.

These are only a few of the many factors search engines measure and weight when evaluating links. For a more complete list, see [SEOmoz's search engine ranking factors article](#).

Link metrics are in place so that search engines can find information to trust. In the academic world greater citation meant greater importance, but in a commercial environment, manipulation and conflicting interests interfere with the purity of citation-based measurements. Thus, on the modern WWW, the source, style and context of those citations is vital to ensuring high quality results.

The Anatomy of a HyperLink

A standard hyperlink in HTML code looks like this:

SEOmoz
[SEOmoz](#)

In this example, the code simply indicates that the text "SEOmoz" (called the "anchor text" of the link) should be hyperlinked to the page http://www.seomoz.org. A search engine would interpret this code as a message that the page carrying this code believed the page http://www.seomoz.org to be relevant to the text on the page and particularly relevant to the term "SEOmoz".

A more complex piece of HTML code for a link may include additional attributes such as:

SEOmoz
[SEOmoz](#)

In this example, new elements such as the link title and rel attribute may influence how a search engine views the link, despite it's appearance on the page remaining unchanged. The title attribute may serve as an additional piece of information, telling the search engine that http://www.seomoz.org, in addition to being related to the term "SEOmoz", is also relevant to the phrase "Rand's Site". The rel attribute, originally designed to describe the relationship between

the linked-to page and the linking page, has, with the recent emergence of the "nofollow" descriptive, become more complex.

"Nofollow" is a tag designed specifically for search engines. When ascribed to a link in the rel attribute, it tells the engine's ranking system that the link should not be considered an editorially approved "vote" for the linked-to page. Currently, 3 major search engines (Yahoo!, MSN & Google) all support "nofollow". AskJeeves, due to its unique ranking system, does not support nofollow, and ignores its presence in link code. For more information about how this works, visit Danny Sullivan's description of nofollow's inception on the SEW blog.

Some links may be assigned to images, rather than text:

<img src="rand.jpg" alt="Rand Fishkin of SEOmoz">

This example shows an image named "rand.jpg" linking to the page - http://www.seomoz.org/randfish.php. The alt attribute, designed originally to display in place of images that were slow to load or on voice-based browsers for the blind, reads "Rand Fishkin of SEOmoz" (in many browsers, you can see the alt text by hovering the mouse over the images). Search engines can use the information in an image based link, including the name of the image and the alt attribute to interpret what the linked-to page is about.

Other types of links may also be used on the web, many of which pass no ranking or spidering value due to their use of re-direct, Javascript or other technologies. A link that does not have the classic text format, be it image or text, should be generally considered not to pass link value via the search engines (although in rare instances, engines may attempt to follow these more complex style links).

SEOmoz

In this example, the redirect used scrambles the URL by writing it backwards, but unscrambles it later with a script and sends the visitor to the site. It can be assumed that this passes no search engine link value.

SEOmoz

This sample shows the very simple piece of Javascript code that calls a function referenced in the document to pull up a specified page. Creative uses of Javascript like this can also be assumed to pass no link value to a search engine.

It's important to understand that based on a link's anatomy, search engines can (or cannot) interpret and us the data therein. Whereas the right sort of links can provide great value, the wrong sort will be virtually useless (for search ranking purposes). More detailed information on links is available at this resource - anatomy and deployment of links.

Keywords and Queries

Search engines rely on the terms queried by users to determine which results to put through their algorithms, order and return to the user. But, rather than simply recognizing and retrieving exact matches for query terms, search engines use their knowledge of semantics (the science of language) to construct intelligent matching for queries. An example might be a search for *loan providers* that also returned results that did not contain that specific phrase, but instead had the term *lenders*.

The engines collect data based on the frequency of use of terms and the co-occurrence of words and phrases throughout the web. If certain terms or phrases are often found together on pages or sites, search engines can construct intelligent theories about their relationships. Mining semantic data through the incredible corpus that is the Internet has given search engines some of the most accurate data about word ontologies and the connections between words ever assembled artificially. This immense knowledge of language and its usage gives them the ability

to determine which pages in a site are topically related, what the topic of a page or site is, how the link structure of the web divides into topical communties and much, much more.

Search engines' growing artificial intelligence on the subject of language means that queries will increasingly return more intelligent, evolved results. This heavy investment in the field of natural language processing (NLP) will help to achieve greater understanding of the meaning and intent behind their users' queries. Over the long term, users can expect the results of this work to produce increased relevancy in the SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) and more accurate guesses from the engines as to the intent of a user's queries.

Sorting the Wheat from the Chaff

In the classic world of Information Retrieval, when no commercial interests existed in the databases, very simplistic algorithms could be used to return high quality results. On the world wide web, however, the opposite is true. Commercial interests in the SERPs are a constant issue for modern search engines. With every new focus on quality control and growth in relevance metrics, there are thousands of individuals (many in the field of SEO) dedicated to manipulating these metrics in order to control the SERPs, typically by aiming to list their sites/pages first.

The worst kind of results are what the industry refers to as "search spam" - pages and sites with little real value that contain primarily re-directs to other pages, lists of links, scraped (copied) content, etc. These pages are so irrelevant and useless that search engines are highly focused on removing them from the index. Naturally, the monetary incentives are similar to email spam - although few visit and fewer click on the links (which are what provide the spam publisher with revenue), the sheer quantity is the decisive factor in producing income.

Other "spam" results range from sites that are of low quality or affiliate status that search engines would prefer not to list, to high quality sites and businesses that are using the link structure of the web to manipulate the results in their favor. Search engines are focused on clearing out all types of manipulation and hope to eventually achieve fully relevant and organic algorithms to determine ranking order. So-called "search engine spammers" engage in a constant battle against these tactics, seeking new loopholes and methods for manipulation, resulting in a never-ending struggle.

This guide is NOT about how to manipulate the search engines to achieve rankings, but rather how to create a website that search engines and users will be happy to have ranking permanently in the top positions, thanks to its relevance, quality and user friendliness.

Paid Placement and Secondary Sources in the Results

The search engine results pages contain not only listings of documents found to be relevant to the user's query, but other content, including paid advertisements and secondary source results. Google, for example, serves up ads from its well-known AdWords program (which currently fuels more than 99% of Google's revenues) as well as secondary content from its local search, product search (called Froogle) and image search results.

The sites/pages ranking in the "organic" search results receive the lion's share of searcher eyeballs and clicks - between 60-70% depending on factors such as the prominence of ads, relevance of secondary content, etc. The practice of optimization for the paid search results is called SEM or Search Engine Marketing while optimizing to rank in the secondary results requires unique, advanced methods of targeting specific searches in arenas such as local search, product search, image search and others. While all of these practices are a valuable part of any online marketing campaign, they are beyond the scope of this guide. Our sole focus remains on the "organic" results, although links at the bottom of this paper can help direct you to resources on other subjects.

How to Conduct Keyword Research

Keyword research is critical to the process of SEO. Without this component, your efforts to rank well in the major search engines may be mis-directed to the wrong terms and phrases, resulting in rankings that no one will ever see. The process of keyword research involved several phases:

1. **Brainstorming** - Thinking of what your customers/potential visitors would be likely to type in to search engines in an attempt to find the information/services your site offers (including alternate spellings, wordings, synonyms, etc).

2. **Surveying Customers** - Surveying past or potential customers is a great way to expand your keyword list to include as many terms and phrases as possible. It can also give you a good idea of what's likely to be the biggest traffic drivers and produce the highest conversion rates.

3. **Applying Data from KW Research Tools** - Several tools online (including Wordtracker & Overture - both described below) offer information about the number of times users perform specific searches. Using these tools can offer concrete data about trends in kw selection.

4. **Term Selection** - The next step is to create a matrix or chart that analyzes the terms you believe are valuable and compares traffic, relevancy and the likelihood of conversions for each. This will allow you to make the best informed decisions about which terms to target. SEOmoz's KW Difficulty Tool can also aid in choosing terms that will be achievable for the site.

5. **Performance Testing and Analytics** - After keyword selection and implementation of targeting, analytics programs (like Indextools and ClickTracks) that measure web traffic, activity and conversions can be used to further refine keyword selection.

Wordtracker & Overture

Overture Keyword Selection Tool

Get suggestions for: (may take up to 30 seconds)

joe dimaggio

Note: All suggested search terms are subject to our standard editorial review process.

