SingleGrain

search & social

A Comprehensive Guide to Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

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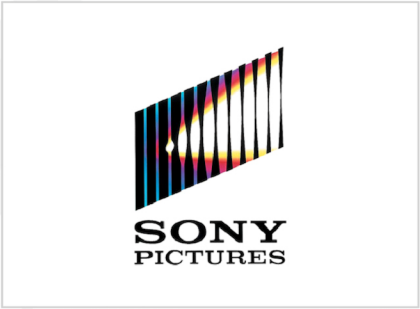

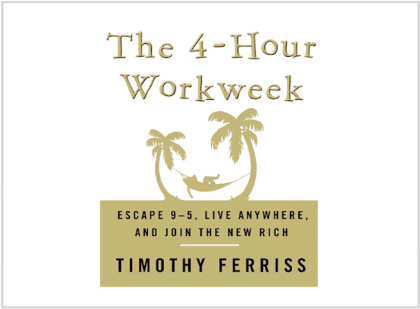

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Setting Up Your Site for Success

Building a website isn't a process that should be undertaken lightly. There are a number of important variables that will be set when you first launch your website – including your navigation structure, permalinks and so on – which is why it's so important to plan ahead in order to set up your site for success.

So before you even think of launching your website, it's important to walk through the following items in order to get started on the right foot.

Keyword Research

Doing keyword research is the vital first step of any SEO campaign, as you'll need to know which keywords to target so that the SEO campaign will achieve its maximum return.

Keep in mind, SEO is built on keywords, not on niches. You can't get your website ranked #1 in Google (and benefit from all of the free traffic that comes as a result of this placement) for a niche. Instead, you need to choose specific keyword phrases to build your site around.

Let's look at a few different ways to research keywords in greater depth:

Go Straight to the Source with Google's Related Searches

Identifying niches without significant competition is one of the biggest challenges that website owners face. Trying to compete in the natural search rankings for a general term like "dogs" is going to be an uphill battle, requiring substantial investment of time and/or money in order to see results.

So instead, Internet marketers are wise to look for the low-hanging fruit of micro niches – that is, smaller, narrower sub-topics within your chosen niche. But how do you know which of these topics offer the most potential? The answer lies in Google's Related Searches feature…

To access this feature, simply navigate to Google and type a general keyword or evergreen niche keyword phrase into the search bar. Then, click on "More Search Tools" on the lower left column and finally, choose "Related Searches". This will bring up a list of several keyword phrases that Google considers to be related to your main keyword, as shown in the example below:

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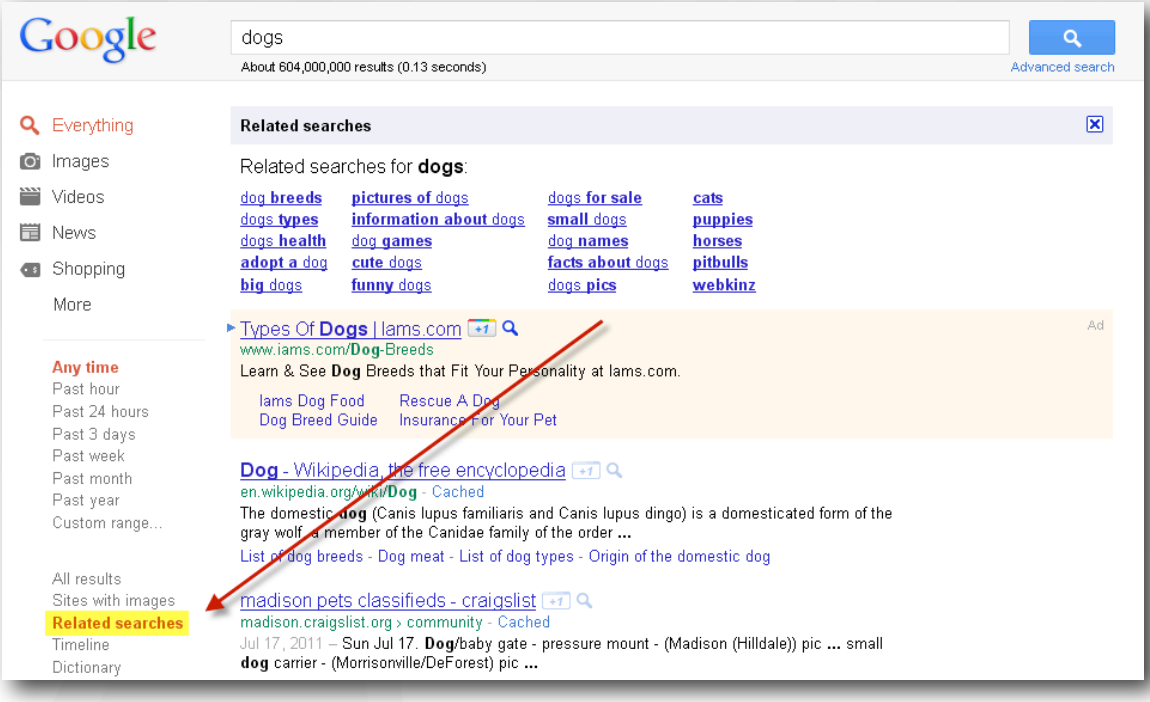
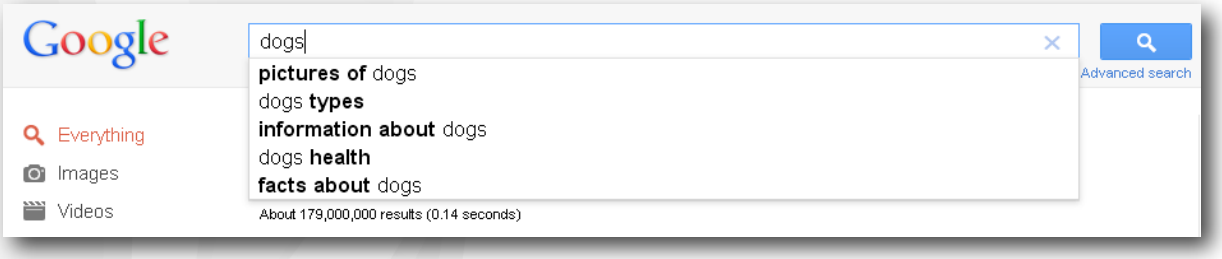


Simply copy the related search terms onto a spreadsheet and enter them into Google's external keyword tool or any other keyword research software program to find more information on their search volumes and overall competitiveness rankings.

