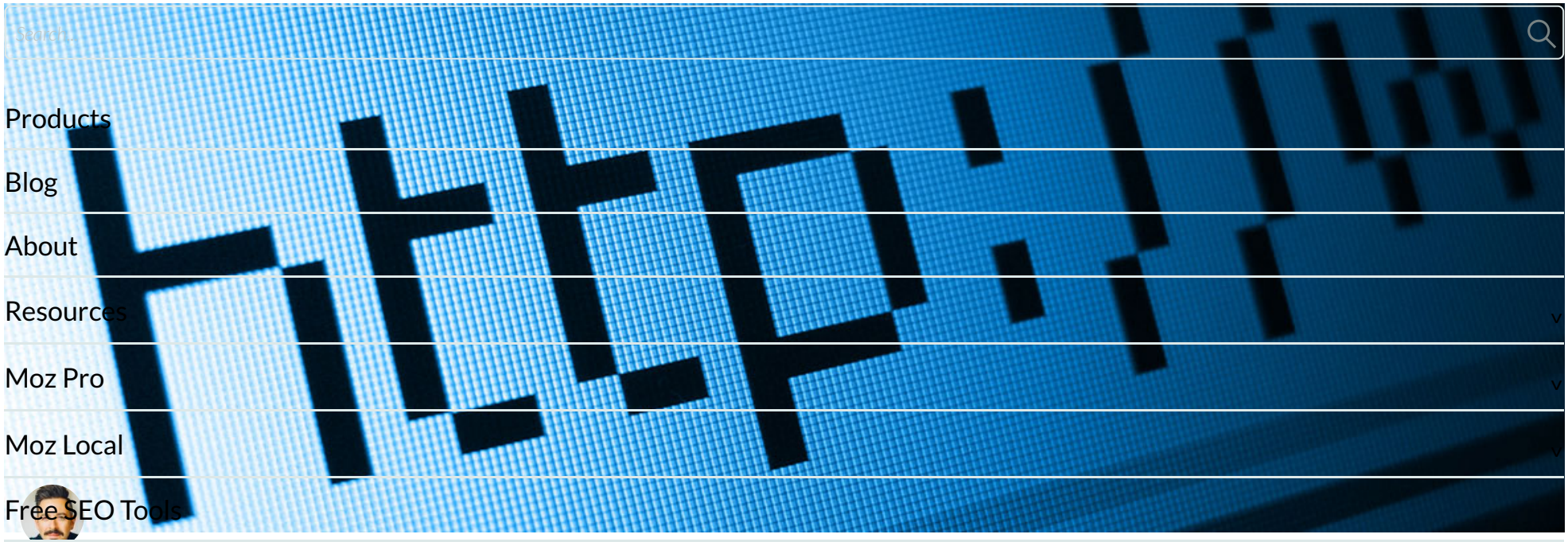

By: Rand Fishkin

February 24th, 2015

15 SEO Best Practices for Structuring URLs

Technical SEO | SEO Basics

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The author's views are entirely his or her own (excluding the unlikely event of hypnosis) and may not always reflect the views of Moz.

It's been a long time since we covered one of the most fundamental building blocks of SEO—the structure of domain names and URLs—and I think it's high time to revisit. But, an important caveat before we begin: the optimal structures and practices I'll be describing in the tips below are NOT absolutely critical on any/every page you create. This list should serve as an "it would be great if we could," not an "if we don't do things this way, the search engines will never rank us well." Google and Bing have come a long way and can handle a lot of technical challenges, but as always in SEO, the easier we make things for them (and for users), the better the results tend to be.

#1: Whenever possible, use a single domain & subdomain

It's hard to argue this given the preponderance of evidence and examples of folks moving their content from a subdomain to subfolder and seeing improved results (or, worse, moving content to a subdomain and losing traffic). Whatever heuristics the engines use to judge whether content should inherit the ranking ability of its parent domain seem to have trouble consistently passing to subdomains.

That's not to say it can't work, and if a subdomain is the only way you can set up a blog or produce the content you need, then it's better than nothing. But your blog is far more likely to perform well in the rankings and to help the rest of your site's content perform well if it's all together on one sub and root domain.

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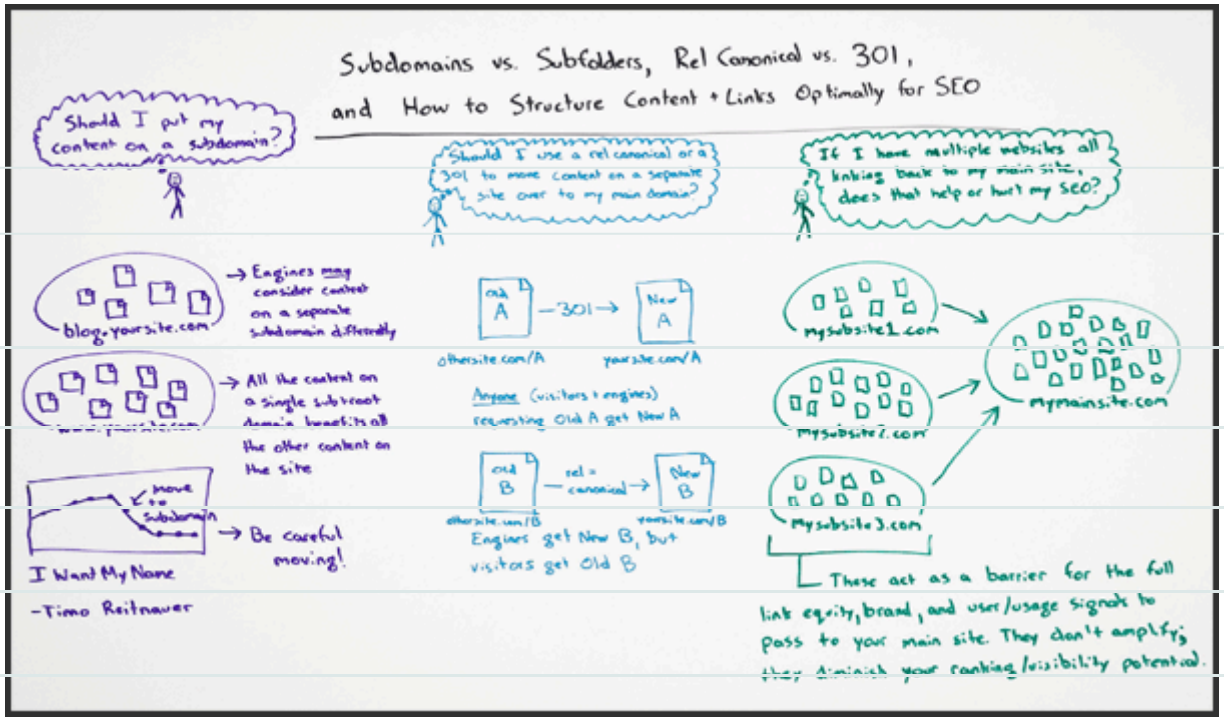
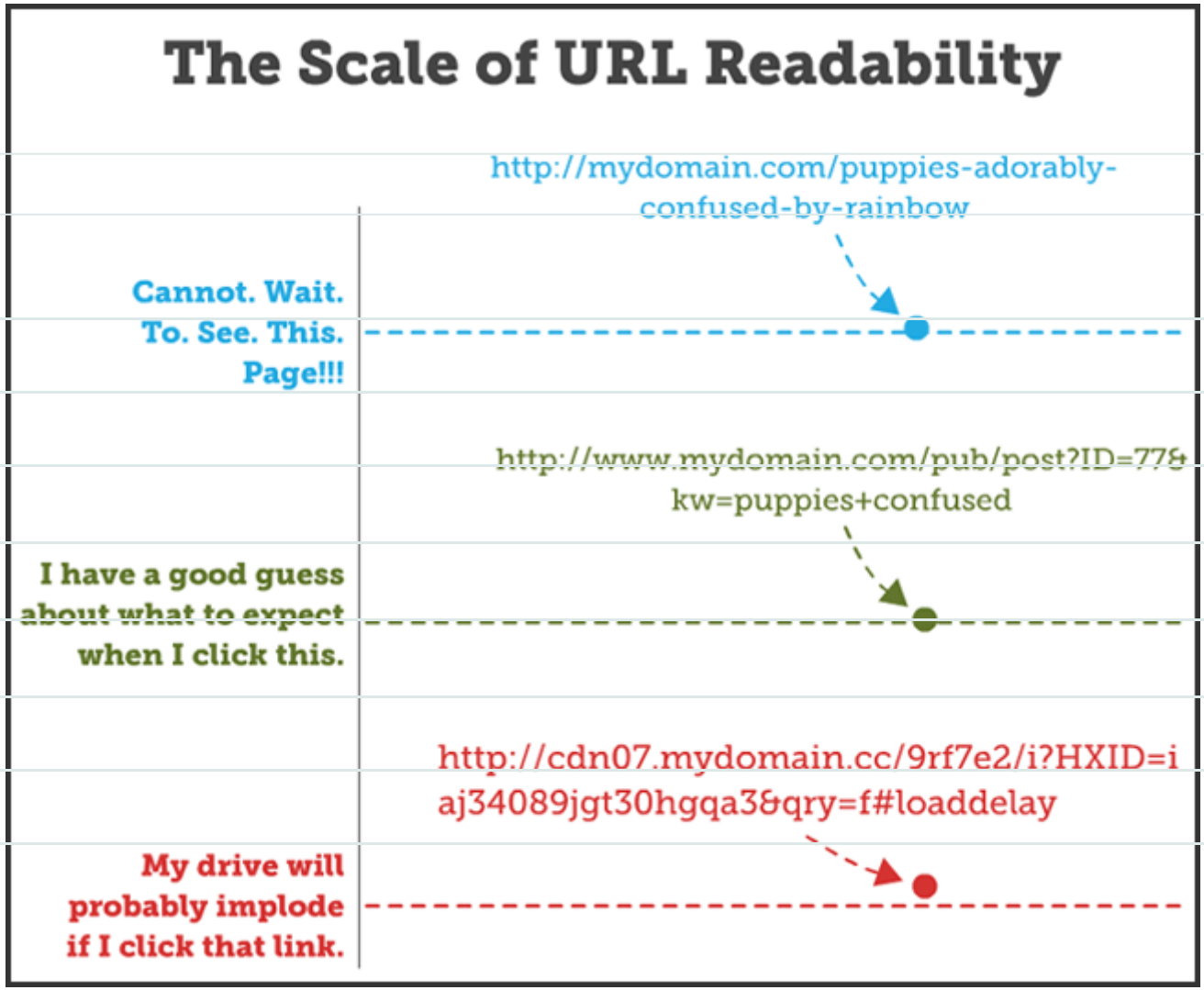


For more details and plenty of examples (in the post and comments), check out this recent Whiteboard Friday on the topic.

#2: The more readable by human beings, the better

It should come as no surprise that the easier a URL is to read for humans, the better it is for search engines. Accessibility has always been a part of SEO, but never more so than today, when engines can leverage advanced user and usage data signals to determine what people are engaging with vs. not.