Searches done in September 2005

Count	Search Term
5847	dimaggio joe
641	dimaggio joe ted williams
430	child dimaggio hospital joe
412	biography dimaggio joe
236	dimaggio hospital joe
206	dimaggio joe picture
187	dimaggio joe marilyn monroe
171	dimaggio joe stats
122	autograph dimaggio joe

Wordtracker Simple Search Utility

Searching...78 row(s) returned
Taken from all Dogpile & Metacrawler queries over the last 130 days.

Keep (?)	Keyword	Count (?)	Predict (?)
✓	joe dimaggio	164	147
✓	Joe Dimaggio	61	55
✓	Joe DiMaggio	50	45
✓	Joe Dimaggio Biography	12	11
✓	Marilyn Monroe and Joe Dimaggio	11	10
✓	joe dimaggio memorabilia	10	9
✓	marilyn monroe wedding ring to joe dimaggio	10	9

Currently, the two most popular sources of keyword data are Wordtracker, whose statistics come primarily from use of the meta-search engine Dogpile (which has ~1% of the share of searches performed online) and Overture (recently re-branded as Yahoo! Search Marketing), which offers data collected from searches performed on Yahoo!'s engine (with a 22-28% share). While neither's data is flawless or entirely accurate, both provide good methods for measuring comparative numbers. For example, while Overture and Wordtracker may disagree on numbers and say that "red bicycles" gets 240 vs. 380 searches per day (across all engines), both will generally indicate that this is a more popular term than "scarlet bicycles", "maroon bicycles" or even "blue bicycles."

In Wordtracker, which provides more detail but has a considerably smaller share of data, terms and phrases are separated by capitalization, plurality and word ordering. In the Overture tool, multiple search phrases are combined.

For example, Wordtracker would independently show numbers for "car loans", "Car Loans", "car loan" and "cars Loan", whereas Overture would give a single number that encompasses all of these. The granularity of data can be more useful for analyzing searches that may result in unique results pages (plurals often do and different word orders almost always do), but capitalization is of less consequence as the search engines don't deliver different results based on capitalization.

Remember that Wordtracker and Overture are both useful tools for relative keyword data, but can be highly inaccurate when compared to the actual number of searches performed. In other words, use the tools to select which terms to target, but don't rely on them for predicting the amount of traffic you can achieve. If your goal is estimating traffic numbers, use programs like Google's Adwords and Yahoo! Search Marketing to test the number of impressions a particular term/phrase gets.

Targeting the Right Terms

Targeting the best possible terms is of critical importance. This encompasses more than merely measuring traffic levels and choosing the highest trafficked terms. An intelligent process for keyword selection will measure each of the following:

- **Conversion Rate** - the percent of users searching with the term/phrase that convert (click an ad, buy a product, complete a transaction, etc.)

- **Predicted Traffic** - An estimate of how many users will be searching for the given term/phrase each month

- **Value per Customer** - An average amount of revenue earned per customer using the term or phrase to search - comparing big-ticket search terms vs. smaller ones.

- **Keyword Competition** - A rough measurement of the competitive environment and the level of difficulty for the given term/phrase. This is typically measured by metrics that include the number of competitors, the strength of those competitors' links and the financial motivation to be in the sector. SEOmoz's Keyword Difficulty Tool can assist in this process.

Once you've analyzed each of these elements, you can make effective decisions about the terms and phrases to target. When starting a new site, it's highly recommended to target only one or possibly two unique phrases on a single page. Although it is possible to optimize for more phrases and terms, it's generally best to keep separate terms on separate pages, as you can provide individualized information for each in this manner. As websites grow and mature, gaining links and legitimacy with the engines, targeting multiple terms per page becomes more feasible.

The Long Tail of Search

The "long tail" is a concept pioneered by Chris Anderson (the editor-in-chief of Wired magazine, who runs the Long Tail blog). From Chris's description:

The theory of the Long Tail is that our culture and economy is increasingly shifting away from a focus on a relatively small number of "hits" (mainstream products and markets) at the head of the demand curve and toward a huge number of niches in the tail. As the costs of production and distribution fall, especially online, there is now less need to lump products and consumers into one-size-fits-all containers. In an era without the constraints of physical shelf space and other bottlenecks of distribution, narrowly-target goods and services can be as economically attractive as mainstream fare.

This concept relates exceptionally well to keyword search terms in the major engines. Although the largest traffic numbers are typically for broad terms at the "head" of the keyword curve, great value lies in the thousands of unique, rarely used, niche terms in the "tail." These terms can provide higher conversion rates and more interested and valuable visitors to a site, as these specific terms can relate to exactly the topics, products and services your site provides.

For example:

Keyword Term/Phrase	# of Searches per Month
men's suit	27,770
armani men's suit	723
italian men's suit	615
Jones New York Men's Suit	424
Men's 39S Suit	310
Gucci Men's Suit	222
Versace Men's Suit	178
Hugo Boss Men's Suit	138
Men's Custom Made Suit	126
*Source - Overture Keyword Selection Tool (Sept. '05 data)	

In the scenario in the table above, the traffic for the term "men's suit" may be far greater, but the value of more specific terms is greater. A searcher for "Hugo Boss Men's Suit" is more likely to make a purchase decision than one searching for simply a "men's suit." There are also thousands of other terms, garnering far fewer monthly searches, that, when taken together, have a value greater than the terms garnering the most searches. Thus, targeting many dozens or hundreds of smaller terms individually can be both easier (on a competitive level) and more profitable.

Sample Keyword Research Chart

The following chart diagrams how we conduct basic keyword research at SEOmoz. You are welcome to copy and use this format for you own keywords:

Term/Phrase	KW Difficulty	Top 3 OV Bids	OV Mthly Pred. Traf.	WT Mthly Pred. Traf.	Relevance Score
San Diego Zoo	63%	$0.41 $0.41 $0.40	116,229	42,360	25%
Joe Dimaggio	51%	$0.28 $0.19 $0.11	5,847	7,590	10%
Starsky and Hutch	53%	$0.16 $0.00 $0.00	19,769	16,950	30%
Art Museum	77%	$0.51 $0.50 $0.25	19,244	7,410	5%
DUI Attorney	52%	$1.63 $1.62 $1.60	13,923	3,960	60%
Search Engine Marketing	83%	$4.99 $3.26 $3.25	1,183,633	74,430	40%

	KW Difficulty	Top 3 OV Bids	Overture Monthly Predicted Traffic	Wordtracker Monthly Predicted Traffic	Relevance Score
Microsoft	89%	$0.69 $0.51 $0.32	1,525,265	256,620	10%
Interest Only Mortgage Loan	50%	$4.60 $4.39 $4.39	3,745	8,910	75%

Key

- **KW Difficulty** - The score from SEOmoz's [tool](#)

- **Top 3 OV Bids** - The bid amount from the top 3 listings in Yahoo!'s PPC results

- **Overture Monthly Predicted Traffic** - The amount of traffic estimated via Overture for the previous month's data

- **Wordtracker Monthly Predicted Traffic** - The amount of traffic estimated via Wordtracker (note that you must add up all terms in their database that match and multiply by the number of days in the month - the "exact/precise search" function can help make this easier)

- **Relevance Score** - The % of searchers using this term/phrase that you feel are likely to be interested in your site's products/services/offerings. Although this is a subjective number, you can use conversion rates or click-through rates from previous campaigns to more accurately estimate this in the future.

In selecting final terms, those with lower difficulty, higher relevance and more traffic will offer the greatest value.

Critical Components of Optimizing a Site

Each of the following components are critical pieces to a site's ability to be crawled, indexed and ranked by search engine spiders. When properly used in the construction of a website, these features give a site/page the best chance of ranking well for targeted keywords.

Accessibility

An accessible site is one that ensures delivery of its content successfully as often as possible. The functionality of pages, validity of HTML elements, uptime of the site's server and working status of site coding and components all figure into site accessibility. If these features are ignored or faulty, both search engines and users will select other sites to visit.

The biggest problems in accessibility that most sites encounter fit into the following categories. Addressing these issues satisfactorily will avoid problems getting search engines and visitors to and through your site.

- **Broken Links** - If an HTML link is broken, the contents of the linked-to page may never be found. In addition, some surmise that search engines negatively degrade rankings on sites & pages with many broken links.

- **Valid HTML & CSS** - Although arguments exist about the necessity for full validation of HTML and CSS in accordance with [W3C guidelines](#), it is generally agreed that code must meet minimum requirements of functionality and successful display in order to be spidered and cached properly by the search engines.

- **Functionality of Forms and Applications** - If form submissions, select boxes, javascript or other input-required elements block content from being reached via direct hyperlinks, search engines may never find them. Keep data that you want accessible to search engines on pages that can be directly accessed via a link. In a similar vein, the successful functionality and implementation of any of these pieces is critical to a site's accessibility for visitors. A non-functioning page, form or code element is unlikely to receive much attention from visitors.