Similarly, you can use the auto-complete results that pop up below your search bar to generate related SEO keywords to analyze:



New Ways to Use Google's External Keyword Tool

If you've been involved in SEO research for any amount of time, you've probably used Google's free external keyword research tool before. If not, check it out, as it contains a wealth of free data on keyword metrics, straight from the horse's mouth.

However, once you navigate to the tool, don't just enter in your target keyword and have the tool generate results – that's Google External Keyword Tool 101! Instead, use the tool to reverse engineer your competition's websites to find the most profitable keywords to pursue.

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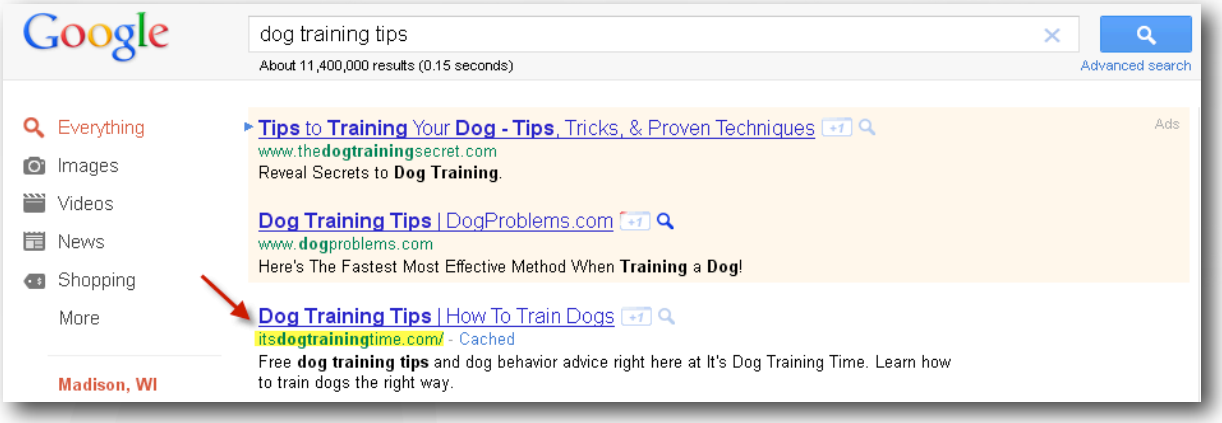
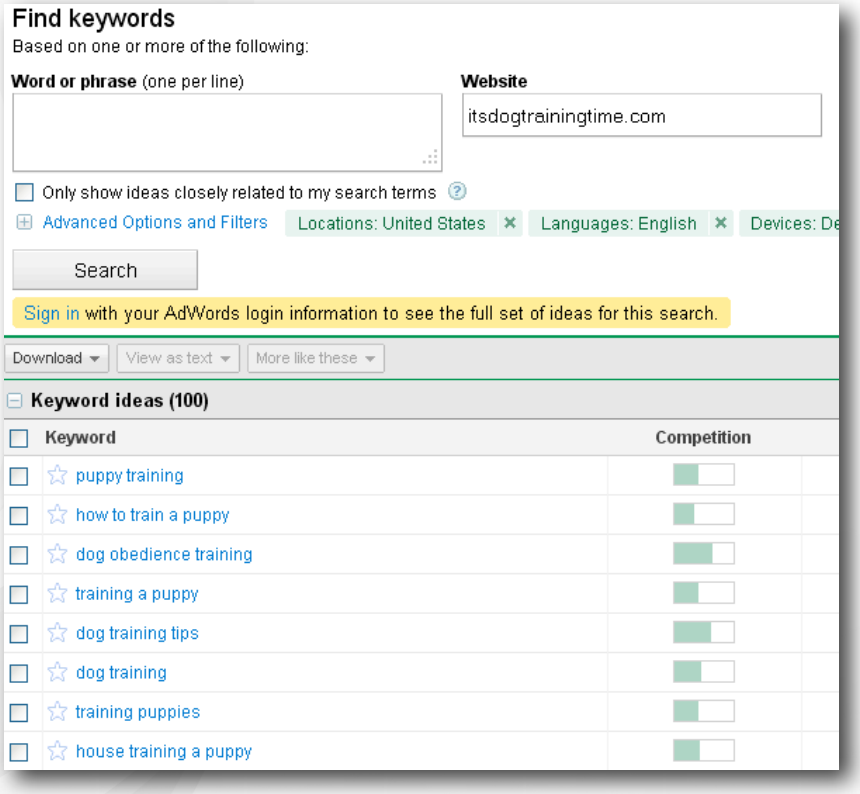
Suppose we decided to target the keyword phrase, “Dog training tips” using the process described above. Now, we know that we want to build a website around this keyword, but we want to find other keywords that Google thinks are relevant from a latent semantic indexing standpoint, as well as keywords that we know will be valuable to target.

To find these specific related keywords, enter the main search phrase into Google, then copy the address of the first natural search result:



Now, return to the Google External Keyword Research Tool and enter this URL into the “Website” box, ignoring the “Word or Phrase” entry area.



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Repeat this process for every site listed in the natural SERPs for your target keyword phrase and make a special note of any keyword ideas that overlap between URLs.

Searching in this manner will return SEO keyword phrases that your competition is targeting and that Google believes to be relevant to each other. Assuming that our competitors are well-established and have done their own SEO keyword search homework, we can be reasonably certain that the common keywords they're targeting are worthwhile to pursue as well.

So now, instead of devoting hours to uncovering sub-niches and drilling down for specific keyword phrases, we can cut our research time significantly and begin moving forward with our websites.

Creating Content for Your Website

Once we've determined which keywords to focus on, we can begin creating the content that will form the base of our new site. The following are a few things to keep in mind as you begin writing your web content:

- Your content must be in HTML text format – images, Flash files, Java applets, and other non-text content items are invisible to search engine spiders and won't help your site get ranked for your chosen keywords.
- The first sentence in the body text and the first few words of each sentence are the most important for advanced SEO necessities. Consider using your target keywords here for maximum benefit.
- Heading 1 (H1) and Heading 2 (H2) texts show the search engines the main subjects for content to be indexed. Make H1 and H2 texts keyword friendly and reflective of your page title.
- Meta descriptions are also important. The meta description is the short description of a page's content that appears directly under the page title in a search engine query.

Or, to break on-page optimization down even further, use your target keywords in your web content in the following manner:

- Use the keyword in the page title at least once. Keep the keyword as close to the beginning of the page title as possible.
- Once in a H1 header tag.
- At least 3 times in the body copy.
- At least once in the URL.

