

## "Search Engine Ranking Factors - What You Need To Do NOW To Help You Get Top 10 Rankings"

Search engine algorithms are becoming increasingly complex and they keep changing every day. Not everyone can be expected to do the hard work, keep up with the details and figure out exactly what the search engines want – in fact most people are still unclear on what the basics of search engine optimization are. Asking regular people who are trying to establish a business online to figure all of that stuff out is too much.

This article will do two things. First, I'll discuss what search engines are aiming for when they rank and index web pages (in the search engine wars you have to be familiar with the battlefield). After that, I'll give you a rundown of the most **important search engine ranking factors** that, in my view, will do your websites a load of good not only in getting indexed **fast**, but also in getting high rankings across the search engines.

### The Holy Grail Of Search

Let's start with what I like to call the "Holy Grail of Search" – this differs for each individual search engine but to generalize, here is a brief definition:

*To deliver the most relevant result to a user's search query.*

That statement sounds meaningless until we define 'relevant' as well. A relevant result is one that:

- Matches directly with the user's search term
- Is correct and authentic – information that is accurate
- Is NOT a copy of another web page
- Is informative
- Provides the ability to dig deeper into the topic
- Gives an answer quickly and effectively

To put all the above into an example:

If I search for car repair service in New Jersey, the answer (the web page delivered to me as the top result) should be:

- On or about car repair services (or a particular car repair service) in new jersey (and not a gambling site operating out of Mexico)
- Should give me details on car repair services in New Jersey – stuff that I can use to contact them, evaluate how good they are, find out how much they charge, etc.
- If it's not a specific site, it should give me links to different car repair services in the region – and if there's analysis on each service, that's even better
- Should be **focused** on that topic – a web page that focuses on one topic as compared to a web page that is about several different topics is 'cluttered' – note that this does not always apply to a website – clutter on a web page is bad, avoid it.

Ideally, the first result should provide all the answers a user needs. In reality, you get a bunch of 'best fit' web pages that are *most likely* to match your question / search. This is a result of building an automated system – and it also shows that:

- No answer is perfect.

- Everyone has a chance to be on top of that list if they can get at what the search engines are looking for.

To arrive at their list of best-fit web pages, search engines use a mixture of on-page and off-page factors to determine rankings for specific keywords. **On-page factors** are those elements that can be evaluated directly from a web page document (such as the title tag, keyword frequency, and also details about the website the page is on). **Off-page factors** basically refer to link-based analysis – or rather, analysis of the web pages linking to that particular document.

## On-Page Ranking Factors

How relevant this document is to the search query? This determined through the following factors – note that I'm putting in only those that are MOST important:

### Title Tag

The title tag reflects the contents of the document. This is elementary and yet many people get this wrong. How you refer to the document yourself makes a lot of difference – and if you're not putting your important keywords into the title tag, the search engines are going to think that this is not a relevant page (for those keywords).

For example, if you have a website on exercise equipment and one of the pages is a review of the ProForm treadmill – which one do you think would be a better title tag?

- ProForm Treadmill Review >> URL.com

Or...

- URL.com >> Treadmills >> ProForm Review

The first one is much better optimized for that page's key term – “ProForm Treadmill Review”. The second one will only confuse the search engine, and as a result of the unclear title tag that page would have been ranked much lower.

Put your keywords (focused and specific to that page) first.

### Keyword Use in Document Text

Keyword density has been abused ever since search engines started becoming popular. Search engines don't measure density anymore – they analyse your content for various types of ways your keywords are present (keyword concurrency, related words, keywords in tags (headings, style, image), keywords as anchor text to other pages) and base their decision on that.

Getting keyword use right is tough when you are also trying to write for your readers and therefore trying to maintain a **natural flow** to your writing. Most people tend to resort to search engine spamming – forgetting their readers and writing heavily optimized pages that are tailor-made for the search engines but drive readers away.

The solution to this is to make sure that the topic of your page is **extremely focused and specific** – this will allow you talk in depth about one thing at a stretch – the optimal keyword usage that you want will come out of this sort of focused writing.

### Accessibility of Document

Accessibility here refers to two things:

How accessible your website is:

- easy to follow links (plain html links, not hid behind javascript redirects or embedded in flash)

- common navigational structure (menu)
- sitemaps (google and regular)

And how accessible the pages are:

- no extra-long urls with multiple parameters (such as [www.url.com/random.php?id=1&x=2&y=3...](http://www.url.com/random.php?id=1&x=2&y=3...) (and so on))
- Keeping all javascript code in an external .js file.
- Minimising the amount of flash and other non-indexable content on your pages.