- **File Size** - With the exception of a select few documents that search engine consider to be of exceptional importance, web pages greater than 150K in size are typically not fully cached. This is done to reduce index size, bandwidth and load on the servers, and is important to anyone building pages with exceptionally large amounts of content. If it's important that every word and phrase be spidered and indexed, keeping file size under 150K is highly recommended. As with any online endeavor, smaller file size also means faster download speed for users - a worthy metric in its own right.

- **Downtime & Server Speed** - The performance of your site's server may have an adverse impact on search rankings and visitors if downtime and slow transfer speeds are common. Invest in high quality hosting to prevent this issue.

URLs, Title Tags & Meta Data

URLs, title tags and meta tag components are all information that describe your site and page to visitors and search engines. Keeping them relevant, compelling and accurate are key to ranking well. You can also use these areas as launching points for your keywords, and indeed, successful rankings require their use.

The URL of a document should ideally be as descriptive and brief as possible. If, for example, your site's structure has several levels of files and navigation, the URL should reflect this with folders and subfolders. Individual page's URLs should also be descriptive without being overly lengthy, so that a visitor who sees only the URL could have a good idea of what to expect on the page. Several examples follow:

Comparison of URLs for a Canon Powershot SD400 Camera

Amazon.com - http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0007TJ5OG/102-8372974-4064145?v=glance&n=502394&m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&n=3031001&s=photo&v=glance

Canon.com - http://consumer.usa.canon.com/ir/controller?act=ModelDetailAct&fcategoryid=145&modelid=11158

DPReview.com - http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/canonsd400/

With both Canon and Amazon, a user has virtually no idea what the URL might point to. With DPReview's logical URL, however, it is easy to surmise that a review of a Canon SD400 is the likely topic of the page.

In addition to the issues of brevity and clarity, it's also important to keep URLs limited to as few dynamic parameters as possible. A dynamic parameter is a part of the URL that provides data to a database so the proper records can be retrieved, i.e. n=3031001, v=glance, categoryid=145, etc.

Note that in both Amazon and Canon's URLs, the dynamic parameters number 3 or more. In an ideal site, there should never be more than two. Search engineer representatives have confirmed on numerous occasions that URLs with more than 2 dynamic parameters may not be spidered unless they are perceived as significantly important (i.e. have many, many links pointing to them).

Well written URLs have the additional benefit of serving as their own anchor text when copied and pasted as links in forums, blogs, or other online venues. In the DPReview example, a search engine might see the URL: http://www.dpreview.com/reviews/canonsd400/ and give ranking credit to the page for terms in the URL like dpreview, reviews, canon, sd, 400. The parsing and breaking of terms is subject to the search engine's analysis, but the chance of earning this additional credit makes writing friendly, usable URLs even more worthwhile.

Title tags, in addition to their invaluable use in targeting keyword terms for rankings, also help drive click-through-rates (CTRs) from the results pages. Most of the search engines will use a page's title tag as the blue link text and headline for a result (see image below) and thus, it is important to make them informative and compelling without being overly "salesy". The best title tags will make the targeted keywords prominent, help brand the site, and be as clear and concise as possible.

Examples and Recommendations for Title Tags

Page on Red Pandas from the Wellington Zoo:
- Current Title: Red Panda
- Recommended: Red Panda - Habitat, Features, Behavior | Wellington Zoo

Page on Alexander Calder from the Calder Foundation:
- Current Title: Alexander Calder
- Recommended: Alexander Calder - Biography of the Artist from the Calder Foundation

Page on Plasma TVs from Tiger Direct:
- Current Title: Plasma Televisions, Plasma TV, Plasma Screen TVs, SONY Plasma TV, LCD TV at TigerDirect.com
- Recommended: Plasma Screen & LCD Televisions at TigerDirect.com

For each of these, the idea behind the recommendations is to distill the information into the clearest, most useful snippet, while retaining the primary keyword phrase as the first words in the tag. The title tag provides the first impression of a web page and can either serve to draw the visitor in, or compel them to choose another listing in the results.

Meta Tag Recommendations:

Meta tags once held the distinction of being the primary realm of SEO specialists. Today, the use of meta tags, particularly the meta keywords tag, has diminished to an extent that search engines no longer use them in their ranking of pages. However, the meta description tag can still be of some import, as several search engines use this tag to display the snippet of text below the clickable title link in the results pages.
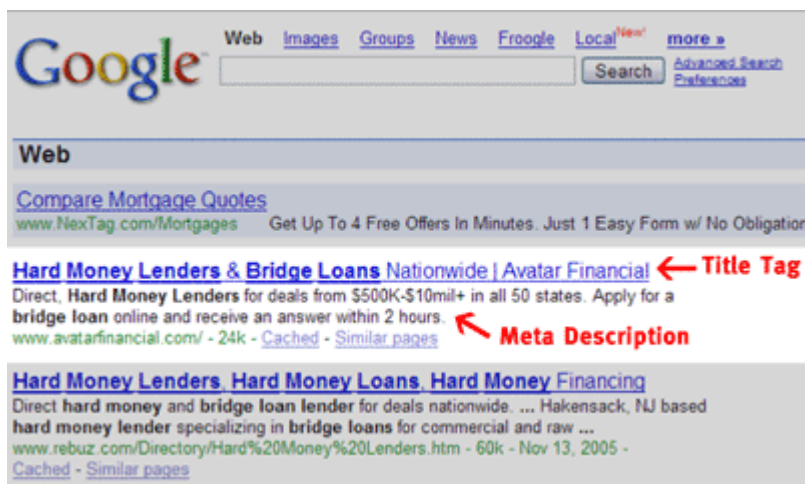
In the image to the left, an illustration of a Google SERP (Search Engine Results Page) shows the use of the meta description and title tags. It is on this page that searchers generally make their decision as to which result to click, and thus, while the meta description tag may have little to no impact on where a page ranks, it can significantly impact the # of visitors the page receives from search engine traffic. Note that meta tags are NOT always used on the SERPs, but can be seen (at the discretion of the search engine) if the description is accurate, well-written and relevant to the searcher's query.

Search Friendly Text

Making the visible text on a page "search-friendly" isn't complicated, but it is an issue that many sites struggle with. Text styles that cannot be indexed by search engines include:

- Text embedded in a Java Application or Macromedia Flash file
- Text in an image file - jpg, gif, png, etc
- Text accessible only via a form submit or other on-page action

If the search engines can't see your page's text, they cannot spider and index that content for visitors to find. Thus, making search-friendly text in HTML format is critical to ranking well and getting properly indexed. If you are forced to use a format that hides text from search engines, try to use the right keywords and phrases in headlines, title tags, URLs and image/file names on the page. Don't go overboard with this tactic, and never try to hide text (by making it the same color as the background or using CSS tricks). Even if the search engines can't detect this automatically, a competitor can easily report your site for spamming and have you de-listed entirely.

Along with making text visible, it's important to remember that search engines measure the terms and phrases in a document to extract a great deal of information about the page. Writing well for search engines is both an art and a science (as SEOs are not privy to the exact, technical methodology of how search engines score text for rankings), and one that can be harnessed to achieve better rankings.

In general, the following are basic rules that apply to optimizing on-page text for search rankings:

- **Make the primary term/phrase prominent in the document** - measurements like keyword density are useless (see kw density myth thread), but general frequency can help rankings.

- **Make the text on-topic and high quality** - Search engines use sophisticated lexical analysis to help find quality pages, as well as teams of researchers identifying common elements in high quality writing. Thus, great writing can provide benefits to rankings, as well as visitors.

- **Use an optimized document structure** - the best practice is generally to follow a journalistic format wherein the document starts with a description of the content, then flows from broad discussion of the subject to narrow. The benefits of this are arguable, but in addition to SEO value, they provide the most readable and engaging informational document. Obviously, in situations where this would be inappropriate, it's not necessary.

- **Keep text togethe**r - Many folks in SEO recommend using CSS rather than table layouts in order to keep the text flow of the document together and prevention the breaking up of text via coding. This can also be achieved with tables - simply make sure that text sections (content, ads, navigation, etc.) flow together inside a single table or row and don't have too many "nested" tables that make for broken sentences and paragraphs.

Keep in mind that the text layout and keyword usage in a document no longer carries high importance in search engine rankings. While the right structure and usage can provide a slight boost, obsessing over keyword placement or layout will provide little overall benefit.