Readability can be a subjective topic, but hopefully this illustration can help:

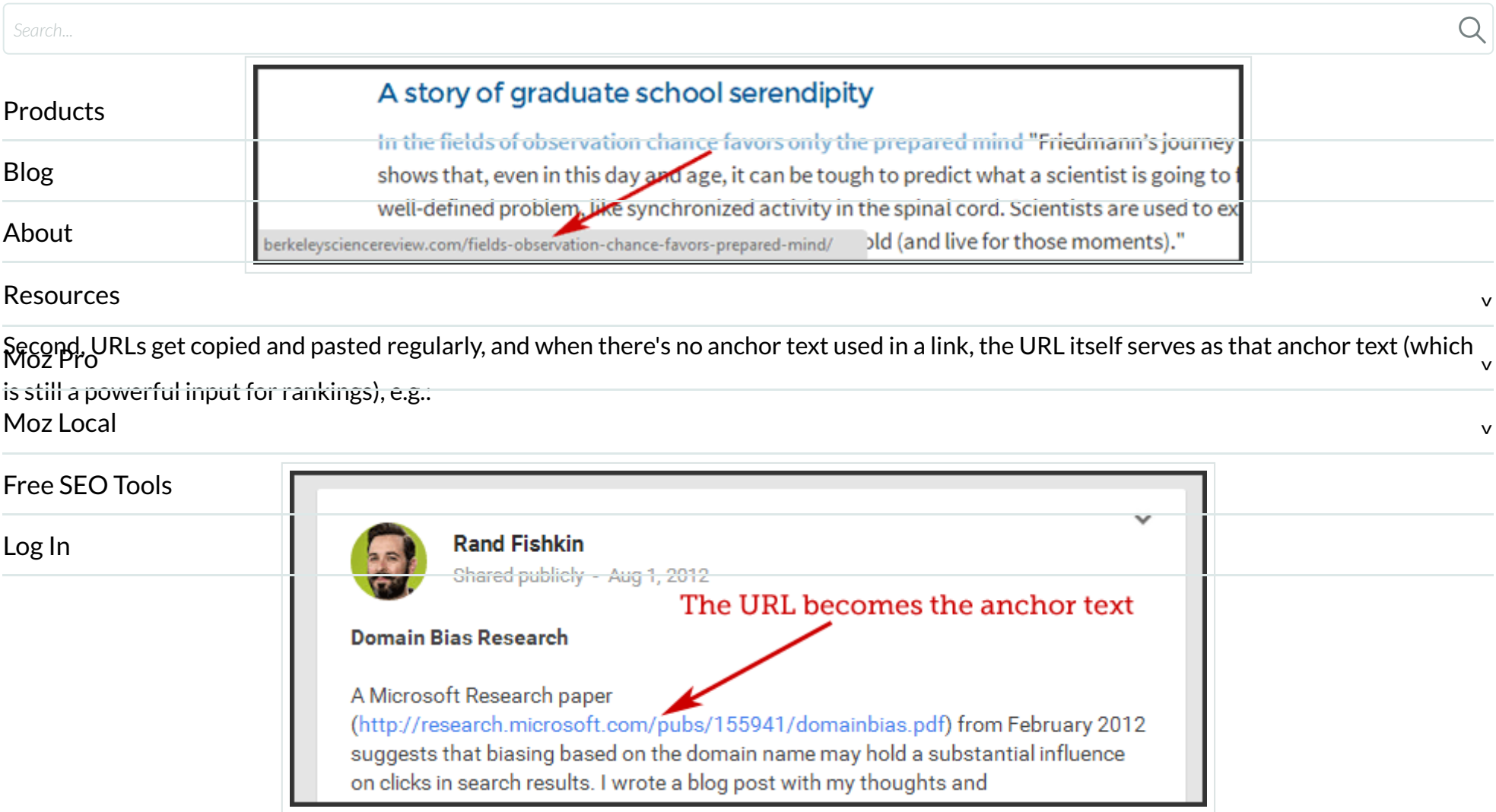


The requirement isn't that every aspect of the URL must be absolutely clean and perfect, but that at least it can be easily understood and, hopefully, compelling to those seeking its content.

#3: Keywords in URLs: still a good thing

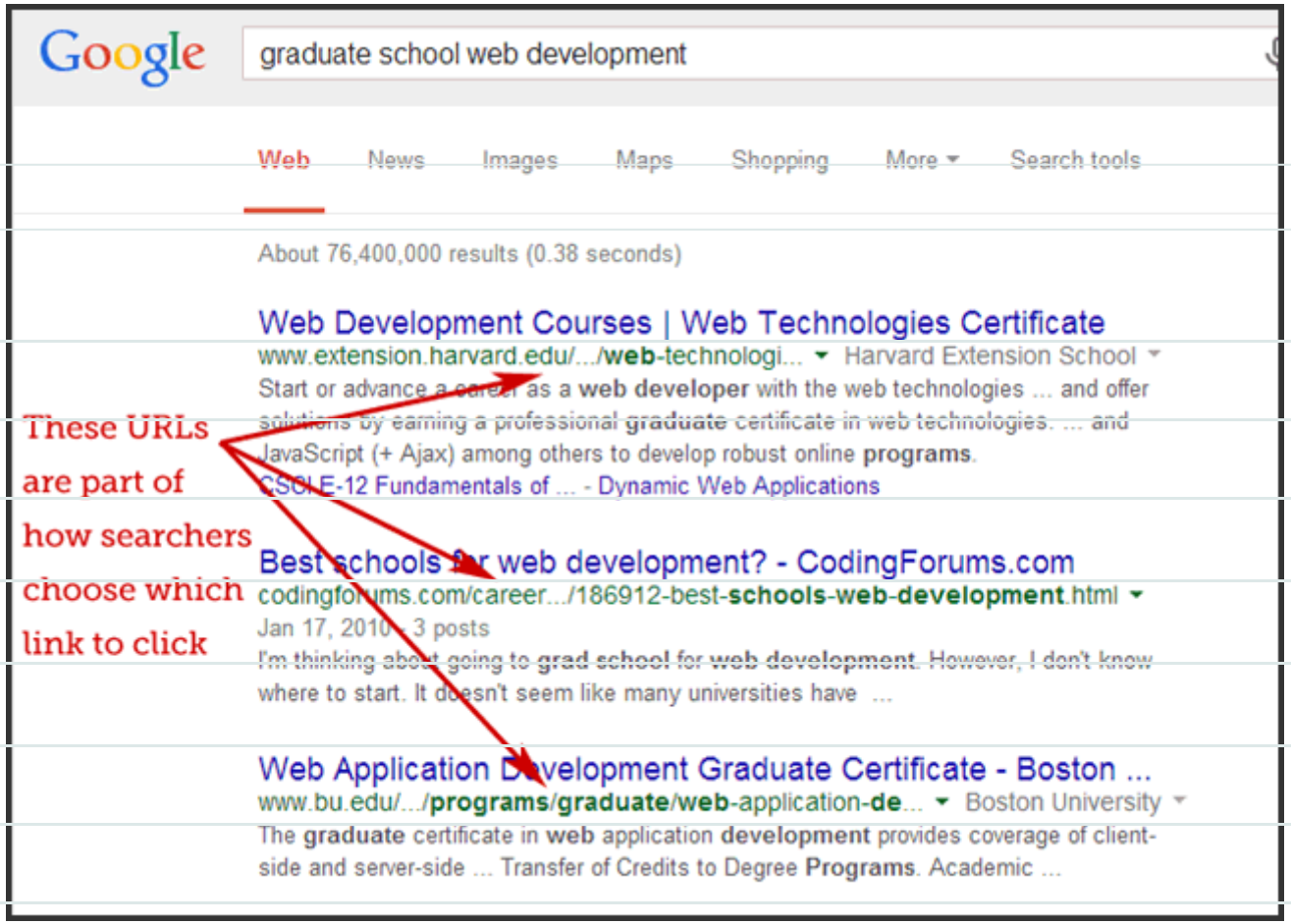
It's still the case that using the keywords you're targeting for rankings in your URLs is a solid idea. This is true for several reasons.

First, keywords in the URL help indicate to those who see your URL on social media, in an email, or as they hover on a link to click that they're getting what they want and expect, as shown in the Metafilter example below (note how hovering on the link shows the URL in the bottom-left-hand corner):



Second, URLs get copied and pasted regularly, and when there's no anchor text used in a link, the URL itself serves as that anchor text (which is still a powerful input for rankings), e.g.:

Third, and finally, keywords in the URL show up in search results, and research has shown that the URL is one of the most prominent elements searchers consider when selecting which site to click.



It's important that your keyword research is well-informed, especially if they're used in your URL. We use and recommend Keyword Explorer if you're in search of a free tool to get started with.

#4: Multiple URLs serving the same content? Canonicalize 'em!

If you have two URLs that serve very similar content, consider canonicalizing them, using either a 301 redirect (if there's no real reason to maintain the duplicate) or a rel=canonical (if you want to maintain slightly different versions for some visitors, e.g. a printer-friendly page).

Duplicate content isn't really a search engine penalty (at least, not until/unless you start duplicating at very large scales), but it can cause a split of ranking signals that can harm your search traffic potential. If Page A has some quantity of ranking ability and its duplicate, Page A2, has a similar quantity of ranking ability, by canonicalizing them, Page A can have a better chance to rank and earn visits.

