

Your Guide to Top 10 Google Rankings

Understanding Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

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Your Guide to Top 10 Google Rankings

There are no tricks to top 10 rankings in Google. The bottom line to strong, consistent rankings is sticking to the basics and providing a well designed site with valuable content that surpasses your competition. Become a valuable and trustworthy resource in your industry and naturally, over time, you will experience rewards by satisfying both your target audience and the search engines.

What exactly stands behind top 10 rankings? Although Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is generally a simple practice, there are many factors that contribute to its success. In a nutshell, effective rankings with SEO are generally about:

1. **WHAT YOUR WEBSITE LOOKS LIKE**
How it's designed, how it's programmed and how it navigates.
2. **WHAT YOUR SITE PROVIDES**
Providing valuable content and resources for your target audience and the engines.
3. **YOUR REPUTATION**
How Google views your site in relationship to your competition (inbound links).
4. **WHAT ELSE YOU ARE DOING**
Any efforts that you are you making—in addition to SEO—to drive traffic to your site.

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Understanding SEO

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Understanding SEO

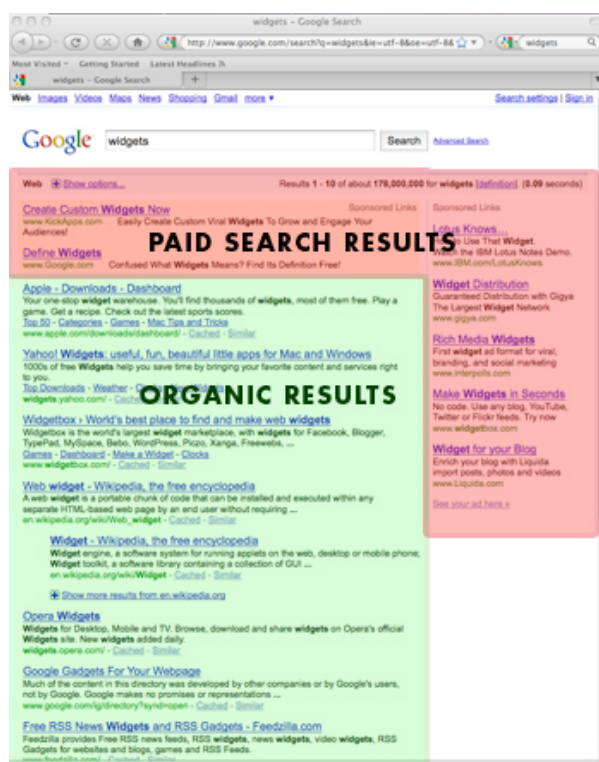
What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is not rocket science. It is the organic process of improving a website's position so that it naturally ranks higher in the search engine results list for specific keywords and phrases. There are many companies who never "optimize" their sites and experience excellent rankings. Sometimes this is just pure luck. Most of the time it is because they have a great site that is well designed and offers valuable content and resources to their customers.

Paid Vs. Organic

When someone conducts a search in the engines, there are two different types of results that are returned: organic and paid. Organic listings are returned in the main frame of the screen—on a white background. The paid listings (Pay Per Click or PPC) normally surround the organic listings and are seen at the top or far right side of the screen—sometimes on a colored background or underneath a "Sponsored Links" heading.

Research shows that the majority of people conducting searches examine and select the organic listings over the paid listings. Both types of listings can be a beneficial part of a company's Search Engine Marketing campaign, although organic listings are generally more affordable, and can provide more consistent, successful results over time.



What's the Deal with Search Anyway?

The bottom line with search is that the search engines want to return accurate results. Chances are, if Google gives you the exact information that you are searching for every time, you will continue to use Google when you need to search for information. If Google continues to strike out, you're more likely to seek out a different engine when conducting a search.

So how does Google determine which websites to return when answering your search? There are many criteria considered, but some of the most significant are page titles; content; design & development; and reputation & inbound link development.

Page Titles

When you're looking at a website on your computer screen, the page title is found at the very top of the page, above the URL or website address bar. If you're looking "under the hood," the page title is an item of code that provides information about the subject of the page. This is a very simple item to incorporate and is the first significant item in the code of your website that the search engines will crawl.



Content

Content is the text, copy or information that you provide on your website. The page title of your website works in conjunction with your content to signify what that page is about. It is important that your page title is focused on one specific phrase or keyword that matches your content and is repeated, when appropriate (without "stuffing"), throughout the text.

Providing the engines with fresh, original, dynamic content will help to boost your rankings. Posting press releases, articles and other valuable materials will be beneficial to your customer and your rankings.