Information Architecture

The document and link structure of a website can provide benefits to search rankings when performed properly. The keys to effective architecture are to follow the rules that govern human usability of a site:

- **Make Use of a Sitemap** - It's wise to have the sitemap page linked to from every other page in the site, or at the least from important high-level category pages and the home page. The sitemap should, ideally, offer links to all of the site's internal pages. However, if more than 100-150 pages exist on the site, a wiser system is to create a sitemap that will link to all of the category level pages, so that no page in a site is more than 2 clicks from the home page. For exceptionally large sites, this rule can be expanded to 3 clicks from the home page.

- **Use a Category Structure that Flows from Broad > Narrow** - Start with the broadest topics as hierarchical category pages, then expand to deep pages with specific topics. Using the most on-topic structure tells search engines that your site is highly relevant and covers a topic in-depth.

For more information on segmenting document structure and link hierarchies, see Dr. Garcia's excellent guide to on-topic analysis.

Canonical Issues & Duplicate Content

One of the most common and problematic issues for website builders, particularly those with larger, dynamic sites powered by databases, is the issue of duplicate content. Search engines are primarily interested in unique documents and text, and when they find multiple instances of the same content, they are likely to select a single one as "canonical" and display that page in their results.

If your site has multiple pages with the same content, either through a content management system that creates duplicates through separate navigation, or because copies exist from multiple versions, you may be hurting those pages' chances of ranking in the SERPs. In addition, the value that comes from anchor text and link weight, through both internal and external links to the page, will be diluted by multiple versions.

The solution is to take any current duplicate pages and use a 301 re-direct ([described in detail here](#)) to point all versions to a single, "canonical" edition of the content.

One very common place to look for this error is on a site's homepage - oftentimes, a website will have the same content on http://www.url.com, http://url.com and http://www.url.com/index.html. That separation alone can cause lost link value and severely damage rankings for the site's homepage. If you find many links outside the site pointing to both the non-www and the www version, it may be wise to use a 301 re-write rule to affect all pages at one so they point to the other.

Building a Traffic-Worthy Site

One of the most important (and often overlooked) subjects in SEO is building a site deserving of top rankings at the search engines. A site that ranks #1 for a set of terms in a competitive industry or market segment must be able to justify its value, or risk losing out to competitors who offer more. Search engines' goals are to rank the best, most usable, functional and informative sites first. By intertwining your site's content and performance with these goals, you can help to ensure its long term prospects in the search engine rankings.

Usability

Usability represents the ease-of-use inherent in your site's design, navigation, architecture and functionality. The idea behind the practice is to make your site intuitive so that visitors will have the best possible experience on the site. A whole host of features figure into usability, including:

- **Design**
  The graphical elements and layout of website have a strong influence on how easily usable the site is. Standards like blue, underlined links, top and side menu bars, logos in the top, left-hand corner may seem like rules that can be bent, but adherence to these elements (with which web users are already familiar) will help to make a site usable. Design also encompasses important topics like visibility & contrast, affecting how easy it is for users to interest the text and image elements of the site. Separation of unique sections like navigation, advertising, content, search bars, etc. is also critical as users follow design cues to help them understand a page's content. A final consideration would also take into account the importance of ensuring that critical elements in a site's design (like menus, logos, colors and layout) were used consistently throughout the site.

- **Information Architecture**
  The organizational hierarchy of a site can also strongly affect usability. Topics and categorization impact the ease with which a user can find the information they need on your site. While an intuitive, intelligently designed structure will seamlessly guide the user to their goals, a complex, obfuscated hierarchy can make finding information on a site disturbingly frustrating.

- **Navigation**
  A navigation system that guides users easily through both top-level and deep pages and makes a high percentage of the site easily accessible is critical to good usability. Since navigation is one of a website's primary functions, provide users with obvious navigation systems: breadcrumbs, alt tags for image links, and

well written anchor text that clearly describes what the user will get if they click a link. Navigation standards like these can drastically improve usability performance.

- **Functionality**
  To create compelling usability, ensure that tools, scripts, images, links, etc., all function as they are intended and don't provide errors to non-standard browsers, alternative operating systems or uninformed users (who often don't know what/where to click).

- **Accessibility**
  Accessibility refers primarily to the technical ability of users to access and move through your site, as well as the ability of the site to serve disabled or impaired users. For SEO purposes, the most important aspects are limiting code errors to a minimum and fixing broken links, making sure that content is accessible and visible in all browsers and without special actions.

- **Content**
  The usability of content itself is often overlooked, but its importance cannot be overstated. The descriptive nature of headlines, the accuracy of information and the quality of content all factor highly into a site's likelihood to retain visitors and gain links.

Overall, usability is about gearing a site towards the potential users. Success in this arena garners increased conversion rates, a higher chance that other sites will link to yours and a better relationship with your users (fewer complaints, lower instance of problems, etc.). For improving your knowledge of usability and the best practices, I recommend Steve Krug's exceptionally impressive book, "Don't Make Me Think"; possibly the best $30 you can spend to improve your website.

Professional Design

Elegant, high quality, high impact design is critical to gaining the trust of your users. If your site appears "low budget" or only marginally professional, it can hurt the chances of gaining a link and more importantly, the chances of engendering trust in your visitors. The first impression of a website by a user occurs in less than 7 seconds. That's all the time you have to convey the importance and authority of your company through the site's design. I've prepared two examples below:

Workplace Office UK's Website
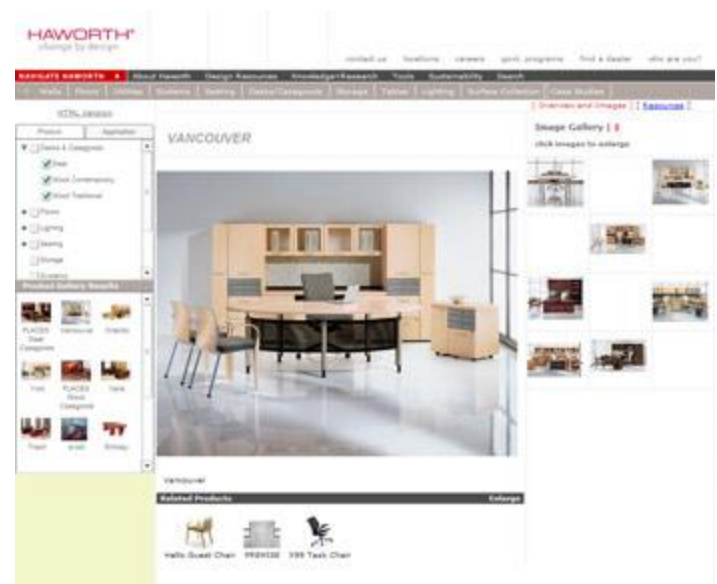
Haworth Furniture's Online Catalog

- Amateur Logo Styles
- Discordant Colors

- Well-Defined Navigation
- Elegant Color Scheme

- No Clear Navigation Element
- Basic Stock Photography
- Template-Like Layout

- Attractive Lines & Shading
- High-Quality Photography
- Design Creates Intuitive Flow to Information

Although the above examples are not perfect (note that Haworth is missing a critical element - a search bar, while Workplace Office UK has one), it's easy to see why consumers visiting websites like these would be more inclined to trust and buy from Haworth rather than Workplace Office. The application of professional design to sites can induce greater numbers of links from visiting content creators, greater number of users who return to the site, higher conversion rates and a better overall perception of your site by visitors.

Although high quality, professional design is not one of the factors directly ranked by search engines, it indirectly influences many factors that do affect the rankings (i.e. link-building, trust, usability, etc).

Authoring High Quality Content

Why Should a Search Engine Rank Your Site Above all the Others in its Field?

If you cannot answer this question clearly and precisely, the task of ranking higher will be exponentially more difficult. Search engines attempt to rank the very best sites with the most relevant content first in their results, and until your site's content is the best in its field, you will always struggle against the engines rather than bringing them to your doorstep.

It is in content quality that a site's true potential shows through, and although search engines cannot measure the likelihood that users will enjoy a site, the vote via links system operates as a proxy for identifying the best content in a market. With great content, therefore, come great links and, ultimately, high rankings. Deliver the content that users need, and the search engines will reward your site.

Content quality, however, like professional design, is not always dictated by strict rules and guidelines. What passes for "best of class" in one sector may be below average in another market. The competitiveness and interests of your peers and competitors in a space often determine what kind of content is necessary to rank. Despite these variances, however, several guidelines can be almost universally applied to produce content that is worthy of attention:

- **Research Your Field**
  Get out into the forums, blogs and communities where folks in your industry spend their online discussion time. Note the most frequently asked questions, the most up-to-date topics and the posts or headlines that generate the most interest. Apply this knowledge when you create high quality content and directly address your market's needs. If 10,000 people in the botany field are seeking articles that contain more illustrated diagrams instead of just photos, delivering that piece can set your content (and your site) apart from the competition.