To see how this will all look on your site, consider the following example:

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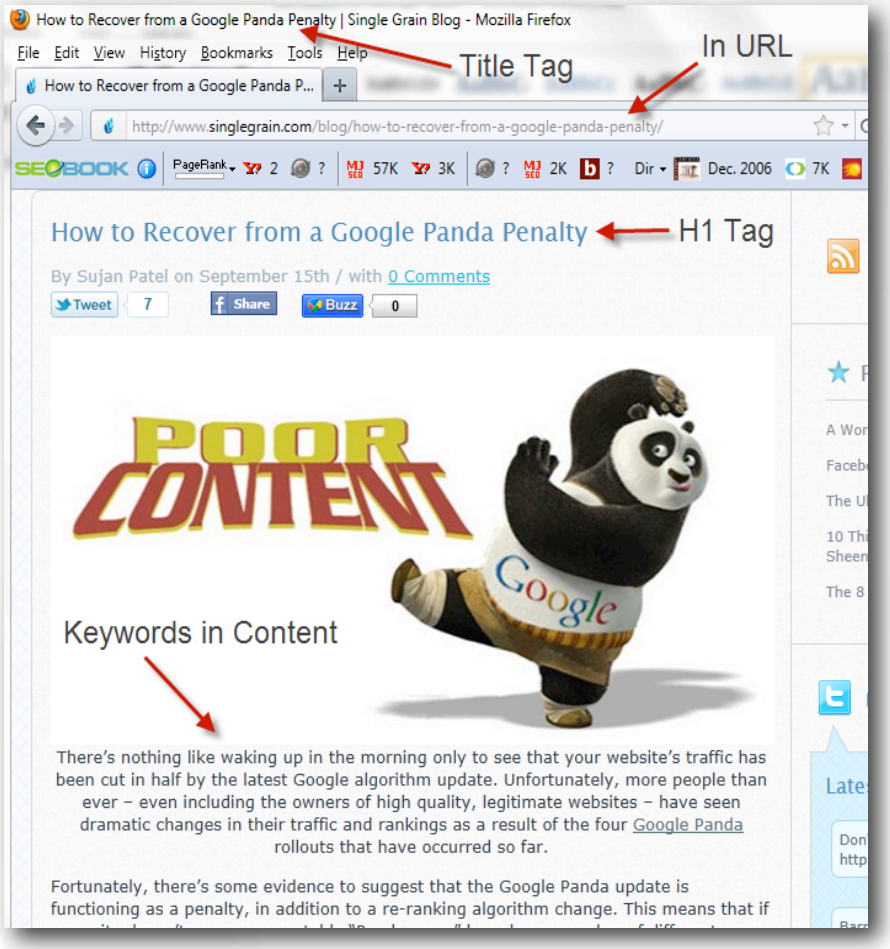

Scalable Content Creation That Works

Now you know what keywords you're going to write your content around and how to set them up for maximum SEO success, but how the heck are you going to actually sit down and create all of this content? Consider any of the following strategies to get your creative content-writing juices flowing!

Write Content Based on Interesting Data

If you hang out around geeks who can't get dates, you've probably seen a series of posts by OKCupid on topics such as how your race affects responses in online dating. This is brilliantly done linkbait – it takes a huge amount of proprietary data (OKCupid response analytics) and exposes it in such a way that it is:

- **Interesting** ("Whoa, the very hottest women really do get hit on less than you would expect")
- **Easily consumable** ("Whoa, this pretty picture demonstrates that black guys have it hard when dating."), and

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- **Easily shareable** ("Guys, I found scientific proof of why we need to take our shirts off!")

Of course, if you're any old random dating site affiliate, you can't possibly produce that same type of linkbait content. OKCupid can do it over and over and over again though, because they've written the analytics tools that generate this data and they've figured out how to do the research and visualizations. All they need to do is to come up with a new hook every so often and – *bam* – they're back at the top of the social news sites collecting links again.

If you don't have interesting data like this, you should start collecting interesting data using your analytics program (which we'll discuss later) or other survey tools. In the meanwhile, you can start visualizing or crunching existing data. Obviously, anybody can go out and grab a few random statistics to suit their points, but you can add a lot of value by summarizing and visualizing these existing stats in new and exciting ways.

Focus on Evergreen Content

One of the first big mistakes people make when it comes to their web content is writing on current events topics that will be out of date within a few days. Not that it's entirely wrong to include news updates on your site (these certainly should have a place), but if you're only ever writing about the latest news, you're missing out on the big advantages of writing evergreen content.

Evergreen content is information that's going to be as relevant in a month or a year as it is on the date of publication. For example, consider our dog training niche from the keyword research section above. Your readers aren't going to care in a week or two that a new dog training facility opened up in a faraway state, but they're always going to want to know how to choose a dog training method.

By writing content that has a longer "shelf life" than brief news updates, you'll need to put less effort into your website's content over time.

Write on Search Terms You Can Win

When you're choosing keywords to target for your website's content, it's best to choose search terms to focus on that aren't too competitive to rank for in the SERPs.

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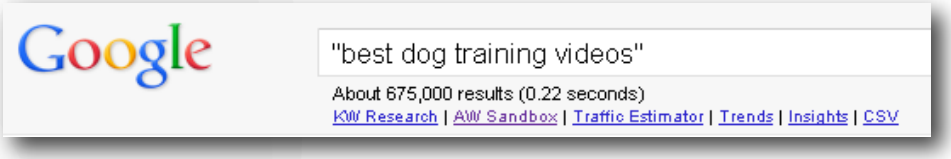
For example, if you search in Google, you'll see that the keyword phrase "dog training" from our earlier example has about 26,400,000 competing results in a phrase match search (use parenthesis around your search term in Google to show all results including the specific target phrase). Many of these results are well-established, high PageRank sites, which means that it will be difficult to get our site to rank well against these competitors.

So instead of targeting this high-level keyword with your content, consider something a bit more "long tail", like the phrase "best dog training videos".



As you can see, this keyword phrase only has 675,000 phrase match competing pages, making it much easier to compete against to get ranked in the SERPs.

SEO Friendly Navigation and Usability

Another important consideration to make at this point in your site planning process is how you'll structure your navigation, or the way people move through your site. Developing a logical, easy-to-follow navigation structure is a key part of making sure your users are able to access your content easily.