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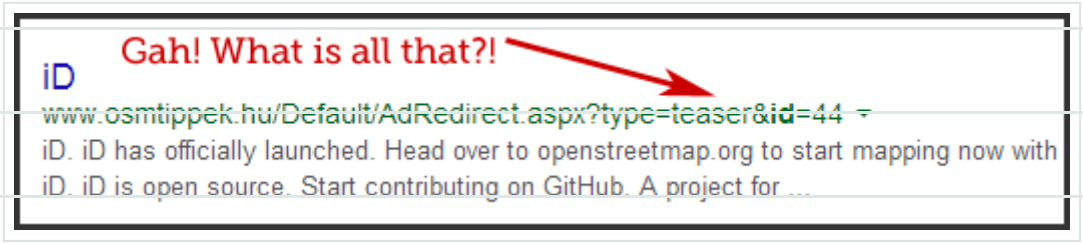
#5: Exclude dynamic parameters when possible

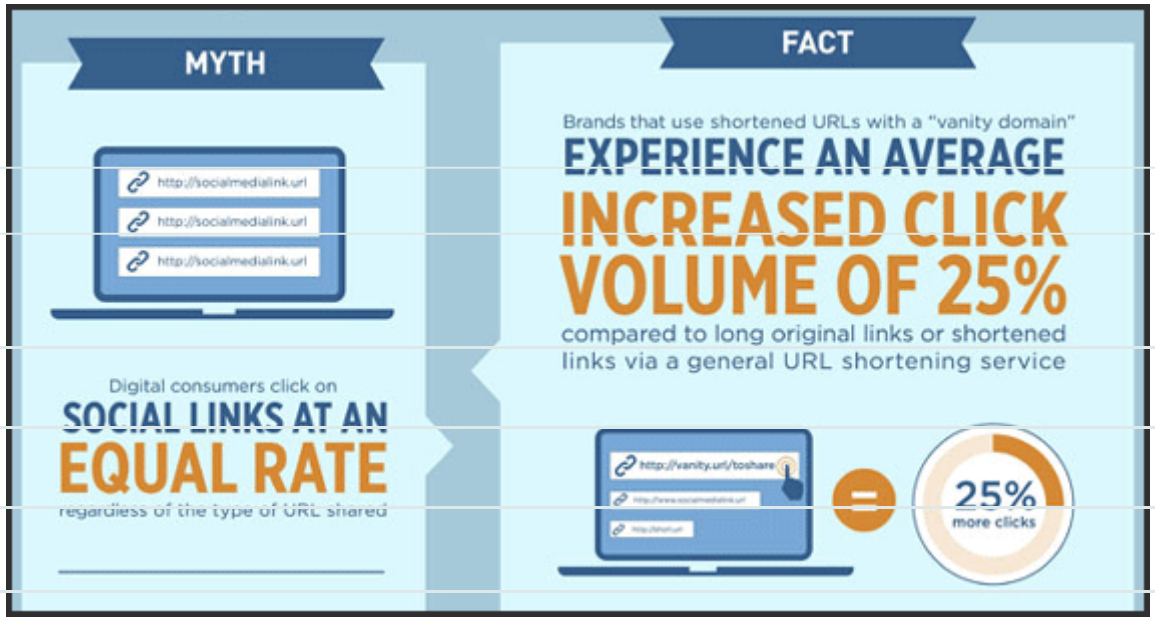
This kind of junk is ugly:



If you can avoid using URL parameters, do so. If you have more than two URL parameters, it's probably worth making a serious investment to rewrite them as static, readable, text.

Most CMS platforms have become savvy to this over the years, but a few laggards remain. Check out tools like mod_rewrite and ISAPI rewrite or MS' URL Rewrite Module (for IIS) to help with this process.

Some dynamic parameters are used for tracking clicks (like those inserted by popular social sharing apps such as Buffer). In general, these don't cause a huge problem, but they may make for somewhat unsightly and awkwardly long URLs. Use your own judgement around whether the tracking parameter benefits outweigh the negatives.



Research from a 2014 RadiumOne study suggests that social sharing (which has positive, but usually indirect impacts on SEO) with shorter URLs that clearly communicate the site and content perform better than non-branded shorteners or long, unclear URL strings.

#6: Shorter > longer

Shorter URLs are, generally speaking, preferable. You don't need to take this to the extreme, and if your URL is already less than 50-60 characters, don't worry about it at all. But if you have URLs pushing 100+ characters, there's probably an opportunity to rewrite them and gain value.

This isn't a direct problem with Google or Bing—the search engines can process long URLs without much trouble. The issue, instead, lies with usability and user experience. Shorter URLs are easier to parse, to copy and paste, to share on social media, and to embed, and while these might all add up to only a fractional improvement in sharing or amplification, every tweet, like, share, pin, email, and link matters (either directly or, often, indirectly).

#7: Match URLs to titles most of the time (when it makes sense)

This doesn't mean that if the title of your piece is "My Favorite 7 Bottles of Islay Whisky (and how one of them cost me my entire Lego collection)" that your URL has to be a perfect match. Something like

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randswhisky.com/my-favorite-7-islay-whiskies

would be just fine. So, too would

randswhisky.com/blog/favorite-7-bottles-islay-whisky

or variations on these. The matching accomplishes a mostly human-centric goal, i.e. to imbue an excellent sense of what the web user will find on the page through the URL and then to deliver on that expectation with the headline/title.

It's for this same reason that we strongly recommend keeping the page title (which engines display prominently on their search results pages) and the visible headline on the page a close match as well—one creates an expectation, and the other delivers on it.

For example, above, you'll see two URLs I shared on Facebook. In the first, it's wholly unclear what you might find on the page. It's in the news section the BBC's website, but beyond that, there's no way to know what you might find there. In the second, however, *Pacific Standard* magazine has made it easy for the URL to give insight into the article's content, and then the title of the piece delivers:

We should aim for a similar level of clarity in our own URLs and titles.

#8: Including stop words isn't necessary

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If your title/headline includes stop words (and, or, but, of, the, a, etc.), it's not critical to put them in the URL. You don't have to leave them out, either, but it can sometimes help to make a URL shorter and more readable in some sharing contexts. Use your best judgement on whether to include or not based on the readability vs. length.

You can see in the URL of this particular post you're now reading, for example, that I've chosen to leave in "for" because I think it's easier to read with the stop word than without, and it doesn't extend the URL length too far.

#9: Remove/control for unwieldy punctuation characters

There are a number of text characters that become nasty bits of hard-to-read cruft when inserted in the URL string. In general, it's a best practice to remove or control for these. There's a great list of safe vs. unsafe characters available on Perishable Press:

Classification	Included characters	Encoding required?
Safe characters	Alphanumerics [0-9a-zA-Z], special characters $-_.+!*'(), and reserved characters used for their reserved purposes (e.g., question mark used to denote a query string)	NO
ASCII Control characters	Includes the ISO-8859-1 (ISO-Latin) character ranges 00-1F hex (0-31 decimal) and 7F (127 decimal.)	YES
Non-ASCII characters	Includes the entire "top half" of the ISO-Latin set 80-FF hex (128-255 decimal.)	YES
Reserved characters	$ & + , / : ; = ? @ (not including blank space)	YES*
Unsafe characters	Includes the blank/empty space and " < > # % { } | \ ^ ~ [ ] `	YES

It's not merely the poor readability these characters might cause, but also the potential for breaking certain browsers, crawlers, or proper parsing.

#10: Limit redirection hops to two or fewer

If a user or crawler requests URL A, which redirects to URL B. That's cool. It's even OK if URL B then redirects to URL C (not great—it would be more ideal to point URL A directly to URL C, but not terrible). However, if the URL redirect string continues past two hops, you could get into trouble.

Generally speaking, search engines will follow these longer redirect jumps, but they've recommended against the practice in the past, and for less "important" URLs (in their eyes), they may not follow or count the ranking signals of the redirecting URLs as completely.

The bigger trouble is browsers and users, who are both slowed down and sometimes even stymied (mobile browsers in particular can occasionally struggle with this) by longer redirect strings. Keep redirects to a minimum and you'll set yourself up for less problems.

#11: Fewer folders is generally better

Take a URL like this:

randswhisky.com/scotch/lagavulin/15yr/distillers-edition/pedro-ximenez-cask/750ml

And consider, instead, structuring it like this:

randswhisky.com/scotch/lagavulin-distillers-edition-750ml

It's not that the slashes (aka folders) will necessarily harm performance, but it can create a perception of site depth for both engines and users, as well as making edits to the URL string considerably more complex (at least, in most CMS' protocols).

There's no hard and fast requirement—this is another one where it's important to use your best judgement.

#12: Avoid hashes in URLs that create separate/unique content

The hash (or URL fragment identifier) has historically been a way to send a visitor to a specific location on a given page (e.g. Moz's blog posts use the hash to navigate you to a particular comment, like this one from my wife). Hashes can also be used like tracking parameters (e.g. randswhisky.com/lagavulin#src=twitter). Using URL hashes for something other than these, such as showing unique content than what's available on the page without the hash or wholly separate pages is generally a bad idea.

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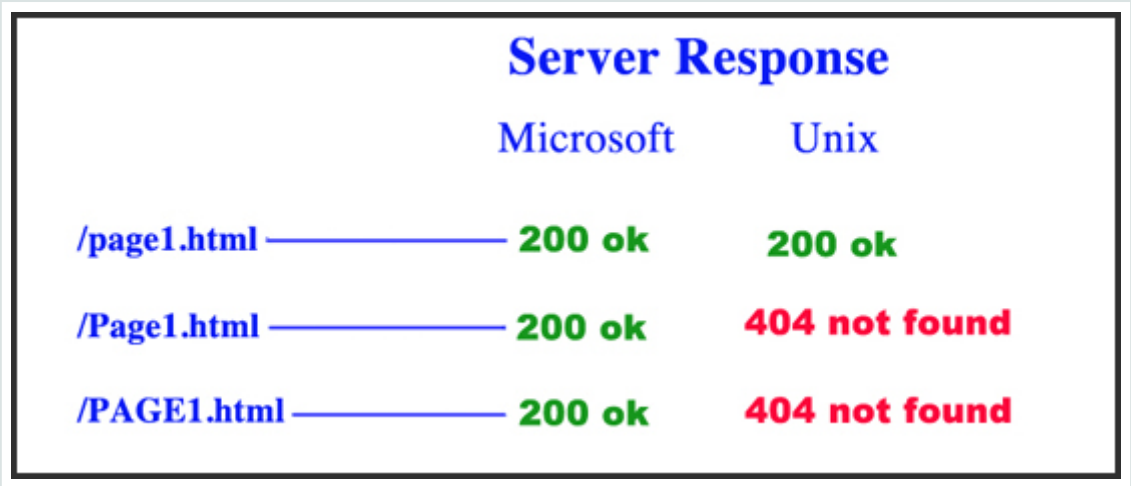
There are exceptions, like those Google enables for developers seeking to use the hashbang format for dynamic AJAX applications, but even these aren't nearly as clean, visitor-friendly, or simple from an SEO perspective as statically rewritten URLs. Sites from Amazon to Twitter have found tremendous benefit in simplifying their previously complex and hash/hashbang-employing URLs. If you can avoid it, do.

#13: Be wary of case sensitivity

A couple years back, John Sherrod of Search Discovery wrote an excellent piece noting the challenges and issues around case-sensitivity in URLs. Long story short—if you're using Microsoft/IIS servers, you're generally in the clear. If you're hosting with Linux/UNIX, you can get into trouble as they can interpret separate cases, and thus randswhisky.com/AbC could be a different piece of content from randswhisky.com/aBc. That's bad biscuits.



In an ideal world, you want URLs that use the wrong case to automatically redirect/canonicalize to the right one. There are htaccess rewrite protocols to assist (like this one)—highly recommended if you're facing this problem.

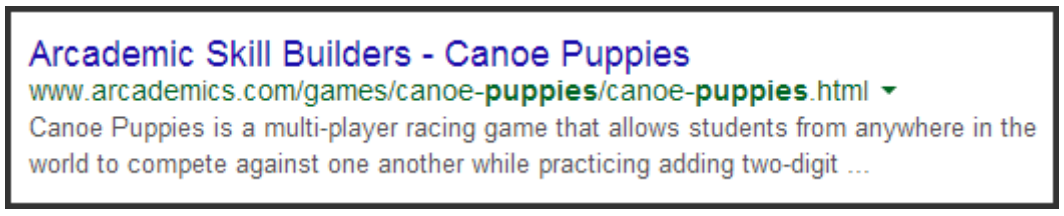
#14: Hyphens and underscores are preferred word separators

Notably missing (for the first time in my many years updating this piece) is my recommendation to avoid underscores as word separators in URLs. In the last few years, the search engines have successfully overcome their previous challenges with this issue and now treat underscores and hyphens similarly.