- **Consult and Publish in Partnership with Industry Experts**
  In any industry, there will be high-level, publically prominent experts as well as a second tier of "well-known in web circles" folks. Targeting either of these groups for collaborative efforts in publishing articles, reviewing your work or contributing (even via a few small quotes) can be immensely valuable. In this manner, you can be assured that your content is both link and visitor-worthy. In addition, when partnering with "experts", exposure methods are built-in, creating natural promotion angles.

- **Create Documents that Can Serve as One-Stop Resources**
  If you can provide a single article or resource that provides every aspect of what a potential visitor or searcher might be seeking, your chances for success in SEO go up. An "all-in-one" resource can provide more opportunities than a single subject resource in many cases. Don't be too broad as you attempt to execute this kind of content creation - it's still important to keep a narrow focus when you create your piece. The best balance can be found by putting yourself in the potential users' shoes - if your piece fits their needs and covers every side of their possible interests, while remaining "on-message," you're ready to proceed.

- **Provide Unique Information**
  Make sure that when you design your content outline, you include data and information that can be found nowhere else. While collecting and amalgamating information across the web can create good content, it is the unique elements in your work that will be noticed and recommended.

- **Serve Important Content in a Non-Commercial Format**
  Creating a document format that is non-commercial is of exceptional importance for attracting links and attention. The communities of web and content builders is particularly attuned to the commercialization of the web and will consciously and sub-consciously link to and recommend resources that don't serve prominent or interfering advertising. If you must post ads, do so as subtlety and unobtrusively as possible.

- **One Great Page is Worth a Thousand Good Pages**
  While hundreds or dozens of on-topic pages that cover sections of an industry are valuable to a website's growth, it is actually far better to invest a significant amount of time and energy producing a few articles/resources of truly exceptional quality. To create documents that become "industry standard" on the web and are pointed to time after time as the "source" for further investigations, claims, documents, etc. is to truly succeed in the rankings battle. The value of "owning" this traffic and link source far outweighs a myriad of articles that are rarely read or linked to.

Link Bait

When attempting to create the most link-worthy content, thinking outside the box and creating a document, tool or service that's truly revolutionary can provide a necessary boost. Even on corporate image or branding sites for small companies, a single, exciting piece of content that gets picked up en masse by your web community is worth a small fortune in public relations and exposure. Better still, the links you earn with an exciting release stay with your site for a long time, providing search visibility long after the event itself has been forgotten.

With content that generates links becoming such a valuable commodity, creating solely for the purpose of gaining links has become a popular practice for talented SEOs. In order to capitalize on this phenomenon, it's necessary to brainstorm. Below are some initial ideas that can help you build the content you need to generate great links.

- **Free Tools**
  Automated tools that query data sources, combine information or conduct useful calculations are eminently link worthy. Think along the lines of mortgage calculators and site-checking tools, then expand into your particular area of business/operation.

- **Web 2.0 Applications**
  Although the term Web 2.0 is more of a buzzword than a technicality, applications that fit the feature set described by the O'Reilly document do get a fantastic number of links from the web community and followers of this trend. Think mashups, maps, communities, sharing, tagging, RSS and blogs.

- **Collaborative Work Documents**
  Working in concert with others is a good way to produce content more quickly and with generally higher quality. If you can get high-profile insiders or several known persons in an industry to collaborate, your chances for developing "link-bait" substantially increase.

- **Exposes of Nefarious Deeds**
  Writing a journalistic-style exposé detailing the misdeeds of others (be they organizations, websites, individuals or companies) can generate a lot of links and traffic if done in a professional manner (and before anyone else). Make sure you're very careful with these types of actions, however, as the backlash can be worse than the benefit if your actions provoke the wrong type of response.

- **Top 10 Lists**
  Numbered lists (of tips, links, resources, etc.), particularly those that rank items, can be a great way to generate buzz. These lists often promote discussion and thus, referencing.

- **Industry-Related Humor**
  Even the most serious of industries can use a bit of humor now and again. As with exposés, be cautious not to offend (although that too can merit mentions) - use your knowledge of stereotypes and history inside your market to get topical laughs and the links will be yours.

- **Reviews of Events**
  Industry gatherings, from pubcrawls to conferences to speeches and seminars, can all garner great links with a well-done review. Write professionally, as a journalist, and attempt to use as many full names as possible. It's also wise to link out to all the folks you mention, as they will see the links in their referral logs and come check you out.

- **Interviews with Well-Known Insiders**
  Anyone inside an industry whose name frequently appears in that industry's internal press is a great candidate for an interview. Even if it's a few short questions over email, a revealing interview can be a great source of links and esteemed professionals are likely to answer requests even from smaller sources as they can benefit from the attention, too.

- **Surveys or Collections of Data**
  Offering large collections of industry data culled from polling individuals, an online survey or simply researching and aggregating data can provide a very link-worthy resource.

- **Film or Animation**
  Particularly in industries where video clips or animations are rare (i.e. Geology, not Movie Reviews), a high quality, entertaining or informative video or animation can get more than a few folks interested.

- **Charts, Graphs or Spreadsheets**
  These standard business graphics should certainly include analysis and dissection, but can provide a good source of links if promoted and built properly.

- **High Profile Criticism**
  Similar to the exposé system, well-written critiques of popular products, companies, sites or individuals in a sector have the ability to pull in quite a few links from folks who agree and disagree.

- **Contests, Giveaways and Competitions**
  Giving away prizes or public awards (even if they're just website graphics) can get a lot of online folks interested and linking.

- **Trend-Spotting**
  Identifying a story ahead of the crowd is commonly called "scooping" in journalism. Do this online, and all (or many) blog posts on the subject will reference your site as the first to "call it."

- **Advice from Multiple Experts**
  If you're creating an article that offers advice, pulling opinions from the well-known experts in the industry is a great way to make sure links flow your way. The experts themselves will often be inclined to link.

There are dozens of other great ways to get bloggers, writers and website editors in your field to add links to your site. Imagine yourself as an industry blogger, seeking to cover the most exciting, unique trends and pages in the sector. If this individual stumbled across your content, would they be likely to write about it? If the answer is yes, it qualifies as link-bait.

Growing a Site's Popularity

While developing a great website is half of the SEO equation, the other half is promotion. Search engines are very particular about growing their ability to detect artificial manipulation and link spam, so effective SEOs who want to promote sites to the fullest extent must use natural, organic link building processes in order to have success.

The techniques and approaches described below are all ultimately designed to improve search engine rankings by growing the number and quality of links that point to a website. However, each also offers natural growth of your user base and provides visitors that come through systems other than search engines. Strangely, although the goal of SEO is better search rankings, the best sites in each industry often receive 50% or fewer of their total visitors from search engine. Why? Because if thousands of visitors are anxiously visiting your site via bookmarks, links and direct type-ins at the address bar, you've achieved the content and status necessary to not only be ranked exceptionally well, but have visitors that know your site and want to visit, no matter what the search engines say. This methodology is particularly valuable because a site that doesn't rely entirely on search engines for traffic, ironically, has a far better chance of getting visitors through them.

Community Building

Creating a user base that develops into a full-scale community is no easy task, but it's one of the holy grails of online marketing and promotion. The idea is to develop frequently updated content in the form of a blog, forum, wiki or other muti-user input system that can become a central reference and gathering point for a significant number of individuals in an industry.

Once a community is established, the input of individual members and coverage of events in these systems are natural sources for incoming links from bloggers and writers in the field, be they members or simply browsers. In addition, many members who run sites of their own will point to the community as their gathering place, creating even greater link value. Community building requires finesse and good online relationship skills, but the rewards are tremendous.

Press Releases and Public Relations

Influencing mainstream or niche press outlets to cover your company or its actions can be a highly effective way to drive attention to your site, which, if link worthy, can earn a fantastic number of links in short order. Press release sites like PRNewsWire and PRWeb are good starting places for driving traffic and links, and as both feed the major online news search engines (Yahoo! & Google News) they can provide high visibility as well. Optimizing press releases is a unique practice in and of itself - placement of text in the title and in visible headlines, compelling story writing and proper content structure are all important elements. One of the most touted experts in this field (Greg Jarboe) runs a site with specific advice (SEO-PR) on the subject of optimizing press releases in particular.