Search engines like sites that satisfy their users and the best sites have the following characteristics in common, so put some thought into how you'll link the pages together on your site and how you'll improve your users' experiences:

- Easy to use navigation and simple site structure.
- Professional website design and accessibility to modern browsers (Firefox, Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome etc.).
- High quality and credible content.

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- Site Map (a page listing and linking to all other major pages on your site which allows search engine spiders to crawl (search) your site easier.

By the end of this process, you should have a list of the keywords you want to target, web content that's optimized to these keywords and ready to be uploaded to your site, and an understanding of how you'll structure your website for maximum usability and SEO benefits.

Congratulations – you're now ready to build your website!

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On Page SEO

As you begin building your website, it's important to keep the following on-page search engine optimization principles in mind, as they will ensure your site ranks in the search engines as well as possible.

Page Titles

Pages titles are meant to be accurate, concise descriptions of a page's content. There are a few easy rules to follow when it comes to page titles.

- Search results only display 70 characters – any page titles that exceed 70 characters will be cut off with an ellipsis.
- It's better to place your keywords at the beginning of the page title and try to leverage branding by ending every page title with your company name.
- Don't forget to consider the user experience when coming up with you page titles. This means, don't force the keyword usage since the page title is the first impression of your site to new users.

Image Optimization

Optimizing the images on your site for SEO can drive traffic to your website. Image SEO has a lot of benefits, as images can be included in universal search when people enter a query into Google. People can also find your site when they use the image search function if you've properly optimized your images.

There are several things you'll want to consider when carrying out optimization for your images, whether you're trying to improve your users' experience, or get your images to appear in the universal search results.

Find the Right Images

Finding good images is important, as having high quality images on your web page can improve your visitors' experience and motivate them to share the page, which will create good backlinks to your site. The following are a few good resources to use when you need to find images to use on your site:

- Flickr –Make sure to use the "creative commons search" and credit the author by linking their name back to the photo.
- stock.xchng – This site provides royalty-free stock images for use on your site.

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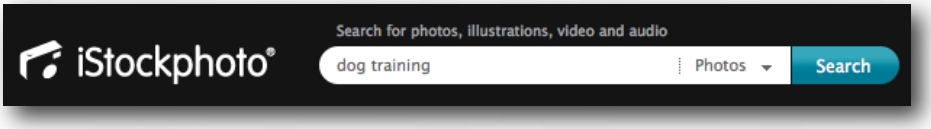
- iStockPhoto – This company sells high quality stock images, and can be a good choice when you need to find something specific.



You can also search Google Images when looking for images, but you want to adjust your search parameters so that you use images with proper licensing. Google Images allows you to search for creative commons and public domain licenses.

It's important to be cautious about using images without the proper permissions, because if you do, the owners of the images can take legal action against you. To be safe, don't use an image if you didn't buy it or get it from an explicitly labeled Creative Common License search.

Use Keyword(s) in the File Names

It's important to use keywords in the file names of your images because search engines can see this data and use it to evaluate what the image is about and what the image may be relevant to. Remember search engines are trying to evaluate information the same way people do, so if the search engine evaluates the file name "iStock_04040426125MED.jpg" what meaning if any would that name have to a human being?

If the picture happens to be of a dog running, then the file name should be "Running-Dog.jpg," as this will allow Google to evaluate the image better and bring it up in the search results when someone searches for something that might be relevant to it. For example, if you're writing a blog post about martial arts training, find an image that displays some kind of martial arts drill and then give it an appropriate filename.

In addition, Google recommends putting all the images on your site in one place, as opposed to having them spread out around the site in different folders. They also recommend that you use common file types like jpeg, gif, png, and bmp for maximum SEO benefit.

Create Descriptive Alt Text

Another way to tell Google what your pictures are relevant to is with the use of alt tags. Unlike text, search engines can't read images and analyze them semantically to see what they're relevant to. This means that the search engines must rely on you to add alt text to your images to determine what the picture is about and give you the proper SEO benefit.

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Make Your Images Match Your Content

When you incorporate images into your content, you want to make sure that the image you're using is actually relevant. If a human being read your text, would they consider the image to be related to what you're writing about? The answer to this question should be, yes. The image should also be related to all the other things you've optimized this far, including alt text, anchor text and the image URL.

Internal Links

While building external links back to your website is a great way to improve your overall SEO (we'll talk more about this in the next section), you'll also want to consider how to take advantage of link anchor text when linking between pages on your own website!

One way to generate keyword-rich anchor text pointing to your site is with the internal linking strategies you use – meaning the links that point from one page on your site to another.

In-Text Links

Because Google and the other search engines prefer sites that have a shallow navigation structure (where information on any page can be accessed within a few clicks), it's a good idea to link to 2-3 other pages on your site within every piece of content you post.

Breadcrumb Links

Bread crumbs are another great way to build backlinks throughout your site and improve your user experience at the same time. For example, the picture below shows an example of breadcrumb navigation that tells users that they're currently in the electronics department, viewing the auto electronics section, and looking at in-dash stereos:

These kinds of bread crumbs are usually dynamic and can change based on what the visitor searches for while on site. With bread crumbs like this, you can access the same page through several paths, while also building links that improve your site's SEO:

Consulting > Services > Implementation > Service A

Consulting > Services > Optimization > Service A

Consulting > Services > Upgrade > Service A

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Off Page SEO

Of course, getting the optimization of your website's content right is only half the battle. When it comes to search engine optimization, the things that are happening on other people's websites are just as important. Let's look at a few of the things that matter most when it comes to off-page SEO.

Link Building

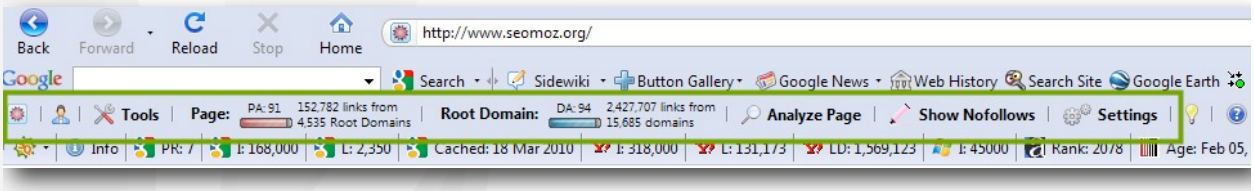
Specifically, the biggest part of off-page SEO is backlinks – the links that point from other people's websites back to your own. The number and quality of these links can play a huge role in how your page is ranked in the search engine results pages, so it's important to spend some time building these links.