Spaces can work, but they render awkwardly in URLs as %20, which detracts from the readability of your pages. Try to avoid them if possible (it's usually pretty easy in a modern CMS).

#15: Keyword stuffing and repetition are pointless and make your site look spammy

Check out the search result listing below, and you'll see a whole lot of "canoe puppies" in the URL. That's probably not ideal, and it could drive some searchers to bias against wanting to click.



Repetition like this doesn't help your search rankings—Google and Bing have moved far beyond algorithms that positively reward a keyword appearing multiple times in the URL string. Don't hurt your chances of earning a click (which CAN impact your rankings) by overdoing keyword matching/repetition in your URLs.

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Best of luck with all your URL creation and optimization efforts! Please feel free to leave any additions, ideas, or observations in the comments below.

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Tomas Vaitulevicius
6 years ago

Thanks Rand. It's good to see some technical SEO material as lately it's been getting harder to find any in between all of the, obviously very important, inbound Marketing / Brand Building content.

I assume this will boil down to the specific wording used, but as it currently stands I would strongly disagree with the point #12 - "**Avoid hashes in URLs unless absolutely essential**". In my view hashes provide an extraordinary level of technical creativity / flexibility that can be funnelled to improve one's SEO Architecture.

- You yourself have once promoted the idea of using hashes to condense multiple nonSEO pages / links (e.g. about us, contact, Ts & Cs, etc.) into a single destination with all of the content sitting within a single "page" but navigable with in-page anchors (#hashes).

Separately from this there are many great use cases for hashes for purposes other than in-page navigation. Just a handful of examples:

- On the back of your point #5 hash parameters can be used to replace url parameters for tracking purposes, e.g. example.com/product#utm_source=whisky+aggregator (in GA you would have to enable _setAllowAnchor() for this). Which would stop search engines from having to consider each parameterized page as a unique destination.
- Hash parameters can be used for passing around technical information within your site e.g. this distilled.net/store/profile/login/?next=/training/mobile-seo-guide/ should really be this distilled.net/store/profile/login/#next=/training/mobile-seo-guide/
- Hashes can be used for inbound links which are supposed to trigger some technical functionality on the site. E.g. if you wanted link to a "Buy it now" page from internal or external locations you could use this link www.ebay.co.uk/itm/151417855182#buy-it-now, with on-page JS triggering a "Buy it now" lightbox popup and you would have a link sending link juice to the relevant product page instead of using something like checkout.payments.ebay.co.uk/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?XOProcessor&TransactionId=-1&item=151417855182&quantity=1 which blocks most / all strength from passing through to the rest of your site.

The one place I'll agree hashes are causing more problems than they're solving is if you have decided to develop some or the whole of your site as a "single page application", with hashes being used as replacements for real unique URLs for content you actually want indexed and ranking on search engines.

I've covered these and other similar technical SEO Architecture aspects in my recent SES London talk - http://www.slideshare.net/earnedmarketing/seo-site... I'd love to hear your thoughts on these and the other architectural ideas I'm proposing.

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Rand Fishkin

6 years ago

Hi Tomas - fair points and good additions. I agree I'm being a bit broad, but I would argue that in general, if you can convert URLs with unique content (vs. the very fine and useful usecase of linking to elements in a page) to use non-hash, static, more readable URL formats, it's a better idea.

The examples you gave are mostly links to "in-content" pieces, which I think are precisely the usecase I outlined as being just fine. Tracking parameters is a good addition to that, too, but I'd say that for faceted navigation, if you can use systems that don't require the URL string (e.g. cookies/sessions/etc) that's oftentimes better, and many modern sites are doing this.

p.s. I did edit the list and point to include what you noted - thanks again for the suggestions!

randfish edited 6 years ago

13 0

sotelor10

6 years ago

I guess not recommend the hash because it would become a new URL with the same content, if this is the case Do not be enough to add a canonical?

2 1

D

daskal0s

5 years ago

Hello, very nice article, really

My question:

Which is the best for the url structure?

1) abc.com/category/article-paradeigma

2) abc.com/article-paradeigma

12 0

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Splashweb
6 years ago

Was glad to have found this article, nice job.

Regarding the use of underscore and hyphen, Google and Bing do seem to handle them differently, at least when used within a search phrase, so perhaps some doubt therefore as to whether they handle them equally within URL's.

For example, the searches "office-furniture" and "office_furniture" (ie. string match) produce very different sets of results on Google, but apparently identical ones on Bing (both based on UK versions). So is it a given that they are treated equally in URL's?

Edit: Just took a look at the G webmaster guidelines and they still advise use of "-" over "_" in URL's.

Splashweb edited 6 years ago

10 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

Yeah - I've been looking across URLs and it appears Google, sometime in the last 2 years, started properly parsing underscores as word separators, and you can now see these in their SERPs highlighting. They even seem to have gotten better when there's no word separators (e.g. com/folder/welcometomypost will get seen by Google as a URL containing "welcome to my post"), thus, I'm not telling folks to rewrite or strongly avoid underscores. If it's totally at your own option, I'd probably still slightly bias to hyphens, but you should be fine either way these days.

Search...

2 0

Repro Arte
6 years ago

Its has been a long trip for me with this in recent months: passing a blog on subdomain to a subdirectory, url with 3 and 4 subfolders to only 1, separating words from underscore to hyphens ... and every change I turned Google crazy with redirects and deleting pages. Honestly, the number of visitors to the page has not improved substantially but personally I pretty much prefer the new organization, for clarity for the user and for me. Thanks for this guide :)

4 1

bdegrossa
6 years ago

Hi Rand, Thanks for the great article.

I'm wondering about local. Let's say I'm a therapist in Boulder, CO, and I have separate speciality pages for each issue I treat. Should I add local modifiers to my URLs, such as sitename.com/anxiety-treatment-boulder-co ? Or is that too spammy?

Thanks in advance for your wisdom!

7 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

If you think it's useful for visitors, and it helps denote separate sections (e.g. you also have anxiety-treatment-denver-co), then I think it's OK, but to me it borders a bit on keyword stuffing. I might instead opt for sitename.com/boulder/anxiety-treatment and sitename.com/denver/anxiety-treatment so each of your locations can have separate pages with info from the therapists and about their unique practices.

5 0

Ernie Barojas
5 years ago

Rand - As a quick follow up, if sitename.com/denver/anxiety-treatment listed 50 offices, and you have a page for all 50 offices, would you extend the URL to say sitename.com/denver/anxiety-treatment/1001 where the 1001 is the office ID? Would including "anxiety-treatment" be considered keyword stuffing vs. a shorter url of sitename.com/denver/1001 if the site is about anxiety treatment anyways? Just curious as this applies to many of my clients. Look forward to your reply.

2 0

micromano
5 years ago

Unless all 50 offices are in Denver, the URL "sitename.com/denver/anxiety-treatment" wouldn't make much sense.

It should be "sitename.com/denver/anxiety-treatment" and "sitename.com/boulder/anxiety-treatment" and "sitename.com/pueblo/anxiety-treatment" and so on.

4 0

Rand Fishkin
5 years ago

Yes! What Micromano says - you want the URLs to clearly and accurately indicate as much info as possible about what's on them.

2 0

Paul Sherland
6 years ago

Excellent article Rand! WRT #8, some SEO plugins like Yoast SEO look for the same stop words in URLs that they check for in titles, meta descriptions, and text if the focus keyword phrase contains stop words. We include stop words in titles, descriptions and text for readability.

Your comments are a good reminder that Google and Bing are more sophisticated than Yoast's great tools, and can recognize equivalence when Yoast can't . Don't be a slave to SEO plugin page rating systems.

4 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

Good points Paul. I think that's universally true for tools as a whole in our field.

4 0

micromano

5 years ago

I'm glad I'm not the only one who has noticed this. I use Yoast Premium SEO plugins for my WP site, and I've noticed two rather fundamental problems: (1) Yoast doesn't take into account theme title bars (so if you're using the default title bar on the page rather than a designated <h1> title, Yoast assumes you don't have your keywords in the content of the page, and (2) Yoast is looking for identical phrases in the page title, page content, and in their "focus keywords" box. If there are any stop words or even punctuation differences between any of these three fields, Yoast makes a huge assumption that the page has poor SEO.

1 0

Ben Bendall

6 years ago

Great article. A lot of common sense elements, but still really beneficial to see them written down like this. Also to dispel some SEO myths.

I am sharing with my web team now!

Cheers Rand

4 1

Joseph Garcia

6 years ago

A lot of common sense elements to clear up SEO myths, indeed, such as the last point which is my favorite. Seeing repetitive URL strings like that make me do the ultimate cringe! Clean and simple is always best.

1 1

Highland
6 years ago

It's always good to cover the basics. Great rundown.

A side note on #5

isapi_rewrite is the older IIS version of Apache's mod_rewrite. But, like CMS systems, Microsoft realized it was a gaping hole in their platform and released an official (and free) version of what they call URL Rewrite. Only works with IIS 7.0 or later but it removes the excuse of why IIS hosted sites can't do rewrites.

4 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

Very cool. Thanks - will add that to the post.

1 0

Simon_Ensor
6 years ago

"Short vs Long "This isn't a direct problem with Google or Bing—the search engines can process long URLs without much trouble. The issue, instead, lies with usability and user experience."

If the issue lies with usability and user experience it could be argued that it then has a direct influence on SEO due to traffic/behaviour related signals affecting search rankings. In my opinion, creating a website that is user focussed and then looking at the SEO factors is far more sustainable (and a better business model) than looking at it the other way around! It is not quite that clear cut because SEO needs to be taken into account right from the outset, but not if usability is sacrificed as a result.

Good to know about case sensitive URL's - an easy mistake to make and will check my URL's just in case!

p.s whisky seems to come up as an 'example' a hell of a lot in your posts Rand! Not that whisky is a bad thing...

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Rand Fishkin

6 years ago

What can I say? I write about my passions :-)

And I hear you on the impact of user-focused improvements. I try to always note these as indirect, however, because despite being powerful, they're not specifically causal signals in search engine considerations, but rather follow-on effects, which to me is the definition of "indirect."

3 0

Simon_Ensor

6 years ago

Indeed they may be indirect by definition and therefore harder to quantify - I think my point is that if you focus on user improvements first you can avoid trying to put 'square pegs in round holes' because you are too focussed on SEO. Quite a hard one to articulate; either way they are both incredibly important aspects and neither should be neglected....just another example of inbound marketing needing a holistic approach rather than social doing their job, seo doing their job, and so on whilst no one talks to each other!

Maybe you should do a case study on how more commerical Scottish brands like Glenfiddich have different inbound approaches to the huge American bourbon brands which are maybe quicker to move on social media....;)

1 1

Indra Kusuma
6 years ago

Thanks, this is enlighten me

1 1

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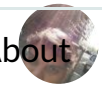

JoaoCJ
5 years ago

Great post as always, however I'm wondering about the short is always better.