Beyond releases, however, is influencing journalists to write editorial news stories about your subject and including a link or mention of your site. Some of the most highly touted PR (public relations) firms in the world charge a fortune for this service, but on a small scale, it can be performed in-house. The trick is to have content and information so compelling and interesting that journalists would love to cover it. If you have the makings of a great story with a near-perfect fit for your site, email a few journalists whose work you've found to be on similar topics. Don't start with the New York Times, though. Go local, independent and friendly to increase your chances of success. For a great example of how standard PR techniques operate, read Paul Graham's article on the effectiveness of PR firms on the web.

Link Building Based on Competitive Analysis

Looking at the links obtained by your top competitors and pursuing methods of your own to get listed on those sites/pages is an excellent way to stay competitive in the link building race. It's also a good way to get natural traffic, as these are the links and sites that send your competitors their traffic, they will also bring visitors to your site. The methodology for investigating a competitor's links is fairly straightforward, although more complex methods can be used by the advanced researcher.

The best source of linkage data is Yahoo!. Google purposely does not report accurate link data with their link: command and MSN's rankings of links can often show less valuable and effective links at the top. Yahoo!, however,

currently shows the greatest accuracy in numbers of links, and also sorts well, typically placing more valuable links near the top of the results.
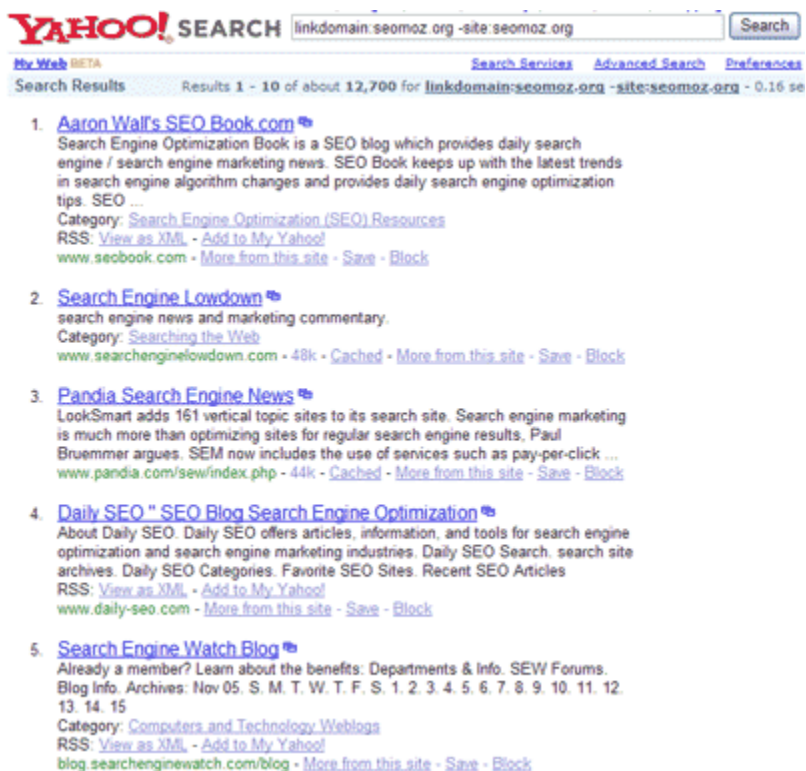
At Yahoo!, the following searches can be used to find pages that link to other sites/pages:

1. **Linkdomain:url.com**
   This command will show you all the pages that link to any page hosted at the domain url.com.

2. **Link:http://www.url.com/page.html**
   This command will show only those pages which link directly to the specified page.

3. **Linkdomain:url.com word**
   This search will show all pagess with the term "word" that link to pages hosted at the URL. You can use this to find topical linking pages that may be providing benefit for specific areas.

4. **Linkdomain:url.com -term**
   Use the - sign to indicate that pages which include a particular term should be excluded from the search, for example, searching for all links that point to a site that don't contain your company name on the page (i.e. linkdomain:seobook.com -seomoz). Note that searches can contain multiple - signs and terms if you require very specific information (or wish to exclude lots of noisy data).

5. **Linkdomain:url.com -site:url.com**
   In addition to the - sign as a term remover, you can remove sites from the results as well. This can be especially valuable if one large site links to the target site on every page, and you wish to see the links that don't include that site. It can also be valuable to remove the site itself, (i.e. linkdomain:seomoz.org -site:seomoz.org), so as not to see results from internal pages.

Competitive analysis also includes using the top search results themselves as sources for links. If a site or page ranks particularly well for many related searches, a link from that site can send a healthy number of interested surfers to you. Rankings in the SERPs is also an excellent way to determine the value of a link, so if a page ranks highly for the term or phrase you're targeting, a link from that page is sure to provide great assistance in your goal to achieve top placement.

Building Personality & Reputation

The cult of personality on the Internet provides excellent opportunities for charismatic, well-written individuals to make headlines, friends and links through online networking. A variety of social interaction sites operate across industries on the web, delivering ready-made sources for building a reputation and earning links. The keys to this methodology are to provide honest, intelligent contributions to existing discussions while maintaining a connection between yourself and the communities.

Online forums are great places to start, and can frequently lead to additional venues for the engagement of your colleagues. In building a successful reputation in an online forum, honesty, integrity and openness provide the best chances to be taken seriously and seen by others as an expert on your subject matter. Forums typically offer a built-in system for referring folks to your site - the signature link. Although debate exists on whether search engines count these links for ranking purposes, there can be little doubt about their effectiveness in driving forum visitors to your site. One last tip for forums is to use a single link to your site in your signature - ensuring that people identify you with one unique online property, rather than several. Combining these effective techniques of forum posting and signature links with blogging can also be very valuable.

In addition to forums, outlets like blog comments (which frequently use the "nofollow" attribute, and are thus valuable for live visitors but not search engines), ICQ Channels, chatrooms, Google groups and privately hosted boards or chatrooms can all serve a similar purpose. Stay consistent in each format - using the same voice, avatar (the accompanying photo on many forums) and username in order to build reputation and recognition.

Highly Competitive Terms & Phrases

For some terms and phrases, even the best websites with the most diligent promotional efforts will have a very difficult time penetrating the top 10-20 results. In these instances, it can be tempting to rely on efforts outside of the search engines' guidelines. However strong this temptation may be, be advised that search engines do not tolerate spam or manipulation via automated links, nor do they allow such results to flourish for long. Although these methods, commonly referred to as "black hat SEO", may have some effectiveness in the short term, they have little chance of long-term success in the SERPs and may become permanently banned from search results.

For highly competitive results (from "mortgage" to "car insurance" to "university degree"), targeting the above described "long tail" (the more niche related search terms for which a smaller degree of heavy competition exists) can be the best method. Search engines are also careful to consider the age of a site and its links, and give heavy weight to those sites with long-held, highly trusted links. Thus, while rankings may be sparse at first, over time, an enterprising site owner can achieve some measure of notice, even in the most competitive of searches.

Conclusion: Implementing an SEO Strategy

The process of SEO is not easy to tackle, largely because so many pieces of a site factor into the final results. Promoting a site that writers on the web are unlikely to link to is as deadly as creating a fantastic website no one will see. SEO is also a long-term process, both in application and results - those who expect quick rankings after completing a few suggestions in this guide will be deeply dissapointed. Search engines can often be frustratingly slow to respond to improvements that will eventually garner significant boosts in traffic.

Patience is not the only virtue that should be used for successful SEO. The strategy itself must have a strong foundation in order to succeed. The best site's adhere strictly to these guidelines:

1. **Unique Content** - Something that has never before been offered on the web in terms of depth, quality or presentation (i.e. a unique value proposition)

2. **Access to an Adoptive Community** - Connections or alliances with people/websites in an existing online community that is ready to accept, visit and promote your offering

3. **Link-Friendly Formatting** - Even the best content may be unlikely to be linked to if it displays ads, particularly those that break up the page content or pop-up when a visitor comes to the site. Use discretion in

presenting your material and remember that links are one of the most valuable commodities a site/page can get and they'll last far longer than a pop-up ad's revenue.

4. **Monetization Plan** - Intelligent systems for monetizing powerful content must exist, or bandwidth, hosting and development costs will eventually overrun your budget.

5. **Market Awareness** - If your site is targeting highly competitive terms you should make available, an online marketing budget, including funds for link buying, and hire or consult with someone experienced in bringing newer sites to the top of the SERPs.

If you take these steps and have a robust knowledge of the methods described in this guide, you are ready to begin an SEO campaign.