The following are a few different ways to attract high quality backlinks back to your website:

Guest Blogging

Guest blogging is a great method for link building, as it enables you to get links from sites that are already trusted and considered authoritative by Google.

If you haven't already, you'll want to download the SeoMoz and SearchStatus toolbars and install it in order to filter potential guest posting blogs and weed out the bad ones. Here's how this process works:



1) Identify several blogs that are relevant to your business.

2) Check each blog to make sure they have at least a PageRank of 1 and/or a Mozrank above 0.0 (you'll get this information from your toolbars)

3) You should simultaneously make sure that the blogs you plan to get a link from have no more than 10 outbound links in the side bar, and no more than 4 outbound links in the footer

4) Make sure there are absolutely no links going to websites related to SEO, porn (adult) sites, payday loans, diet pills, pharmaceuticals, or online gambling.

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Now you'll have a slightly smaller list of blogs that can be considered to be in a "good neighborhood." Go ahead and start contacting the blog owners by proposing a topic to blog on and asking if they think it would make a good addition to their blog's content.

When they agree to let you blog on their site, write a truly unique and interesting post that their readers will find useful. In the resource box at the end of your article, put 1 or 2 links back to your website in order to get an SEO benefit from your work.

Press Releases and PR

A really effective method for getting backlinks is by submitting press releases to sites like http://www.prweb.com, www.businesswire.com, or http://www.helpareporter.com. These press releases, if they are compelling enough, will be picked up by large news sources online and can lead to powerful backlinks from big news websites.

While getting backlinks using press releases can be very rewarding, it can be very difficult to get large news websites to pick up the story. You need to optimize your press release by using keywords in the title that make the article more likely to get picked up by the editors of these publications. At the same time, you need to make the keywords something that will also be SEO friendly for your website.

Another method for getting exposure (and a link) from the press is contacting editors and writers directly. Find people who have written in the past on things that may relate to your company and then reach out to them to let them know what you're working on and how it may be related to something that they're working on now. Write very specific and very personal emails to these writers and editors and they may choose to write about you and give you a link.

Social Bookmarking

Another great way to get powerful links pointing back to your site is to submit your content to sites like Digg, Reddit, StumleUpon, and Delicious. Sites like these can play a big role in link building and driving traffic back to your site.

The power in these sites lies in the user base. Users come across content on these sites and then vote it up or down. If a piece of your content hits the first page of a site such as Digg or Reddit, hundreds of thousands of people will see your site and potentially click through to the content you published.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean that there will be an increase in revenue (as visitors from Digg and Reddit often have a

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very low impact on revenue), but the real value of these visitors is in the links that tend to follow them. Many users from these sites have their own blogs, and will link out to interesting content they find through these social sharing sites.

When you're creating content to put on these sites, you need to be aware of a couple of things. First, each of these sites has its own culture, meaning that certain kinds of content appeal to the site's separate users. Because of this, you'll want to spend a little time reviewing some of the content that hit the front page in the past and see what similarities they had. Keep those qualities in mind as you start creating the content you plan to submit to these social bookmarking sites.

How to Structure Your Links Correctly

In order to get the biggest possible SEO benefit from your backlink campaigns, you'll want to follow a few guidelines that ensure the search engines interpret your links correctly. Here's how to structure your links correctly for maximum SEO benefit:

Choose the Right Anchor Text

Anchor text is simply the text used to form a hyperlink. Google uses the text that forms a link as a means of understanding the relevancy of site to which the link is pointing. It is structured like this:

```
<a href="http://www.yoursite.com">Anchor Text</a>
=
Anchor Text
```

If you go out and build links pointing back to your website using the words "ninja supplies" in the anchor text, then Google will think that your site is relevant to ninja supplies and your site will be more likely to appear in the search results when someone searches for terms related to ninja supplies.

To understand how this works, let's look at a real world example of how a marketing agency BOMBED when naming their company. First, many website administrators put PDFs on their websites for their visitors to read. To be helpful, they instruct visitors to download Adobe's PDF reader if the visitor doesn't already have it installed on their computer. When they do so, they use the anchor text, "click here" to link to the PDF reader download.

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So, some creative folks at an agency decided to name their company “Click Here”. Well, guess what – the PDF is an industry standard file format, and nearly every site that hosts PDF files contains a link to Adobe’s PDF reader with the anchor text “Click Here.”

Because of this, if you Google the company’s name (“Click Here”), they have no chance of ever ranking in the top spot for their own name because SO many people have used the anchor text “click here” to refer to Adobe’s PDF reader. See why choosing your anchor text carefully is so important?

Watch Your Link Quality

Unfortunately, search engines have a history of being cheated by black hat SEO workers trying to game the algorithm. In fact, it’s estimated that as many as 60% of the pages on the Internet are total spam. In an effort to keep all that junk out of the search results pages, search engines have a method of measuring trust built into their algorithm based on the profile of links pointing back at a website.

What does this mean for you? It means you need to be street smart when you build links back to your website. If you build links to your website from spammy websites, this can actually hurt your rankings.

Instead, if you build backlinks from websites that appear to be written by experts, have good design, load quickly, and seem trustworthy, then go ahead and build a link back to your website from that site. On the other hand, you want to stay out of “bad neighborhoods” when building links back to your website by avoiding spammy sites and sites that other spammy sites might link to.

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Follow Up / Ongoing Site Tweaks

We've covered a lot of different SEO tactics in this report so far, including both things to do on your website and ways to build links pointing to your site from other pages that will increase your odds of ranking higher in the search engines. The good news is that, if you've followed the guidelines above, you've already done a tremendous amount of work to give your website the best possible chance of succeeding.

The bad news is that SEO isn't a "set it and forget it" kind of thing. Search engine optimization is a field that's always changing, which means that you need to be proactive about staying on top of SEO news.

The following are a few of the things you'll want to keep an eye on:

Site Speed

Google considers website speed when they determine how to rank your website in the search results. This means that you need to keep an eye on how changes to your website influence your site's loading speed to ensure that you aren't being penalized unfairly. Here's how to do it:

Minimize HTTP Requests

Goal: *Reduce the number of files required to display your website*

When readers visit your website, their browsers request the corresponding files to be displayed, including CSS files, Javascript and images. The more files you have (including things like Wordpress plugins, unnecessary scripts or outdated temporary files), the longer your site will take to display.

Action Item: Get rid of everything that isn't absolutely necessary to your site's operation. If you have deactivated plugins still stored on your site or scripts installed that you aren't using anymore, remove them so they don't slow down your load times.