Lets say for a classified site, how do you handle when people use multiple filters and you want them to be as semantical as possible.

The thing is by mixing filters plus semantic, my URL grows a lot when most filters are used at the same time.

So what would be my best option here, have long urls over 100 and keep it semantic, or probably go for parameters or just don't show each filter.

Thanks in advance.

3 0

Authority Networks
5 years ago

People have attempted to end the URL debate before, but you sir, have just done it.

2 0

fortress-design
5 years ago

Thanks Rand,

Please tell me which of the three options for the most correct URL of the article in terms of indexing and ranking of search engines:

1. site.com/category/article/
2. site.com/category/article
3. site.com/category/article.html

2 0

Tragester
5 years ago

Thanks Rand - as always valuable insights! Question. What is better when it comes to documents? Option 1 would be to place docs in a directory - e.g. www.brand.com/documents/info-about-cats.pdf. Option 2 would be to just place the documents in the same directory with pages - e.g. www.brand.com/info-about-cats.pdf. Appreciate your advice!

2 0

Carla Dawson
5 years ago

Hi Rand,

I am so glad you wrote this post. Can you give me your opinion on Filter vs Folders? A classic example is how Expedia or Tripadvisor have structured their URL's via filters instead of using folders. I think this issue needs addressing.

Thanks!

Carla

2 0

Search...

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Cynergise

4 years ago

Great post on urls Rand!

I have a question regarding unique numbers in urls - is this still a valid tactic?

I ask as I'm in the process of migrating a site with over 10,000 articles to a WP site and am wondering if I need to maintain the exact url structure to lessen any negative impact - I'll be 301-redirecting them ...

Current url structure: /news/europe/uk-new-housing-minister-20160719121612.html

Probable new url structure: /news/europe/uk-new-housing-minister/

Are there any obvious issues with changing the structure, backed up by a 301 redirect?

Thanks in advance for any insight.

2 0

P

P-C-A

6 years ago

Quick question.

Do you think Search engines have a preference between a URL that contains a file type vs. not?

EXAMPLE

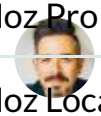
www.example.com/vs.
www.example.com/index.php

OR

www.example.com/business/
vs.
www.example.com/busines.php

jennita edited 6 years ago

3 1



Rand Fishkin
5 years ago

No, I don't think they care at all.

2 0

Alberto Bernal
6 years ago

Great article Rand. Could you give us some example websites that work well all these aspects or most of them?

Thank you!

3 1

Aziz-A
5 years ago

Thank you Rand.

I have a question, what is the best/worst for SEO in these examples:

101**doors**.com/exterior-**doors**/entry-**doors**/wood-entry-**doors**

Or

101**doors**.com/exterior-**doors**/entry-**doors**/wooden

Or

101**doors**.com/exterior-**doors**/entry/wooden

Or

101**doors**.com/exterior/entry/wooden

Regards,

Aziz-A edited 5 years ago

2 0

websaitove
5 years ago

Thanks for the info mr. Fishkin. A lot of things I was wondering about answered in one place even the thing with the blog (subdomain or subolder) I got one problem with#15 - having a service for Logo Design and dealing with the fact that there is no synonym to Logo and Design that looks reader friendly in my language. I'm planning to write a lot of content for Logo Design in my blog(10 to 15 posts) linking to the service page but as I guess it would be a red light for a spammy content. How could I avoid this and is this a big thing to worry about?

websaitove edited 5 years ago

2 0

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AnimeHDO

5 years ago

Great! Thank you very much

1 0

micromano

5 years ago

Rand, I've gone back to this list of suggestions several times over the last several months, and I've finally decided to bit the bullet and update many of my URLs (probably 100+). Is there any benefit to *not* using redirects, but rather letting Google find them naturally? I know the traditional advice has been to use redirects to preserve SEO, but I cannot help but wonder whether it would be better for a site to have 100+ pages of "new" content (edited pages with new URLs) re-discovered by Google naturally rather than for Google to detect 100+ redirects (which *seems* spammy). Any thoughts on this?

1 0

Rand Fishkin

5 years ago

If those pages have any SEO value today - link signals, trust signals, content signals, user/usage data signals, any rankings at all, etc. I'd strongly urge you to redirect them. 100 pages of "new" content will have to earn ranking signals. Those redirects will help boost them and will help anyone who's ever bookmarked or linked to them get to the right, new page.

2 0

micromano
5 years ago

Thanks!

1 0

adventvk
6 years ago

Great Post Bro,

Can We include 2+ canonical url for single page.

http://somewebsite.com

http://www.somewebsite.com/

http://www.somewebsite.com/index.html

some website shows example website

and also i have used stop words on my url and keyworsd too. like **SEO Services in Chennai,** is it enough to use **SEO services Chennai instead of adding in on url and keyword ?**

Thanks a lot for your post

KeriMorgret edited 6 years ago

Doc_Weber
5 years ago

Hi,

I assume that a keyword within a site name can be repeated in the URL, just wanted an expert's opinion

eg. for

surgery.com

1. surgery.com/surgery-without-scars would be better than 2. surgery.com/without-scars

what about using synonyms instead 3. surgery.com/operation-without-scars ?

Let me know what you think the best of the 3 option is. (I would personally vote for 2 as the search engines should prioritize the correlation of keywords that are together between the same slashes and surgery without scars has more hits than operation without scar...; what if the number of hits were similar?)

Thanks.

1 0

Chris Lynam
5 years ago

Great article Rand. Quick question, I'm using the Hubspot CMS which has a lot of great SEO tools built in. Only thing, it automatically crafts URLs based on the blog title. I can change the URLs, keep them shorter, etc. But should I go back and edit blog urls where the keyword sits at the end of the URL? Should it sit earlier in the URL, or does it matter?

Thanks!

Chris

1 0

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deepak1989
5 years ago

thanks for this informative post.

can I change all meta title tags,description and content of my website home page.

home page is all ready indexed.

1 0

Saday Kumar
6 years ago

Hi Rand, i used to follow each URL structure rules written by you for all of my websites. i am happy to know that i am following the right. Some of my clients didn't understand the reason behind a proper structure. I make them understand but at the same time they show me some example sites which has not the same URL structure as mentioned in this blog post but still in good rank.

My clients always ask me to some write-up (proof) where they can find the URL structure suggestions. I used to give all write ups separately from different resource. But now I found this article where all the important suggestion are given.

Thanks a lot for this post

Regards

2 1

Sergio Garcia Sanchez
5 years ago

Ejemplar poico Mensaje te explican tan bien todo sobre las url

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1 0

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Kaushal Thakkar
5 years ago

Hi Brad, Thank you for posting such useful content on URL structuring. Point 11 - Fewer folders is generally better needs some clarification. Can we read this as no folders is generally better than folders.

i.e. would (A) randsfootwear.com/shoes-pumas-soccer-cleats

be better than (B) randsfootwear.com/shoes/soccer/pumas-soccer-cleats

Thanks

Kaushal

1 0

Greg Painter
6 years ago

Great post, Most of the things you could really boil down to it benefits the user which at the end of the day what we're all working towards.

2 1

sushilkin
6 years ago

Hi @Rand Fishkin, Thanks for sharing for URL structuring Post. Its an important part of on-Page SEO.

2 1

Vinodh Ramakannan
5 years ago

Hi, Just read this post after seeing the top posts of 2015 post from Felicia Crawford. Really useful post, glad she had taken time to review the best posts for 2015.

1 0

dezius
5 years ago

What structure of URL is better by making dynamic addresses looks like static (SEO friendly)? We use example.com/**1Q24H2**/SEO-friendly-address/ but I have feeling that better is example.com/SEO-friendly-address/**1Q24H2**/ (this structure using Amazon and Google Play) for SEO?

What is your opinion for this question?

dezius edited 5 years ago

1 0

Rand Fishkin
5 years ago

I don't think it matters at all to be honest, or, at least such a small amount as to not be worth worry about.

1 0

mdmoz
5 years ago

Hi,

I have a question, if my most important keyword is already in the domain name, should I include it on a page URL name too? or it's better to avoid using that keyword in a page URL name?

Thanks!

1 0

surisuraj
5 years ago

great man

1 0

kamleshparekh
5 years ago

Hey Rand, Amazing article! I had a question for a sub-domain. If I have a website which serves 2 different location (country) where one is a global domain (xyz.com) and the others server for usa and other diff locations which has subdomain like usa.xyz.com. Is this the best practice to use sub-domain?

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Brad Averhill
5 years ago

A good article, but I noticed how you did not mention the meta tags for title and description. As we all know there is no need for keywords anymore, but title and description still plays crucial roles in page rank.

Also by adding schema to the page it should also give a little boost to the technical seo.

Just my 2 cents woth.

1 0

Paulo Semaan
5 years ago

Hi!

From the beginning of this year I analyze GA of my blog and found that when my blog was on WP and the URL: simbo.com.br/blog/”YEAR”/”MONTH”/”DAY”/keyword-blog-post” I had much more organic traffic than when I changed to HubSpot blog with the URL

“blog.simbo.com.br/keyword-blog-post”. Anyone have a good reason for that?

Thanks!

1 0

Enver Babat

5 years ago

This is a great information regarding SEO and I have read every single word on this page including all the comments. I thank you for this informative article. I am trying to structure my website and I am a bit confused and I need you help. Please tell me which URL to use for my website:

1. www.ringsforwomen.org/rings/gemstone-rings/sophist...

2. www.ringsforwomen.org/rings/sophisticated-spectacu...

Do you suggest to create sub categories under Rings as follows or just throw all the posts under Rings category?

Rings

Gemstone Rings

Cubic Zirconia Rings

Diamond Rings

1 0

Erica McGillivray

5 years ago

This is also a great question for our Q&A forum.

Panayotis Nikolaidis
5 years ago

Hi Rand,

I would like to know more about the hash in the url. Does Google read after the hash?

1 0

Crystalline-Beauty-of-the-Soul
5 years ago

For me, most of your pointers were excellent. The rest were a bit technical but I see Tomas has that part :)

Thanks for your work!

1 0

Vinodh Ramakannan
5 years ago

Nice Article Rand.

1 0

Saifi Rizvi
6 years ago

Incrdeible post indeed.

2 1

MatrixNeo
6 years ago

Hello Rand!

I liked your blog and the clear explanations you give.

But while reading, I was wondering about the effect of the new domains in terms of SEO traffic.

I mean, would it help for your SEO, if for example, I buy a new .agency domain for my agency (mybusines.agency) and then redirect all my old traffic to this new domain? Would that make sense?

Hope you understood me :/

MatrixNeo edited 6 years ago

2 1

Espesca.es
5 years ago

A perfect tips for writing the url of my website, thank you very much

1 0

tschager
5 years ago

Thanks Rand for the insights! Great to have a current recap.

tschager edited 5 years ago

1 0

farnamjam
5 years ago

my site (123project.ir) is in persian language and as you know for non-english languages urls become very long
do you guys think it's better to still use non-english keywords in my urls or not?
thanks

MattRoney edited 5 years ago

1 0

amiremami
5 years ago

Nice article, I just wanted to be sure about this:

Spaces can work, but they render awkwardly in URLs as %20, which detracts from the readability of your pages.