Quantity vs. Quality

In order to optimize a site to rank well in the search engines, diligent attention to the quality of your website and the effectiveness of your promotional tactics. While creating thousands of pages targeting every conceivable keyword may seem like a viable tactic, in fact, a single, phenomenal article or content source on a single term is far more likely to be profitable and less likely to be flagged for spam by the search engines.

This same rule applies to the sphere of promotion. While thousands of low quality, spammy pages or reciprocal free-for-all links pointing to you may provide some boost in the SERPs, a far greater effect can be achieved with just a few highly valuable, well-placed links from relevant sources that will drive both traffic and rankings. In the age of advanced link spam analysis, search engines will give greater credit to one link from CNN.com, Berkeley.edu or Usability.gov than from 50,000 guestbooks, forum signatures or reciprocal link directories.

Measuring Success: Website and Ranking Metrics to Watch

One of the most valuable sources for data, analysis and refinement in an SEO campaign is in the statistics available via website tracking and measuring programs. A good analytics program can provide an incredible amount of data that can be used to track your visitors and make decisions about who to target in the future and how to do it.

Below is a short list of the most valuable elements in visitor tracking:

- **Campaign Tracking** - The ability to put specific URLs or referrer strings onto ads, emails or links and track their success.

- **Action Tracking** - Adding the ability to track certain actions on a site like form submission, newsletter signups, add to cart buttons, checkout or transaction completions and tying them together with campaigns and keyword tracking so you know what ads, links, terms and campaigns are bringing you the best visitors.

- **Search Engine Referral Tracking** - Seeing which search engines sent which visitors over time and tracking the terms and phrases they used to reach your site. Combined with action tracking, this can help you determine which terms are most valuable to target.

- **Referring URLs & Domain Tracking** - This allows you to see what URLs and domains are responsible for sending you traffic. By tracking these individually, you can see where your most valuable links are coming from.

- **First-Time vs. Return Visitors** - Find out what percentage of your visitors are coming back each day/week/month. This can help you to figure out how "sticky" and consistently interesting your site is.

- **Entry Pages** - Which pages are attracting the most visitors and which are converting them. You can also see pages that have a very high rate of loss - those pages which don't do a good job pulling people into the site.

- **Visitor Demographics** - Where are your visitors coming from, what browsers are they using, what time do they visit? All these questions and many more can be answered with demographics.

- **Click Path Analysis** - What paths do your visitors follow when they get to your site? This data can help you make more logical streams of pages for visitors to use as they navigate your site, attempting to find information or complete a task.

- **Popular Pages** - Which pages get the most visitors and which are neglected? Use this data to help improve low popularity pages and emulate highly trafficked ones.

- **Page Views per Session** - This data can tell you how many pages each visitor to your site is viewing - another metric used to measure "stickiness."

Applying the information you learn from your visitor tracking is a science unto its own. Experience and common sense should help to discover which terms, visitors, referrers and demographics are most valuable to your site, enabling you to make the best possible decisions about how and where to target.

Working with a Pro vs. Do-It-Yourself SEO

As in many other areas of web development, a long-standing argument exists between those who feel that learning and practicing SEO should be done in-house, vs. those who feel it is best left to the professionals. There are advantages to either side, and it's best to weigh these against each other when making a final decision:

Advantages of Working with a Professional SEO

- **Diverse Experience** - Professionals with several years of SEO experience under their belts can tell you what to expect from the search engines as you conduct the optimization process. They can also interpret and understand rankings data and "hiccups" in the results that may indicate certain trends or strategies that should be implemented or avoided.

- **Pre-Existing Relationships** - Many SEOs have contacts inside the SEO industry to folks with experience in certain fields, expertise in unique areas (i.e. press releases, article distribution, directories, etc.) that can have a great impact on the success of your efforts. Several SEOs even have personal relationships with the folks at the search engines, although the use of these contacts is very rare and SE representatives pride themselves on not showing favoritism.

- **Link Building Knowledge** - Professionals will have the ability to quickly identify topical communities and the most popular and relevant sites in them, saving time when link building. SEOs also have considerable experience with link acquisition, and will recognize the requirements of certain sites for paid links, link requests, etc.

- **Identifying Linkable Content** - SEOs are often masters of crafting and launching content. Not only can they identify the content most likely to get links from the specific web community, they're also experienced in how to package and promote it.

- **Fixing Possible Problems** - Professionals are competent at identifying and managing issues that can cause a lack of indexing, low rankings or penalties from the search engines. This is a skill that can be very hard to develop without years of practice and experience. If you have a ranking issue, an SEO can be of great value.

- **Time Savings** - SEO can be an exceptionally time-consuming endeavor. An experienced SEO has the processes and systems of optimization down to a science, and can use that efficiency to provide better service in less time.

Advantages of Do-It-Yourself SEO

- **Complete Control** - With personal responsibility comes complete control for each element of your site's progress. There can be no question as to who or what created a link or modified a document.

- **Learn from Your Actions** - The ebb and flow of the SERPs will quickly teach an amateur SEO what what works and what doesn't. Certain links, timing and on-page changes will be fully visible and recordable, making it a learning process.

- **Personal Responsibility** - Your success or failure will depend entirely on your own efforts, narrowing responsibility and preventing overlaps in work or issues of blame.

- **Cost Savings** - Doing SEO yourself means you don't have to pay someone else. If you find that your time is less expensive than hiring an outsourced provider, do-it-yourself SEO can be a great way to save money.

With these pieces of information in mind, you're prepared to make an informed decision. Remember, too, that many SEOs offer consulting services, which provide you with a strategic plan that can be implemented and a helpful consultant to provide advice as needed on the project. This type of arrangement may offer a good balance if you're torn about which direction to choose. Look for costs between $100-$300 per hour depending on the experience and notoriety of the consultant.

If you choose to outsource to an SEO firm, be well aware of the many pitfalls that await the uninformed. SEO has classically been an industry that has attracted many untrustworthy and dishonorable firms, resulting in an unfortunate perception from many. Pay particular attention to the following:

- **Manipulation & Search Spam** - Overly aggressive tactics can get you banned from search engines

- **Link Exchanges & Free-for-All Links** – While the promise of easy link building through link exchanges or link farms is tempting, these tactics often achieve subpar results. Natural, organic inbound links from sites that your competitors can't get links from are the best way to rank well in the long term

- **Optimizing Pages for Search Engines vs. Visitors** – Professional SEOs should have specialist copywriters who can craft well-written pages that attract both users and search engines. Repetitive keyword use (as noted above) is largely useless, but compelling, intelligent dialogue is a great way to get both searchers and engines interested in your content.

- **Guaranteed Rankings** – Guaranteeing rankings is often one of the first indications that you're dealing with a less-than-reputable firm. No SEO can guarantee rankings, because the search engines are responsible for the results and are constantly changing. Be wary, too, of promised success at "thousands of engines" (remember that the top 4 account for 95%+ of all search traffic), daily submission (completely unnecessary) and other "tricks" or "secrets". Great rankings come from having great sites with quality links – no tricks or secrets required.

- **Investigate** – The firm you work with should be able to provide references, preferably from both customers and industry folks that will let you know their skill and ability. Use your best judgment here – if a review or response seems canned or fishy, it probably is.

Finally, if you opt for do-it-yourself-SEO, be aware that are many, many parts of the SEO process not covered by this guide. SEO is a practice that has even the most respected professionals learning and researching every day to keep with trends on the web and algorithmic shifts in the search engines. A business or site owner will certainly want to join several SEO web communities (see the list in the links section) and keep up-to-date with information and best practices from the industry experts.

Where to Get Questions Answered

Whether you're considering running an SEO campaign yourself, or hiring a professional, there are thousands of additional questions about the practice that I discover each day. Getting these questions answered quickly, with the best possible information, may require paying an SEO consultant, but the online SEO forums offer a second alternative.

Of particular value is the "Website Hospital" at Cre8asiteForums, where some of the world's best SEO professionals (including many of the folks who contributed to the creation of this guide) offer advice and input about posted websites. Other forums, like HighRankings & SearchEngineWatch can provide good advice in both general and specific areas of SEO. A full list of forums can be found in this guide's list of resources.

Finally, if after reading this guide, you have questions that need a quick, direct response, you're always welcome to email Rand (the author).