Optimize and Correctly Display Images

Goal: *Make pictures on your website as small as you can, and make sure the browser doesn't have to resize them.*

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Many picture files come with a lot of unnecessary metadata that can significantly increase the size of a picture file on your website. Make sure to compress the images on your site so they're at the smallest file size possible before they no longer appear correctly.

Many designers and webmasters make the mistake of uploading images to their sites with file sizes much larger than they need to be. High definition cameras can take photos that are 10MB in size – this is great if you'll be editing and resizing those images in Photoshop, but an image that size on your website will harm your load times. Remember to resize and compress your images before they're uploaded to your site so that your visitors' browsers don't have to go through this extra step.

Action Item: Use applications like Picnik or Image Optimizer to resize your images to the correct size (don't rely on the Wordpress resize function to do this, as it adds another step to the loading process). Once the image is the proper size, compress the file and upload the image for use on your website.

Minify HTML, CSS and Javascript

Goal: *Get rid of all the extra space in your source code before it gets served up to your visitors' browsers.*

When developers write the code to build your website, they use a lot of spaces and tabs to make the code readable for human beings. Servers and browsers don't care about white space between code clusters – they just read the code and execute the instruction. When you eliminate the white space between the code clusters, you reduce the number of fields the browsers and servers have to read, speeding up your website's load time.

Keep in mind – if you're constantly editing code on certain files on your site, it isn't practical to remove all the white space between code clusters. In these situations, you'll want to use a plug-in to remove all the white space (or "minify") the code for you. These plug-ins will speed up load times without making the code hard to read.

Action Item: Remove all the white space from your code, or install a Wordpress plug-in like WP-Minify or W3 Total Cache to do this for you automatically.

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Advanced SEO

Canonicalization of Links

"Canonicalization" sounds like a really big word, but it means something very simple. Canonicalization refers to the variance in URLs used to refer to a single web page. As an example, consider the following URLs:

www.yourpage.com
yourpage.com
www.yourpage.com/index.htm
www.yourpage.com/home.asp

All of these URLs refer to the same home page, but they're all different from each other. Keep in mind – search engines are run by robots, which means that they notice every little difference between these, and will treat each one differently – even though they all go to the same page.

Now, here's why this is important. If you don't consistently refer to your webpage with one consistent and standardized URL, Google may see your different URLs as duplicate content.

In order to keep the search results nice and clean for searchers, Google typically eliminates duplicate content from its index. So it's useful to start from the beginning using one standardized URL when you link to your website, and when others link to your website. Of course, the problem is that we don't always have control over the way others link to our site.

So how do we fix the duplicate content problem when others link to our site without using the URL we've chosen as our standard? There is a solution – we can embed a link element in the HTML code of our website that tells the search engine "I know someone has linked to my site with a funky URL, but here's the URL I want to use as the standard – so don't look at this page as duplicate content."

Basically, we tell the search engines that by using a "rel= canonical" element in the <head> section of your website. The easiest way to do this is to use Yoast's SEO plugin to ensure the links on your site are redirecting correctly.

On the other hand, if you want to handle your site's canonicalization manually, you can specify a canonical URL in two ways (according to Google's instructions):

- **Add a rel="canonical" link to the <head> section of the non-canonical version of each HTML page.**

  For example, to specify a canonical link to the page http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish, create a <link> element as follows:

  <link rel="canonical" href="http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish"/>

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Copy this link into the <head> section of all non-canonical versions of the page, such as http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish&sort=price.

If you publish content on both http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish and https://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish, you can specify the canonical version of the page. Create the <link> element:

<link rel="canonical" href="http://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish"/>

Add this link to the <head> section of https://www.example.com/product.php?item=swedish-fish.

- **Indicate the canonical version of a URL by responding with the Link rel="canonical" HTTP header.** Adding rel="canonical" to the head section of a page is useful for HTML content, but it can't be used for PDFs and other file types indexed by Google Web Search. In these cases you can indicate a canonical URL by responding with the Link rel="canonical" HTTP header, like this (note that to use this option, you'll need to be able to configure your server):

  Link: <http://www.example.com/downloads/white-paper.pdf>; rel="canonical"

Keep in mind, Google currently supports these link header elements for Web Search only.

301 Redirects

If you're ready to move on to more advanced SEO, you'll also want to consider how 301 redirects are handled on your website.

There's a simple explanation for what a 301 redirect is – essentially, you're telling a search engine that you've permanently moved your site from one domain to another and that you'd like them to pass all the SEO value, link juice, and trust your website has accrued to the new domain you've selected in order to maintain your rankings in the search results.

Here's an example. Let's say you bought a new domain that has a nice ring to it – it's shorter, easier to type and works better for your site's content than your original domain name. You want to redirect the old URL to the new URL, but you don't want to lose the value of all the SEO work you've done so far.

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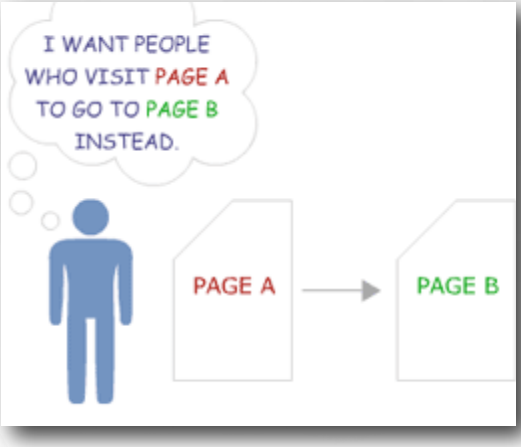
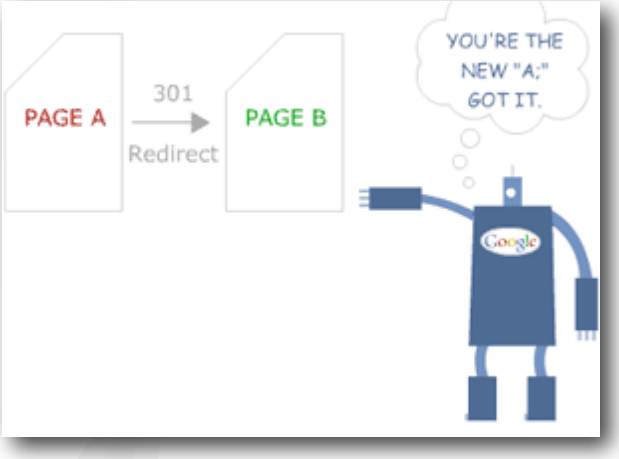


There are a number of different options for redirecting one URL to another permanently, but in general, 301 redirects are preferable both for people, and for search engine. When you use a 301 redirect you're telling both the people who come directly to your site by typing it into their browser bar that you're using a new URL (as they automatically land on the new URL) and you're telling search engines that you've permanently moved your URL so they can go ahead and transfer all the link juice and trust you've built up.