In wordpress when we upload images, if they have spaces in the name, the will be converted to dash, right?

Jack Jostes
5 years ago

Hey Rand,

I just read the recent Moz post about how 301 Redirects can result in a 15% loss in organic traffic.

For an existing page that's missing keywords in its URL, i.e. .com/services/, do you think it's worth it to edit it to something like .com/keyword-services/ and then 301 Redirect the old URL to the new one -- or is it best not to edit URLs of existing webpages?

RamblinJackson edited 5 years ago

1 0

Rand Fishkin
5 years ago

No, probably not. If you're moving it anyway, go for the friendlier URL, but otherwise I wouldn't sweat it.

2 0

Jack Jostes
5 years ago

Ok thanks. Just to clarify -- you don't think editing the URLs to include keywords is a good idea, unless we're needing to redirect the page for another reason?

RamblinJackson edited 5 years ago

1 0

Rand Fishkin
5 years ago

If you're just publishing it, go ahead and optimize the URL, but if it's already published and ranking, probably worse to edit the URL and need to redirect the old version than the slight benefit you'll receive.

2 0

itspuck
5 years ago

I have a business that services multiple locations which URL structure would you recommend.

Option 1.

Main state landing page

mysite.com/florida-plumbing-service

City landing pages within the state

mysite.com/plumbing-service-miami-florida

Option 2.

Main State Landing Page

mysite.com/florida-plumbing-service

City landing pages within the state

mysite.com/florida/plumbing-service-miami

*note in option 2,... navigating to just /florida manually would not produce any pages.

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itspuck edited 5 years ago

1 0

Jeewan Garg
4 years ago

If any url/page e.g. abc.com/code_test.html is ranking at position no. 1 , but should be done. Should we change it or no need to do it.

1 0

epars
4 years ago

hi thanks for great post it's very useful I have one question about URLS the language of my site is Persian is it better to use Persian words in URLS or equivalent of their in English words? which is better for SEO? thank you

1 0

Bhuvneshvar Sharma
4 years ago

how much percent important off page submission in seo ?

bhuvneshvarsharma edited 4 years ago

1 0

Nick Stamoulis
6 years ago

There's a difference between having a keyword rich domain and including keywords in the URL. You don't want to "stuff" the URL but it's important to have them there. It helps tell users what they can expect to see when they land on the page.

2 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

Yup - totally agree. That's the difference between what I recommend in #15 vs. #3.

1 0

Mike Lowry
6 years ago

We have faced an issue with our domain name. After successfully running the site a year with magento service in the name, last week we got a mail from "Magento" Software that we can not use "Magento Service " in our domain, unfortunately we have to redirect this domain to a new domain.

2 2

Konstantinos Valsamidis
6 years ago

Hey Rand,

In a previous article of Moz, Ellie mentioned that a slash in the end of the URL is considered duplicate to a URL without one.

So, domain.com/blog and domain.com/blog/ requires a 301 redirect, right? But how this can be achieved? And which one should you choose between the two?

Konstantinos.V edited 6 years ago

2 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

Yes - that's still the case, as those are entirely separate URLs (oftentimes the one ending in a slash is actually calling the index or default page of the folder, e.g. domain.com/blog/ calls domain.com/blog/default.php or the like). My advice would be to pick one, stick with it, and if you're finding confusion or folks accidentally linking, canonicalize via rel=canonical or 301.

2 0

grobro
6 years ago

On my wordpress installation I had this too but wp 301'ed it automatically.

1 1

Louise.G
6 years ago

There are all excellent points Rand! I just have one questions regarding 'The Scale of URL Readability' diagram. I noticed that the first URL which is described as the preferred one does not carry the www-header. Does that mean you would say that a website would have a better URL structure if it was just http://mydomain.com/puppies as opposed to http://www.mydomain.com/puppies?

Trevor-Klein edited 6 years ago

2 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

That's actually totally up to you and should be mostly based on considerations of readability and user-friendliness. Some folks like www because of the historical contexts and associations with familiarity. Personally, I find that for savvier audiences, removing the www and saving the four characters (the three ws and the .) is better.

1 0

FabReal

4 years ago

Hi Rand, i have a question about folders: if i have many different content related to a same topic on my website, does it makes an SEO impact to have always the same folder ?

Let's say, I have a website about Pro Sports and i have many different contents about Professional Bikes.

I would prefer to place my "Bikes Home" to : domain.com/best-professional-bike/

But then i have a lot of different contents in this Bike category like "Tests", "Comparaisons", "Brands", "Model"s, etc..

So, should all that content go into /best-professional-bike/ ? Like for instance /best-professional-bike/tests/we-tested-the-awesome-2-wheel-bike or /best-professional-bike/we-tested-the-awesome-2-wheel-bike

If it does not make an impact, i would personally prefer to have a shorter folder for all the other content like : /bike/test/we-tested-the-awesome-2-wheel-bike or /bike/we-tested-the-awesome-2-wheel-bike

That's something i ask myself for every client website i do, but i never figured out what's the best solution..

Thanks !

1 0

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nnass
4 years ago

I need some advice please. My client has an extremely long business name but shortening the url does not indicate what they do. Would a generic address eg rescuingyourbusiness.co.za be too vague and bad SEO? Any response much appreciated. The quicker the better ;)

1 0

Khan Babar

4 years ago

I see this wonderful suggestions I found some intelligent info here also i have read an splendid suggestion here on bloger khan and i feel like i should share cause there always people who like to learn more.

Enjoy

interword90 edited 4 years ago

1 0

M **manoharah97**
4 years ago

Is it okay to add date int the URL? liike www.example.com/2017/1/9/new-post-title
Does this affect SEO or any other problems?

1 0

S **st025**
4 years ago

This is a very interesting article. Thank you Rand.

I have something though that still puzzles me and it is related mainly with the reporting part of an SEO work after implementing on page SEO optimization best practices techniques. I am going to start making SEO optimizations in one eshop that is using short product urls i.e. domainname.com/product-name

The website is in greek but a lot of its urls are written in english (not as transliteration though). Due to this the urls do not contain the main keyword in each landing page and they do not also perform well in organic traffic terms. I would like to change the urls using the best SEO practices but I didn't see mentioned in the best practices something for an article/product id inside the url. I believe when a url contains an id (like a primary key for example) then after making url changes it is easier to track in GA the impact of the SEO in a landing page.

Example:

old url:

domainname.com/product-name_productid or

domainname.com/product-name/productid

to

new uri:

domainname.com/new-product-name/productid

(both urls keep the same productid)

I have noticed that if such a url structure is kept it is possible in Google Analytics to track the performance of the landing page easily even after a url changes. Just by filtering based on the productid number.

Also, when a very short url is used in a website (domain+productname) then in GA I believe it is hard to report on the impact of the seo on a category of products you might be working on. Because, there is no categorization in the url. How in that case you can track the new traffic performance of product category you have been working on with on page SEO optimization? Everything will need to be linked with categorizations that exists maybe in excel documents and then create functions in excel to link the info. All these are time consuming...

I think for this reasons I would prefer to use a url like:

domainname.com/category/productname/id

And if the product is linked to more than one product category to set which is the primary category for the product, which I guess is handling the canonical url part for the product.

What is your opinion about this?

1 0

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B

Bernard_Street

4 years ago

Still number one after 2 years. Thanks for the article. :)

Umar Khan
6 years ago

Hey Rand,

It's a great and I'd say a much needed refresher post.. I have few things in my mind which I like to have your take on that,

1. When you click any link from twitter, your main URL automatically associates to something like this:
(*/?utm_content=buffer53e35&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer*)
does it have any positive/negative impact? I heard that generally the "?" doesn't pollute your URL, is it true?
2. In the WP URLs option, we have several options to select the URL structure, like:

Post Name (/%postname%/ -> www.moz.com/big-news/
Category and Name (/%category%/%postname%/ -> www.moz.com/sports/big-news/
Day and Name (/%year%/%monthnum%/%day%/%postname%/ -> www.moz.com/2014/05/01/big-news
Month and Name (/%year%/%monthnum%/%postname%/ -> www.moz.com/2014/05/big-news/

Which one do you prefer? Having the Day/month in URL possess any value?

Thanks,

Salman Sharif
6 years ago

I think it is already defined there, **fewer folders is generally better**

2 1

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Nouman Tariq
6 years ago

Hey Umar,

Regarding your first question The answer is yes "?" do pollute your url and it is crawlable as well, A lot of ecommerce site use "?" when using filters. So it is recommended to have canonical tag of your original url on these pages. Or Block all type of parameters from robots.

Regarding your 2nd question I think [Post Name (/%postname%/ -> www.moz.com/big-news/] and [Category and Name (/%category%/%postname%/ ->www.moz.com/sports/big-news/] are the best url approach in WP but again the shorter is better.

Cheers,

2 1

Infocorp
4 years ago

Very good article, has served me a lot when editing the url, I have also seen another article where they mention the maximum number of cacracteres that must have a url so there are no problems after

1 0

abuntlysupport
4 years ago

Hi Rand! I have a website that sells "Colored Contact Lenses" and these products are also referred to as, Theatrical Contact Lenses, Halloween Contact Lenses" but they are literally the exact same thing, just different peoples intention when searching..

I'm trying to figure out what a good url structure would be, in regards to hierarchy because they are the same things I feel the 3 categories mentioned above would all be top/primary.. Or should i do colored-contacts/theatrical/, colored-contacts/halloween using "colored contacts" as the base since it seems to be the most basic and also the higher of the search volume.

I can't personally seem to relate any available content with my particular concerns.

Any feedback would be highly appreciated.

Chris

1 0

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semidot
4 years ago

I like the post and follow all the steps that you told here. But what about numerical values? If someone use numerical values in url to make it separate from other url then it would be seo friendly or not please tell me. If the answer is yes then what rules we need to follow to use numerical values in URL?

1 0

Caleb Wetherell
4 years ago

Thanks for the list Rand! Great to see that your URL for this page meets your criteria :)

1 0

Shineedge
4 years ago

Some people use different domains.but here it is a good advice to use single domains rather than many as we will be more focused and other thing I learn is to use catchy content.

1 0

Mike Corso
6 years ago

Rand,

Since we're currently addressing the 'hashbang' issue as a result of a site redesign, I found #12 to be especially useful. And thanks to Thomas V for chiming in.

Mike Corso

1 0

Kaitlin McMichael
6 years ago

Thanks for this very helpful article, especially the links to further research, like the mod rewrite rules & the Search Discovery article on case sensitivity. I've been hoping to deepen my knowledge of IIS rewrites etc, so this is perfect.

2 1

Danny121
4 years ago

The way in which Vivastreet structure their urls is also interested.

Can you comment on their use of subdomains and filters ?

thanks Rand!