## Primary Subject Matter of Site

The topic of your website matters greatly (determined usually from the main page, but also through an analysis of your web pages as a whole) – for a search engine, the more focused the site is on a topic the better it is at providing information on that topic – this knowledge of course is combined with link wealth (what everyone else says about that site) to give definite answers.

## Keyword Spamming

In short, keyword spamming is easiest and the stupidest way to get your website busted by the search engines. This includes keyword stuffing in the meta tags, in the title tags, in the alt image tags, etc. White on white text is also another incarnation of keyword spamming and is caught pretty easily by the search engines.

**Avoid keyword spamming** – you can spend the time doing something far more important, such as tweaking your title tags.

## Off-Page Ranking Factors

Everything I've said about on-page factors is relevant, but the reality is that with overwhelming link wealth, you can trump all of those factors (in most cases, just get the title tag right, use the keyword once or twice in the text and boom, your link profile can take care of the rest).

Off-page factors are important because of a 'real-life' analogy – **link-based analysis** – that Google brought to the search engine world and the other SEs have subsequently adopted to some extent. Google's analogy to the real world:

Links act as recommendations / editorial votes of quality for web pages. As each "editor" is different in terms on knowledge, expertise and primary subject matter, these votes have different values as well. Expertise in an industry is gauged through the number and quality of votes one gets.

This is democracy in search – a good idea in theory, but in practice it is quite hard to manage, especially because of the temptation to game the system and create inflated link wealth by pursuing links through blog spamming on one end, and buying up links on the other.

In this backdrop, what are the key off-page factors that search engines consider most important?

## Anchor Text of Links

The anchor text of the links pointing to a web page is about as important as the title tag of the page itself. This anchor text acts as a quick identification mechanism of what the linked-to page is about. If you can in some way control your anchor text, you can make sure that you get optimized links.

One way to ensure that you remain in control of your anchor text is to remember that when you are exchanging / buying links, it is most effective to give people the **exact html code** that they should insert in their website. People are lazy and for someone who isn't too proficient with html / site coding, this small step may just be the reason you get that link.

Make sure that you vary your anchor text considerably – use related words and extended key phrases as much as possible.

## Links to Document from Your Site's Internal Pages

This refers to the links the webpage gets from the internal pages of the host website. Essentially, while internal links are not as important as external links for ranking purposes, they can give a huge boost especially if the anchor text is optimized and these links are within content.

This is one way that you can use to transfer your site's link-wealth around to your most important pages.

## External Links to the Document

How many links does this page receive from other websites? While your inner pages may not get many links from outside your website, any page that does automatically stands a great chance of being ranking for its key terms.

When you are exchanging links, getting a couple of links to your internal pages is always a good idea, especially if they are focused around a popular keyword. Also, once you start creating good, linkable content, people coming to your website will also start linking to your pages gradually.

## Link Popularity of Site in Topical Community

This is something that's still being implemented, but what you can see of its implementation is the rise in importance of themed links. The Ask search engine is most advanced on this front, with Google close behind. Themed links are an extension of the 'real-world' democratic model of search – editorial 'votes' from highly ranking websites within your industry are worth more than votes from outside.

One thing most people forget is that when you are going after themed links, make sure that you cover your related industries as well (for example, a vote from a successful online business counts a lot for an SEO service).

## Global Link Popularity of Site

This one is self-explanatory – essentially, how many links the website have, how many of those links are high-quality links, which of those links are themed links, how of them are one-way, etc. These questions (and more) help determine the link popularity (or link wealth) of your website, and eventually, your search engine rankings as well.

## Recap - Using This Knowledge To Your Advantage

So, if you're looking for a quick rundown of what you need to do to improve your site rankings, here are two lists.

First, get all your pages in order by making sure that:

- **your title tags are optimized**
- your web pages are using the right keywords
- **each web page is specific / focused**
- each web page (and the site as a whole) is accessible
- **you're not spamming the search engines**

In addition, get your link-building campaign in order as well by making sure that:

- **Your website gets themed links**
- Your internal linking is well done – in-context linking to related pages on your website
- **You create web pages that are linkable – to help you get deep links naturally**

- You use internal pages when doing your link building
- **You get links from high-ranking websites**

Just by following these simple steps you will be ahead of 95% of your competition in no time at all.

All the best,



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