Design & Development

The design and development of your website is important not only for the impression that you leave on your target audience, but also for the search engines. Search engines need to be able to easily crawl the code on your site so that they can index all of the pages of information that are available.

If the majority of the content on your site is placed in Flash technology, images or video, the search engines are going to have a difficult time finding any text to crawl (as of yet, they cannot view the text in these elements). Although Google is continually working on technologies to crawl Flash, search engine spiders can only read written text on a web page.

Navigation is a big deal as well. If the engines can't navigate through the navigation or links on your site due to ineffective technology, organization or architecture, Google will miss a majority of the pages in your site, making it impossible to index those lost pages. Be sure to use general terms for your major navigational choices so that those categories are universally understood by your visitors. Organize the pages of your site within these categories making it easy for your audience and the engines to find what they need.

Reputation & Inbound Link Development

Reputation and inbound link development is probably one of the most significant factors in determining your site's rankings. Google likes to know that other credible websites in your industry are sending a thumbs-up your way. This vote, or inbound link from another credible website to yours, shows Google that other trustworthy sites in your industry are vouching for your credibility as well.

Remember that quality is the key here. Developing inbound links from just any website won't help your site's rankings, and depending on the site it can actually hurt your rankings (guilt by association).

Developing inbound links from just any website won't help your site's rankings, and depending on the site it can actually hurt your rankings (guilt by association).

Your goal is to focus on building high quality links that relate to your industry. You can do this organically and naturally over time by cultivating quality relationships, or simply by providing such useful content that other sites want to link to yours.

You can also submit your site to reputable directories to assist in pointing additional traffic and links your way. Be sure to read and follow the specific submission directions for each individual directory as they each have unique requests for submission and approval. Some of these directories can be difficult to get listed with but can be beneficial to your rankings. DMOZ (www.dmoz.org) is free, but not all websites submitted are published. Additionally, directories like www.Business.com and Yahoo Directory (<http://dir.yahoo.com>) are reputable, but have submission costs associated.

For a complete list of reputable directories, as well as a list of free directories, visit <http://vilesilencer.com/info/forum/index.php>.

One of the most effective ways to cultivate quality inbound links is to provide how-to-articles, press releases and other valuable content on your website. Providing these resources satisfies your customers and the search engines. The more valuable content you have to provide, the more content the engines have to crawl, the more information for your customers and the better your reputation.

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Foundation for successful SEO

How exactly do you achieve desirable rankings in Google? Is there anything that you should consider before engaging in an SEO campaign?

Evaluate Existing Efforts

Before investing in SEO, determine how to get the most out of your existing assets by evaluating your current efforts.

- **WHAT DOES YOUR WEBSITE LOOK LIKE?**
Once you begin driving traffic using SEO, will your target audience be motivated to stay? Will the engines be able to crawl your information and links? Is there any technology that is getting in the way (Flash, frames, etc.)? Evaluate the design of your site, its navigation, content and materials. Develop a list of items that require attention.
- **WHAT EFFORTS ARE YOU CURRENTLY MAKING?**
SEO can be effective, but it certainly can't stand alone. Take a global look at your efforts. What other marketing efforts are you currently making? What else can help to enhance your SEO efforts? Think about additional and alternative ways of driving traffic through email marketing, press releases, blogging, video, and print.

SEO can be effective, but it certainly can't stand alone. Take a global look at your efforts. What else can help to enhance your SEO efforts?

Identify Your Audience & Goals

Determining your audience and goals will help better define your keywords and SEO strategies.

- **IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE**
Who is your target audience? How would they go about finding a company like yours? This will help to determine additional avenues that can be utilized for driving targeted traffic.
- **IDENTIFY YOUR SEO GOALS**
What do you want SEO to do for you? What are your desired timelines for success? It is important to understand that SEO requires patience and does not come with a guarantee.

How does SEO work?

Generally, the SEO process involves a combination of research, optimization and monitoring performance:

Research

A strong SEO campaign begins with research to determine and select the most effective keywords for your goals and audience.

- EVALUATE COMPETITION**
 What key phrases are your competitors using? Check their page titles and copy to determine the most relevant phrases for your industry.
- DEVELOP A KEYWORD LIST**
 What terms are your target audience using to find a company like yours? Check the validity of these phrases in Google to be sure that you want to be associated with those terms. Be selective with your keywords; you want to encourage quality visits so that you can convert those visits into new customers and sales.
- RESEARCH KEYWORDS**
 Determine popularity, competitiveness and synonyms of your keywords using tools like www.wordtracker.com. Your goal is to use a combination of phrases that are popular but not too competitive, as well as phrases used by your competitors.

Be selective with your keywords; you want to encourage quality visits so that you can convert those visits into new customers and sales.