Links to More Information and Resources

Daily Blogs on SEO/M

- Threadwatch - A popular community blog on all things search
- SearchEngineWatch Blog - SEW, operated by Danny Sullivan, is one of the most respected sources for SEO and search news inside and outside the webdev community
- SEO-Scoop - Donna Fontenot's personal and often introspective take on SEO
- StuntDubl - Todd Malicoat's SEO tips and tricks journal
- Cre8pc Blog - Kim Krause Berg presents on usability, marketing, webdev and the search markets
- Jim Boykin's SEO Thoughts - The owner of WeBuildPages, a reknowned development and SEO shop, Jim's blog is geared to industry insiders and those who want an expert view
- Matt Cutts - One of Google's search engineers, Matt is Google's official representative to the SEO world
- SERoundtable - Barry Schwartz's roundup of all things search related
- SEOBook - Aaron Wall's accompaniment to his excellent book on SEO
- Link Building Blog - Patrick Gavin and Andy Hagans of Text Link Ads combine for great advice on the subject of where and how to get links to your site
- Search Engine Journal - Loren Baker's collection of posts and guest writers about events and phenomenon in SEO/M
- Marketing Pilgrim - Andy Beal's journal of the search engine space and SEO events
- Google Blogoscoped - Philipp Lenssen's journal of Google events, with an SEO bend

SEO/M & Webdev Forums

- Cre8asite Forums - Cre8asite is an open community of dedicated SEOs, usablity professionals, web developers and others who come together to provide some of the best advice related to online marketing and development on the net. It's also where you'll find myself (randfish) moderating and posting on a daily basis
- SEW Forums - Danny Sullivan's Search Engine Watch website's online forums. A place where many high visibility folks in the SEO/M space come to post
- HighRankings Forums - Jill Whalen, a very well-known and respected SEO runs HighRankings, a place where you'll also find experts like Scottie Claiborne, Dan Thies and Alan Perkins
- DigitalPoint Forums - Shawn Hogan's incredibly popular (and somewhat noisy) forum on everything related to the web
- WebProWorld Forums - A large, web development and SEO forum with a very diverse group of posters

Industry Conferences

- Search Engine Strategies (SES) Conferences - Each year, SES runs 6-10 conferences worldwide, including several shows in North America that I'll typically speak at
- WebMasterWorld (WMW) Conferences - 2-3 Times each year, Brett Tabke, the owner of WMW runs conferences that attract a large group of SEOs
- Ad:Tech - An interactive marketing conference that has begun to address many of the issues of SEO and search marketing as well
- SEO by the Sea - An industry insider event sponsored by Bill Slawski as well as a blog on SEO events and subjects

How Search Engines Operate

- [Modern Information Retrieval](#) - The reference standard textbook on Information Retrieval Science by Ricardo Baeza-Yates
- [How Search Engines Work](#) - from Danny Sullivan in 2002
- [Search Engine Reference Page](#) - from Wikipedia
- [The Anatomy of a Large-Scale Hypertextual Web Search Engine](#) - by Larry Page & Sergey Brin, founders of Google
- [A Comparison of Search Engines and a Guide to How they Operate](#) - from Berkeley University's Internet Guide
- [List of IR Resources Online and Books/Publications](#) - from Avi Rappoport of SearchTools.com

Link Analysis

- [Search Engine Ranking Factors](#) - From SEOmoz, see section on "Factors Affecting the Value of a Link" for link analysis information
- [Block Level Link Analysis](#) - From Microsoft Research on how search engines can segment pages into pieces of content to help devalue links from non editorial content

Keyword Research

- [Wordtracker](#) - Keyword research software
- [Overture Tools](#) - Measuring keyword popularity
- [Digitalpoint KW Tool](#) - Free data from Overture & Wordtracker (though shortened in each)
- [Keyword Research Services](#) - From Dan Thies; $100 reports are worth thousands
- [Dan Thies' Blog at Sitepoint](#) - Coverage of a range of SEO issues with a focus on KW research
- [Measuring Keyword Competition](#) - HighRankings Thread (9 Pages)

Accessibility

- [Dive into Accessibility](#) - From Mark Pilgrim, a guide to making a site accessible in 30 days
- [Making a Great Website for Everyone](#) - From Carmen Mardiros of Mardiros Internet Marketing
- [Mistakes to Avoid](#) - From IBM's articles on WebDev

Information Architecture

- [Louis Rosenfeld](#) - Information Architecture expert and author of the O'Reilly Book on the subject
- [Introduction to Information Architecture](#) - from Subha Subramanian at Sitepoint

Duplicate Content Issues

- [Copyscape](#) - Tool to search for copies of your pages on the web
- [Aaron Wall on Dup Content Penalties](#) - Citing posts at WMW
- [Review of Dr. Garcia's Speach at SES San Jose on Dup Content](#) - From SERoundtable
- [What is Duplicate Content](#) - From Sitepoint Forums

Usability

- [Steve Krug](#) - Usability consultant and author of *Don't Make Me Think*, my favorite book on usability
- [Kim Krause Berg's Usability Reports](#) - A steal for a corporate review at $675
- [Usability Guidelines](#) - From the National Cancer Institute; a great list
- [Website Usability Evaluation Form](#) - From MIT

Web Design

- [A List Apart](#) - Blog and Resources for Web Designers

- [Applying CSS to Web Design](#) - from Intensivstation
- [Using Pattern Design to Lay Out Web Pages](#) - from 37 Signals
- [Sample Web Color Schemes](#) - from Return of Design
- [Biggest Design Mistakes of 2004](#) - from Web Pages That Suck

Content Writing for the Web

- [50 Writing Tools](#) - from Poynter Online
- [Write Effectively for the Web](#) - from the LifeHacker blog
- [Resurrect Your Writing](#) - from Digital Web Magazine
- [Writing, Briefly](#) - from Paul Graham
- [The Nitty-Gritty of Writing for Search Engines](#) - from Jill Whalen (of HighRankings), it's $50 but worth every penny
- [Crappy Content](#) - thread from HighRankings forum by Scottie Claiborne

Link Bait

- [The Art of Linkbaiting](#) - by Nick Wilson of Performancing
- [Linkbaiting for Fun & Profit](#) - by yours truly at Search Engine Journal
- [Examples of Link Bait](#) - from SEOBook

Community Building

- [20 Tips for Community Building](#) - from Threadwatch
- [Implementing a Forum](#) - a HighRankings thread with lots of generalized tips on community, too
- [Building an Online Community](#) - from Digital Web Magazine

Press Releases

- [Optimization of Press Releases](#) - Paid services from SEO-PR
- [Writing for the Press](#) - From Michael Iwalaski in the HighRankings Newsletter
- [Online PR and Press Release Optimization](#) - by Lee Odden at ISEdb
- [Press Release Service](#) - From PRWeb (free and paid options)
- [Press Release Service](#) - From PRNewswire (also has free and paid options)

Public Relations

- [Public Relations as a Submarine](#) - from Paul Graham
- [Trends to Watch in PR](#) - by Erica Iacono at PR Week
- [List of Popular PR Weblogs](#) - from PubSub
- [How to Get Blogged](#) - from TechCrunch

Link Building

- [Advanced Link Building Tactics](#) - from SEOmoz
- [131 Link Building Strategies](#) - from Chris Sherman at SEW
- [Technique for Selecting Sites for a Link Request](#) - by Eric Ward (see more articles from Eric, the godfather of linking, [here](#))
- [Jump Start Link Building (while dodging the Sandbox)](#) - by Andy Hagans

Search Spam

- [Google](#), [Yahoo!](#) & [MSN](#) - Spam reporting links for each of the major search engines

- [Debate on White Hat vs. Black Hat SEO Techniques](#) - from SEOmoz, a discussion on the pros and cons of spamming the search engines
- [Manipulating Search Rankings](#) - An interview with Greg Boser of WebGuerilla in Wired News
- [SpamDexing](#) - Another name for search engine spamming; definition from Wikipedia

Website Analytics and Visitor Tracking

- [Web Metrics](#) - Book by Jim Sterne
- [Key Performance Indicators to Track](#) - from the Web Analytics Association
- Web Analytics for Retailers, Parts [1](#), [2](#) & [3](#) - by Brian Eisenberg at ClickZ
- [Top 10 Ways to Use Analytics to Improve your Site](#) - from Conversion Rater
- [Web Analytics Blog](#) - from Omniture

Selecting an SEO/M Firm

- [SEOmoz's List of Trusted SEO/M Firms](#) - I've personally met or worked with all of the folks on this list and can vouch for their ability and integrity
- [Google's Recommendations for Choosing an SEO Firm](#) - with advice on how to avoid companies that could hurt your site
- [Resources to Help Select a Firm](#) - from Lee Odden of TopRank Marketing
- [Reputable SEO Companies](#) - Thread from SEW Forums
- [Checklist of What to Look for in an SEO Company](#) - from Stuntdubl