1 0

letsgetapps
4 years ago

Hi, Thank you this article really help me. I have question.

I've a website and i create a Subdirectory my website looks like this

- mydomain.com/

The Subdirectory is like this

- mydomain.com/mobile-appd-development/

And i have two categories iOS and Android.

So i have to choose the permalink like this one

/%Category%/%postname%/

now when i write an article it looks like this:

- mydomain.com/mobile-appd-development/ios/how-to-become-ios-developer/

or

- mydomain.com/mobile-appd-development/android/how-to-become-android-developer/

is this good for SEO?. It's not spammy is that right ? please give me your opinion about this.

Thank You

1 0

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Julieana Findlay
4 years ago

Hi there, this was very valuable for me today to check that I am on the right path with my SEO. Many thanks for a well written and informative article.

1 0

alokkumar01
5 years ago

in my site # is available in url.

May i know it affact in seo or not.please suggest me.

Thanks

1 0

Luong Thang
5 years ago

Thank ! It's really good

lbeen88 edited 5 years ago

1 0

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Christ0fer
5 years ago

about Fewer folders thing, you say "it create a perception of site depth for both engines and users". What is the problem with that?

1 0

Shalu Singh
5 years ago

Hey Rand great list regarding URL structuring. What you think about capitalization for specific keyword in URL for example abc.com/Blog/Cloud/xyz and does it makes any difference. I am also not certain with the use of WWW or non www site: I know you will prefer http://abc.com but is there any specific reason or factor behind this?

1 0

asghar zinolabedini
4 years ago

hello

thanks to your education

I am from Iran and without if I can , I'm use in url of Farsi words .

After the use of Farsi words links becomes as follows:

http://seonab.com/-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B2%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%BE%D8%B1%D8%B3-.html

Is this link can be broken link or Google can this link to crawl to the

I am waiting for your guidance

asghar edited 4 years ago

1 0

AwesomeEves

6 years ago

Thanks Rand! I was still recommending clients not to use underscores! Can you provide any reference showing that they are treated similar to hyphens? Cause everyone seems to refer to Matt Cutts himself pointing out to avoid them.

2 1

Rand Fishkin

6 years ago

Yes! I noted this in the answer above, but check out, for example, https://www.google.com/search?q=rand+fishkin+pubco...

Years ago, the URL bolding/highlighting would have issues depending on how you typed it - e.g. https://www.google.com/search?q=rand+pubcon wouldn't show just "rand" individually bolded in the URL. From what I'm seeing, it appears Google's very close to as good at extracting words when the underscore is used as a separator. Either that, or Google's gotten good enough at parsing words even when in run-on-format (e.g. randfishkinpubcon) that word separators are now less critical for SEO.

2 0

Meemoza
4 years ago

Hi,

This article is very useful. I'm wondering if you can help us figure out the best URL to use on a bilingual french/english website. We are using Shopify and it allows us to translate everything except for URLs. I checked several times and it's simply impossible to translate URLs with Shopify. That would involve maintaining two websites, which I don't want to get into.

What would be the best unique language to use in a URL? The one most of your customers use? Or the one which has the most potential to reach people? French is the language of our current customer, but I feel french URLs are keeping us from reaching english customers, which equal to a lot more people here in Canada.

Would you recommend using bilingual URLs? Like /about-us-a-propos-de-nous

Or would that just confuse Google?

Thank you,

1 0

irwinl
4 years ago

Great read! Basic SEO practice, pity to say some digital agency don't do this best practice....on URL readability

irwinl edited 4 years ago

1 0

felixyakubov91
4 years ago

I have a very serious question :)

If I have a website in Hebrew. Should I leave my URL's in hebrew (which when copied changes them to %A%A%B format) or change it to english?

1 0

hner
5 years ago

I'm having a hard time deciding between the following:

example.com/seattle/leaky-faucet

example.com/seattle-leaky-faucet

I want to rank for "seattle leaky faucet," for example.

The site will have cities as prefixes or directories for each url.

hner edited 5 years ago

1 0

heenaahmad
4 years ago

Hi Hner,

If you are going to have single city and various directories on the website then the following solution will work for you in a better way:

example.com/seattle-leaky-faucet

example.com/seattle-french-lang

But if you are going to have various cities and various directories or same directory inside those different cities, then following URL structure will be better for you:

example.com/seattle/leaky-faucet

example.com/seattle/french-lang

example.com/manette-peninsula/leaky-faucet

example.com/manette-peninsula/french-lang

1 0

Search...

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About

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sansarlochan
4 years ago

Hi Rand. Very interesting article to read. One thing I wanna ask you more. Actually I posted an article and submitted to google using *add url to google*. After then I saw a mistake -- I had used two types of brackets in article's heading. So I deleted the uneccessary bracket from title and again updated the post. Will it hurt my newly post ranking in Google? This is my post...I was talking about.

1 0

Kinga Harskuti
6 years ago

Hi Rand,

Thanks for the great article! This post is just about time to ask you -or the audience- about the tricky issue of the URLs with double byte characters. I've found a Q at the q&a forum on this and they say that in this case usability might more important than being URL-friendly: http://moz.com/community/q/double-byte-characters-...

My question: if my keyword contains special characters like "ü" or "ő" should I use those or should I use the "plain" keyword.

Search...

The keyword in the URL currently looks like this: /rep%C3%BC!%C5%91jegy/

instead of this: /repulojegy/ and this is a high priority keyword.

Products
Blog
About
Resources
Moz Pro
Moz Local
Free SEO Tools
Log In

If you have a guess it's more than welcome. :)

Thanks,

Kinga

Kinga_Harskuti edited 6 years ago

2 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

Generally speaking, I'd bias to the cleaner URL with the plain character, and rely on the title, headline, etc. to clearly include the special characters.

3 0

Enfys
5 years ago

When you have a special character like ü, in German language, it can be written as "ue". (ä = ae, ö = oe, ...)

What is the best way for using these keywords in the url, "u" or "ue"?

1 0

Search...

Tali Yess
4 years ago

Great Article Rand.

So let me ask you... bottom line (until Google throws another curve ball) ...is an SEF URL (as in a human readable one) a ranking factor *in and of itself*? Or is it just a thing that causes a higher click through rate and and therefore good for usability (which also affects rank)?

1 0

shalini11
4 years ago

Great job and i have got lot of information and procedure how to estimate the URLs and how to restructure it are really helpful to me, as i am new to this concept, your guidance helped me a lot.

1 0

talentedzone
4 years ago

great post

1 1

Frank Rietta
6 years ago

Is the default Ruby on Rails way to parameterize detrimental vs shoehorning in a slug system? For example:

https://example.com/posts/1337-puppies-adorably-co...

Where 1337 is the database ID for a Post model (by convention). What happens is that behind the scenes the text after the number is entirely disregarded, but it is used in the links to the content.

1 1

Michael Cottam
6 years ago
ASSOCIATE

Great article, Rand--one eetsy beetsy comment about IIS and case-sensitivity in URLs in general. If you're using IIS, yes, it will ignore the case and still serve up mypeatyislay.html when you request it as MyPeatyIslay.Html....BUT really those are technically different URLs, and Google will treat them as separate. Which means if you have some links to it in 1 form, and other links in another form, then you're spreading link juice across two separate (and unfortunately duplicate) pages. Really, you need to 301 one to the other.

1 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

Huh. Fascinating! I had seen Google doing a relatively good job auto-canonicalizing those years ago. Have they slipped? Do you have any examples you could point to where Google's not or hasn't counted ranking metrics across two pages simply because of unique capitalization?

3 0

Matt LaClear
6 years ago

I hope that this post circulates around because as a customer, one of the most annoying traits in a link to me is dynamic parameters. I pay close attention to websites URLs before I click on a link, and if the link is doing too much I skip it. It makes me feel unsafe and uneasy to click a confusing link full of dynamic parameters and multiple subfolders. There's nothing I appreciate more than knowing what I'm going to be directed to before I click a link. Typically when changing the names of my links I try to have it match the title in some variation, and throw a keyword that fits in if I can. For instance, if I'm writing a location page for a plumbing company my URL might be something like, (website.com/Bronx-newyork-repair-plumber.)

1 1

Cameron Smith
6 years ago

Great concepts! I have a quick question. So I work for a local builder in Utah and we are redesigning our site. I am thinking of redoing our site hierarchy and I don't know how to structure our community pages. would it be better to include the city name in the url or not include it to make the url shorter?

www.homebuilder.com/communities/city/name-of-community

www.homebuilder.com/communities/name-of-community

CandleCam edited 6 years ago

1 1

sarahlouisej
6 years ago

Hi Rand, really informative as ever, many thanks. Could I ask one question, you mention canonicalizing URLs that have very similar content... just in the process of reviewing our site to either re-write some of the duplicate content or canonicalize pages with large amounts of 'internal' duplicate content. As an apx guide, how 'identical' do pages need to be before you canonicalizing them? For example, if you had 3 products on different URL's that were all very similar so the product descriptions were part identical (internal duplicate) and part unique, at what point would you consider it could be deemed as duplicate' and need a canon, once the duplicate content exceeds 50% of the pages content or a different ratio? Any comments would be very gratefully received.

1 1

Tino Fernandez
6 years ago

Rand Hello!

Interesting post, as always. Even knowing that search engines today are able to track any URL structures, it is best to create as simple and clean as possible URL structure for both search engines and users.Good advice, but as you point out, is not ready to follow to the letter, in which if we do not our position will not be good. It is a list for good guidance on how to do it.

Great ...

1 1

Bennie Stander
6 years ago

Thank you for clarifying some issues I had for some time now. A good reference tool when explaining url structures to a client.

1 1

ofw12387
6 years ago

Very nice article :-)

Btw, about this point -> **#7: Match URLs to titles most of the time (when it makes sense)**

I agree that title and h1 should be similar! But what do you think about using different versions of a keyword (for example the plural/singular version) to help both rank well?

Br

//Oliver

1 1

Vikas Chawla
6 years ago

Hi Oliver, That is usually a good strategy in our experience. The title, url and H1 tags need not be the same but can have similarities which could either be synonyms or expansions of abbreviations or sometimes even leaving out elements in the url to create curiosity.

2 1

abu maram
6 years ago

the nice

Wonderful strategies
The problem is that Google daily to update algorithms

alraiah edited 6 years ago

Search...

1 1

TZora
6 years ago

As someone relatively new to the industry, it's always nice to see some new posts about the "basics" since things seem to change incredibly quickly. Thanks Rand!

1 1

mozfanfunda
6 years ago

Good Evening Moz Team,

Kind help : How to delete contents from website to not showing in Google search results

This is very great information regarding Search Engine Optimization and i visited length and depth of this website, really very very much useful information.

I am new blogger and using blogger as platform for blogging, but whatever i posted, it all become searchable on Google very short span of time. Now i want to remove some content from my blog post, but i tried my best, refer and read a lot in Google guidance and in many other websites about removing a content but i am not able to understand very clearly so i am not able to remove. When i searched for removed content, that contents are again listed in Google search. So i am very worry and i stopped my all planed about whatever i have prepared offline since two years as big project to launch a blog. I have prepared a lot page offline during my vacation for part of my forthcoming blog project. As soon as i am not able to remove such contents if in case of any removal requirement as i am not knowing very well in this regard, i stopped every thing for content writing.