Optimization

Once your keywords have been determined, they are ready to be incorporated into the corresponding pages in your Website. Keep the following principles in mind:

- TARGET ONE KEYWORD OR PHRASE PER PAGE**
 When optimizing your site, be sure to utilize one keyword or related key phrase per page. The content on that page should then match the subject of the keywords that you are targeting.
- OPTIMIZE CONTENT INCLUDING HEADINGS AND IMAGES**
 Google places the most significance on the first 100 to 250 words on a page, so be sure to include your target keywords at the top of the page. Optimize the page headings on every page as well as images. Use your keywords in the title for the image file (when saving the image file).

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Where appropriate, use your keywords when titling images in the code as well as in any captions. Remember not to overdo it. Placing too many keywords (called Keyword Stuffing) is frowned upon by Google and can hurt your rankings. A good balance is copy that would sound natural to your target audience, especially when read aloud.

- **PROVIDE A SITE MAP**
Provide a site map that displays a list of links to all site pages and materials. This page will help Google to discover and crawl all of the pages on your Website. In addition to the site map that will reside on your Website, create an .xml file that utilizes Google's preferred site map protocol, load it to your server and then submit it to Google. For more information, visit www.google.com/webmasters.
- **DON'T FORGET YOUR AUDIENCE**
When optimizing your website, remember that there are more people visiting your site and reading your content than the search engines. Appeasing the engines is important, but if your text is crowded with keywords, hard to understand or difficult to follow, your target audience may decide to go elsewhere. Keep your target audience in mind and don't forget to keep them happy with valuable content and resources.

Monitoring Performance

Once your site has been optimized, your next task is no task at all —patience. Allow your efforts to take effect and prepare for tracking your results.

Be sure to review your campaign metrics so that you can make educated decisions about necessary changes. Utilize tools like Google Analytics and Web Position Gold to determine:

- **TRAFFIC**
Where are visitors landing (first page to visit), where are they exiting, how long are they staying and where are they clicking?
- **KEYWORDS**
What keywords are actually being used to find your site? Compare with your target keyword list and determine where to strengthen your campaign.
- **KEYWORD RANK**
What is your keyword rank among the different engines? Where do each of your keywords rank in Google, MSN/Bing and Yahoo?

Once your site has been optimized, your next task is no task at all — patience. Allow your efforts to take effect and prepare for tracking your results.

- **COMPETITION**

Where do your keywords rank in relationship to your competition? It is great to rank above and beyond your competition for all of your phrases, but make sure that you are actually targeting the most accurate key phrases. If none of your competition ranks for any of the keywords that you are targeting, perhaps you need to review their Websites and check their copy and keywords.

Continuing Your Efforts

In addition to tracking and monitoring your SEO efforts, it is important to continue your efforts in order to help boost your rankings. Continue to:

- **ESTABLISH TRUST**

Establish your website as a trusted resource. The more quality content and resources you provide, the more websites in your industry will want to link to those materials. This will help you to grow credible inbound links which

Google considers as a vote for credibility. You can also submit your website to reputable directories for additional inbound traffic.

- **EXERCISE GOOD DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT**

As your business grows and changes, make sure that your site accurately reflects your company's current reality. Maintain the integrity of the design and ensure that the site continues to navigate effectively so that your users and the search engines can find what they need. When your company outgrows your existing structure and design, it's time to reevaluate your goals and needs and redesign not only the look, but the architecture of your site.

- **ENHANCE WITH ADDITIONAL EFFORTS**

In addition to providing dynamic, fresh content on your website, leverage that same content through the use of email marketing, article and press release submission or through blogging and Social Media. If applicable, use video to boost your rankings. Post your videos on YouTube, providing yet another credible inbound link source to your site. Determine the most effective method for notifying your customers that this information is available on your website.

- **CREATE A LOCAL PRESENCE**

Enhance your local search rankings by creating a free Google Local Search listing for your business. For more information, visit www.google.com/localbusinesscenter.

In addition to tracking and monitoring your SEO efforts, it is important to continue enhancing your campaign with additional efforts to help boost your rankings.

Additional Information

CONTACT MACK WEB SOLUTIONS

For more information about Search Engine Optimization, please visit www.mackwebsolutions.com or call Mackenzie Fogelson at 970-377-2358 or email her at info@mackwebsolutions.com.

Mackenzie Fogelson is the passionate, energetic and creative owner of Mack Web Solutions. She thrives on innovation and knows how to use the web and all of its possibilities to optimize business for her clients. Mackenzie and her team at Mack Web Solutions have been helping clients with design, development, email marketing and search engine optimization programs since 2002.

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