Take note that it can take the search engines a good amount of time before they discover the 301 redirect you've implemented and give your new URL credit for all of the old URL's rankings. If you're site is not crawled on a regular basis because your sites content is not regularly updated then it can take the search engines even longer to discover the 301 redirect.

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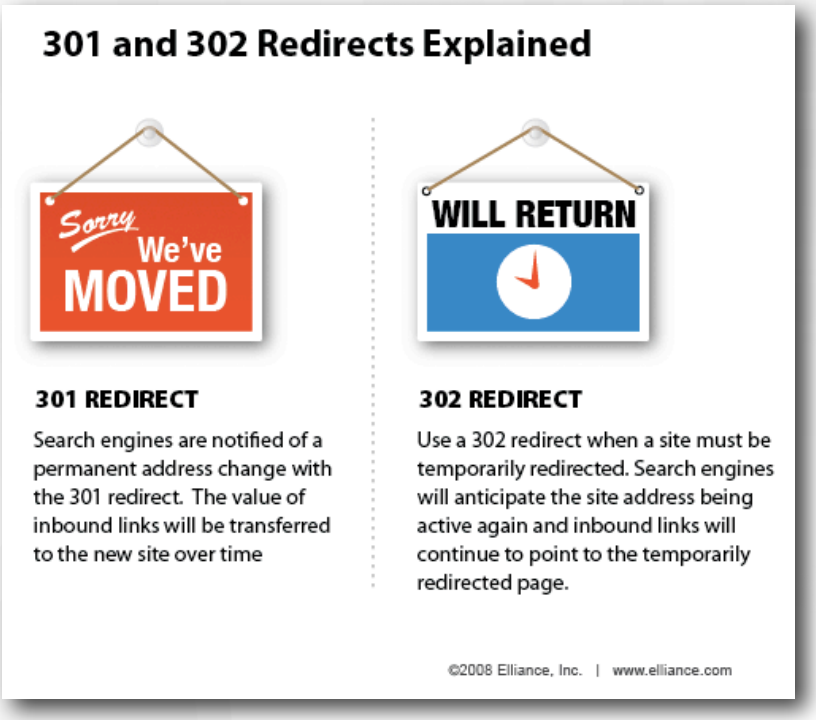

Pagination

What is the pagination problem?

Basically it applies to websites that have a lot of pages with very similar content, such as magazine sites and large ecommerce sites. For example, an ecommerce website such as Nike.com needs to organize content in a way where the information displayed for one product is very similar to the information displayed on other products, as this creates continuity between pages and improves the user experience.

Unfortunately, when pages are very similar, search engines often mistakenly classify these pages as duplicate content or identify the pages as low value. The end result is that those pages on your site do not get indexed.

Good pagination is simply helping your users (and the search engines) to find the information they want in as few click as possible. For this reason, it's a good idea to set up category pages in combination with navigation tools like the one above so that users and search engines can move around your site and access the pages they want as quickly as possible.

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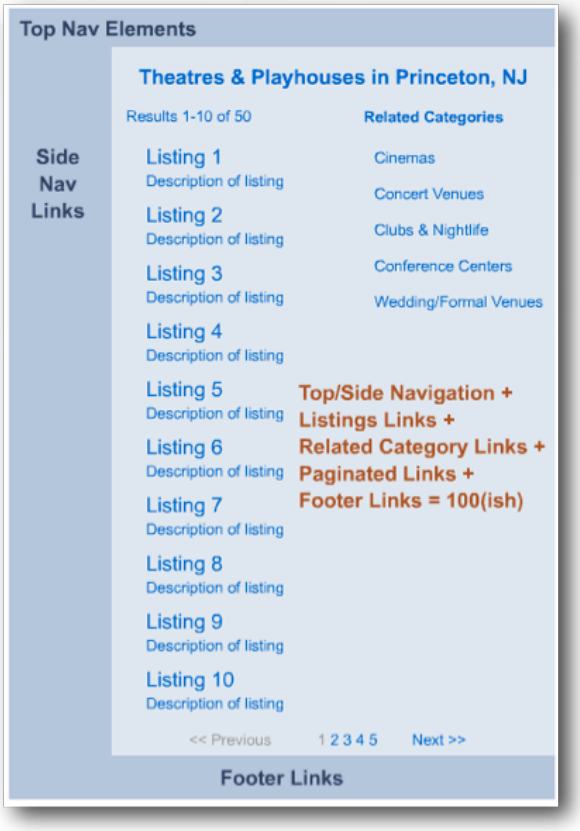
An example of a site that does a good job of this is Copy Blogger. They have plenty of articles, but they organize them into groups that present both users and search engines with several different options for navigating the content. In fact, a visitor can get to any article on the Copy Blogger website within three clicks, because they have an archive page that organizes their articles both via category and via dates.

You can see how they organize it here: http://www.copyblogger.com/archives/

Still not sure how to apply good pagination practices to your site? Check out the image on the right for a good example of how categories and paginated navigation can be combined.



If you're having trouble getting all of your pages indexed by Google, consider taking the following actions:

- Add a "Noindex" tag to pages that are of low value or that have duplicate content.
- Add a paginated navigation element to your pages so that visitors can choose to view content by page number.
- Organize all your content into categories so that visitors can get to any page on your site in as few clicks as possible.

Duplicate Content

What is duplicate content?

Put simply, duplicate content involves having multiple URLs on your website where identical content appears. Why is this bad? Basically, Google has a hard time understanding what to include and exclude from their search results pages when they find multiple URLs with the same content on them. This can result in some pages being excluded from the index unnecessarily.

Unfortunately, the search engines aren't nearly as sophisticated as people are in terms of determining what truly is duplicate content and what isn't. Consider some of the following examples in which a duplicate content penalty could be applied incorrectly:

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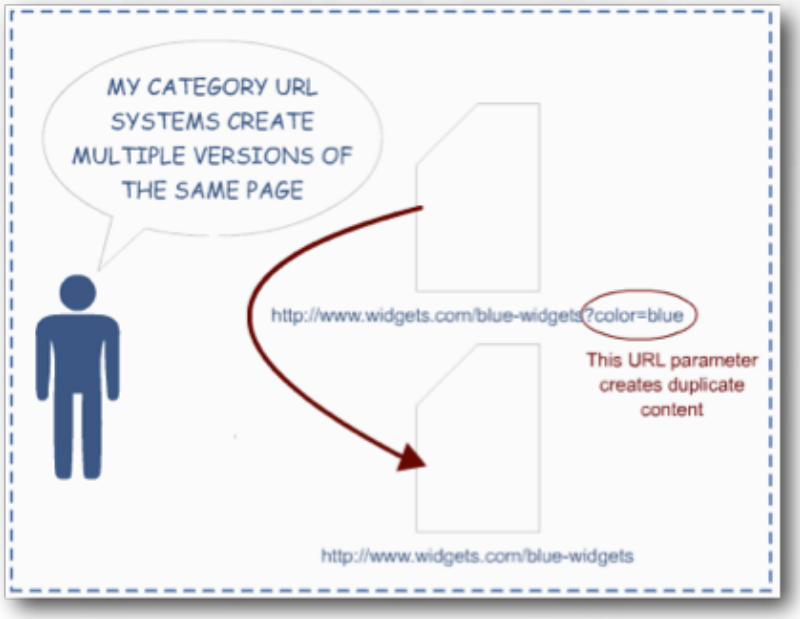
1. URL Parameters

Sometimes, websites append URLs with click tracking parameters, causing your analytics code to trigger duplicate content problems:



2. Printer-Friendly Page Versions

When you publish a printer friendly version of your webpage, the URL that sends the visitor there can confuse the search engine. In this case, the search engine robot finds the same text on two pages of your website and thinks you've got duplicate content.

When the search engine spider sees this, it has to figure out which of the two URLs you actually want visitors to see in the search results. But because Google wants to keep its SERPs clean and free from duplicate content, it only includes one page in the index – even though the second page is full of unique content!

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3. Session IDs

If you use session IDs to track visitors on your website, this can cause a variance in the URLs that visitors see. For example, when the search engine spiders come to crawl your website, they get assigned a session ID, as do all the URLs they crawl during the session.

When this occurs, the robots get confused and have trouble differentiating the session ID URLs and the regular URLs. As a result, the search engine may only include one set of URLs and exclude valuable content.

So how do you fix duplicate content issues?

Basically there are three ways to take care of duplicate content issues, and two scenarios where'd you'd apply these solutions:

Scenario 1: Duplicate content problem because of URLs

When you have multiple URLs that actually point to the same one page of content, you can add a 301 Redirect or a Canonical URL tag.

Both of those solutions tell the search engine that each distinct URL is really just a different way of getting to the same page, and that it should treat these URLs as if they were one and the same. These solutions also tell Google where to send the link juice, trust and authority accrued by all of the similar URLs that are pointing to the same page.

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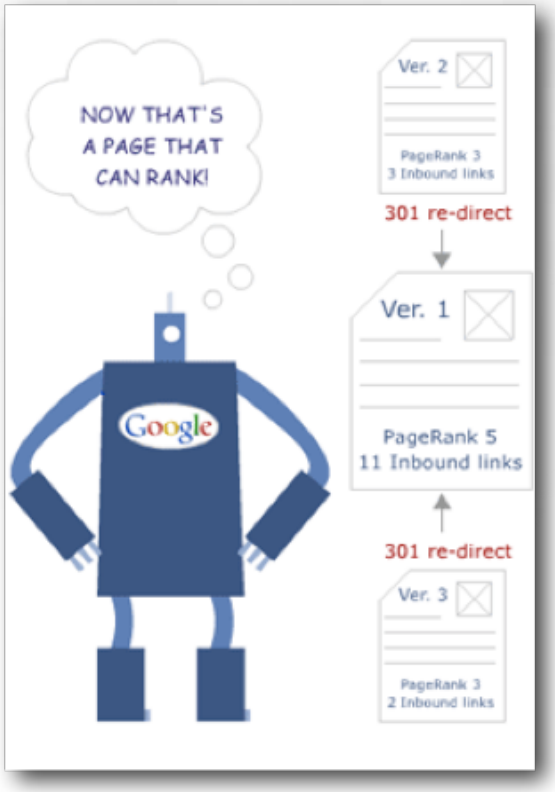
Scenario 2: You have two pages with the same content and you need to keep them both.

If you have a situation where you have two pages with the same content, and you need both pages for the sake of the user experience or other reasons, the best solution is to add a "Noindex" tag in the header of the page with duplicate content.



For example, it's very typical for blogs to have pages with a lot of duplicate content. A blog may have a summary of five posts on the homepage, as well as a page in the archive section of the blog with the same five summaries for the same five posts.

When the search engine crawls the homepage and then crawls the archive page, it will think that there are duplicate content pages on the site and that it should select only one page to include in the search results. By adding a "Noindex" tag, you're able to tell the search engines exactly which page should be shown in the search results and which page should be excluded.

In this case, we'd simply want to add a "Noindex" tag in the header of the archive page. That way, when the search engine finds duplicate summaries in the archive, it knows that it shouldn't show those summaries in the search results – instead, it should show the summaries from the homepage.

Analytical Tools and Tracking

In addition to implementing advanced SEO techniques on your website, you'll want to make use of website data analytics programs to be able to track your site's performance and take control of your marketing campaigns. The following are a few analytic and tracking tools you should consider adding to your site:

1. **Google Analytics –** Google Analytics is the number one tracking tool on the web. It provides detailed information on every different way traffic comes to your website.
2. **Piwik –** Piwik is an open source analytics tool, which means that it's free to install and use on your website. It offers a great dashboard with plenty of helpful reporting options to help you determine how visitors are interacting with your site.

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3. **GetClicky –** GetClicky is a fun program, as it provides real-time updates on your website's data. Using this program, you can see exactly who's on your website, what they're doing and when they do it.

Of course, it's not enough to simply install an analytics program on your website. If you really want your website to be successful, you've got to act on the results you see and make changes based on your data.

For more information on how to do that, check out the "What to Do with Your Google Analytics Data" post on the Single Grain site.

By implementing all of the advice listed here, you'll be setting your site up to receive the best possible advantage in the search engines. However, it's also important to remember that search engine optimization is an always-evolving field. As we've seen with the recent Google Panda update, industry standards and best practices can change overnight, which makes investing time in staying up-to-date on developments a smart move.

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