In view of the above, it is requested that guide me from your side as best tricks as final hope / provide step by step guidance reference / any best web link available known to you. For this i will be very grateful to you.

Thanks and Regards,

Anil

mozfanfunda edited 6 years ago

Search...

1 1

Heiko

6 years ago

Hello,

Regarding #15:

What would you prefer if the lenght of the URL will be still under 60 characters and you have an example like this:

Let's call it a specific page in a category. As I like the old shoe examples: You have a page about red shoes in your shoe category.

Which URL would you prefer:

a) www.mydomain.com/shoes/red-shoe

b) www.mydomain.com/shoes/red

Personally I would prefer a) or would you already consider this as spammy? My real example is not that trivial like the shoe example and the categories will be in plural and the specific pages always in singular (like in the example shoes vs shoe).

c) another alternative would be to put it independently from the side structure on www.mydomain.com/red-shoe - but personally I have the experience that a) or b) will help the rankings of the category page if you have the specific pages in the same subfolder.

What's your opinion on this?

Heiko edited 6 years ago

1 1

Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

In your example, I'd ask whether "red shoes" as a broad term gets all that much search volume and whether it's a filter/facet worth exposing to Google (it probably is, but it might be on the border). I agree that I'd probably choose A over B, though my preference might be /shoes/color-red, /shoes/color-blue, etc.

Let's try a few more real-life examples:

A) randsfootwear.com/shoes/adidas

B) randsfootwear.com/shoes/adidas-shoes

I'd take A over B. In the case of

A) randsfootwear.com/shoes/soccer/puma-cleats

B) randsfootwear.com/shoes/soccer/pumas-soccer-cleats

I'd take B over A.

It's definitely a fine line and a case where you need to use judgement and think about UX/readability/perception ahead of SEO.

3 1

jurgisp
5 years ago

Hey Rand, A vs B?

A. https://yoursite/en/automobile/make-Audi/model-Q5

B. https://yoursite/en/automobile/Audi/Q5

Thanks in advance

Jurgis

jurgisp edited 5 years ago

1 1

Goyllo
5 years ago

In many situation developer, use parameter to categories products in easy way, they don't care about URL permalink. Also one keyword is enough in permalink. Look out Support.google.com URL, they only using product name only once time in permalink. They uses scheme breadcrumbs for rich snippet. I think you should mention schema tags information in this post.

1 1

Ankesh Kumar Shrivastava
6 years ago

Hey Rand,

Amazing article as always. I have one question for you.

What is the ideal way to tackle duplicate content? Like if we have URLs which open both ways with and without "www". I have tried to find the ideal way for solving it but never got a proper answer. So, what should we use, canonical or 301?

Thanks!

1 1

Shiv Gupta
6 years ago

Ankesh, Both options (canonical and 301) will work.

I would suggest you to use 301 redirection in the case of Multiple Versions of the Homepage.

2 1

Krishna Kumar Singh
6 years ago

Hello Rand, Thanks for the great and deeper insight about technical seo.

I always appreciate comparative study as you stated here like subdomains vs subfolders, Rel canonical vs 301, and How multiple websites linking back to main site can affect our seo.

1 1

David Hur
6 years ago

This is a great article! It covers so much ground and provides an information refresh for those already in the industry. There are two points I would like to highlight with regards to Pharma SEO.

- **#1: Whenever possible, use a single domain & subdomain**
  - This is a good strategy, for those not in the pharma industry. If we were selling T-shirts, it would make sense to have “tshirts.com” be the main domain and each section within that domain be its own subdomain like “summer.tshirts.com” and “winter-youcrazy.tshirts.com”.

- This strategy does not work as effectively for pharma brands. Some brands still use this tactic to present content to both Patients and HCPs, but our stance is to have two separate domains because the audience for brand.com and brandhcp.com are distinctly different.
- Reference: http://www.cmimedia.com/insights/povs/the-domain-c...

- **#11: Fewer folders is generally better**
  - This was something our SEO team discussed internally and it seems like your article aligns with our conclusion. There are some cases where a brand may have multiple products across one name (Headache™ Daytime, Headache™ Nighttime, Headache™ Toilettime, Headache™ Allthetime, etc.) and each one may speak to the same topic like "dose reduction".
  - Rather than forcefully creating folders for each pill, we have chosen to limit the number of folders and make the URLs themselves applicable to their topics.

Once again, thanks for providing something with this much depth in the technical side of URL structure!

1 1

robertdnischwitz
6 years ago

As it relates to point #15, while I agree about the spamminess of keyword stuffing, a search for canoe puppies in google returns your example as #1 in organic results. perhaps a different example would prove better but i understand your point.

1 1

ToryBuckley
6 years ago

Great reminders to have a better url structure. Like many different aspects of SEO, it can get complicated and confusing. Sometimes we need a to remember the basics and the users. I've noticed time and again people argue about the importance of the search engine and the user.

First and foremost it is the user. Remember the user!

MrSEOGuy
6 years ago

Rand,

You are a man of culture, I love hearing of your whisky exploits and it is a shame to lose a lego collection.

The ideas here are spot on and I think the subdomains are often recognized like an entirely different domain. What we often refer to as domains aren't top level, .com is a TLD not moz.com so the authority of .com obviously doesn't flow into moz.com or if it does it only does so to a negligible degree. Since moz.com is a subdomain of .com then example.moz.com wouldn't inherit authority either, it would be ranked all on its own and would be likely not to inherit penalties.

That's what I am gathering but that's conjecture of course, do you have solid data for or against that idea? Chances are that's exactly what you are saying and I am simply being Captain Obvious or merely rewording it.

1 1

lisasaline
6 years ago

Excellent post. Nice to see some of the old standards are still relevant. Great reminders too.

1 1

Eddie Dunkerley

6 years ago

Rand....An Islay Whisky fan??. Peaty Goodness!!

What about the process of having multiple URLs for a single page (not two similar pages). For example the main one for SEO purposes another for sharing purposes (shorter perhaps) and any other purposes that we see fit.Obviously they all need to be directing to a single indexable page. Sensible, stupid or no difference?

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1 1

Vikas Chawla

6 years ago

Thanks for this Rand. This is a great refresher. It would be also be wonderful to understand how some of these automated, especially if on Wordpress. I think a plugin like Yoast SEO can take care of most of these elements as long as the title of the article is appropriate. Ofcourse Yoast gives an option to edit the urls in case the default one is not as per the expectation.

Thanks for pointing out about the case sensitive issues. This is something that probably requires some bit of additional work to get right.

1 1

SilverStar1

6 years ago

What about last slash (moz.com/) - is it necessary (why?) or not.

1 1

seoautomation
6 years ago

If anyone can help with a question I have regarding how relevant domain extensions are to google search nowadays. I have a website in googles average top 3 and have an older .jobs extension that points to my website. It is quite spendy to keep current and wondered if it is even relevant anymore and why? jobs is actually a keyword but the domain name is not so not sure if I should do away with it or not, any help would be appreciated. Thanks

Search...

1 1

Jared Gardner
6 years ago

This is the "end all be all" guide to URL structure! you guys should make this in to a evergreen resource.

Thanks!

1 1

Kunle Campbell
6 years ago

Hi Rand -

Great URL primmer I'll be sharing as I agree with all of what you put out.

I am however quite surprised that you missed out the impact of using Structured data (microdata or RDFa) and/or the Schema breadcrumb property (under WebPage itemType) - https://schema.org/breadcrumb on URLs in the SERPs.

Marked-up breadcrumbs render differently in the SERPs - my findings is that few site are yet to fully take advantage of marking up their breadcrumb trails - I typically find about 3-4 out 10 links on page 1 results utilising marked-up breadcrumbs as means of displaying much more human-friendly URLs in the SERPs. Great for UX - which has to be good.

Here is an example: https://twitter.com/KunleTCampbell/status/570311445033959424

This is the Google ref: https://developers.google.com/structured-data/breadcrumbs

kunlecampbell edited 6 years ago

1 1

Daniel Futerman
6 years ago

Hey Rand,

As usual, really good post and great info. Especially liked #8 about not using stop words in the URL, wasn't fully aware of that. Thanks!

1 1

Simon Dalley
6 years ago

Great post - one of my main URLs is extremely long, looks a bit spammy to me because of all the keywords it's got in it, however I've been nervous about touching it because it ranks so well. I think it's about time I bit the bullet!

2 2

Walter Schaerer
6 years ago

Great compilation, Rand, as per usual!

Here's another aspect: How about URL IDs on behalf of Google News? They want at least 3 digit IDs in the URL in order to grant unique news crawling. Some publishers ad it at the end separated by a hyphen. A better way may be to add it at the end after a slash. That way Google News gets its ID but when forwarding the URL to someone you may as well skip that last folder and send the URL without the ID. The link would still work.

This is also a good way to go about adding IDs after the website is indexed without IDs: The old links still work, but Google News links to the new ones. Or does that cause duplicate content issues?

Search...

1 1

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Rand Fishkin
6 years ago

Hi Walter - actually, Google News waives the URL requirements if you use New Sitemaps: https://support.google.com/news/publisher/answer/6...

I really like that feature, since forcing sites to change URL structure simply to get into Google News was a heavy and, IMO, ridiculous requirement.

1 0

Doyle Slayton
6 years ago

Good stuff Rand. When we started using these strategies, our organic search results doubled.

DoyleSlayton edited 6 years ago

1 1

Brian Maher

6 years ago

Hi Guys,

Great article guys. I have a question around wordpress blog posts. I can't structure my posts under the blog subfolder. hierarchy, each blog post http://site.com/blog-post-one and http://site.com/blog-post-two. How can I set it up the to subfolder http://site.com/blog/blog-post-one?

Search...

1 1

Rasmus Aarup Christiansen

6 years ago

Hey Rand,

Nice article, very helpful. I have a question, to make sure I understand it correctly:

If I have a company which sells in multiple languages and also has two different section: one targeted towards men and another towards women. Am I correct to understand you'd recommend the following approach:

Let's assume my main keywords are "bachelorette party" ("EVJF" in French, "junggesellinnenabschied" in German) for women and "bachelor party" ("EVG" in French, "junggesellenabschied" in German) for men.

www.mydomain.com/fr/evjf/

www.mydomain.com/fr/evg/

www.mydomain.com/en/bachelorette-party/

www.mydomain.com/en/bachelor-party/

www.mydomain.com/de/junggesellinnenabschied/

www.mydomain.com/de/junggesellenabschied/

?

I'm not really interested in anynone seeing what is on www.mydomain.com and www.mydomain.com (or /en or /de), as all relevant content would be found on the pages for that language and that category.

An important subsite would then be: www.mydomain.com/en/bachelor-party/las-vegas-bach... - is that too spammy? ("las vegas bachelor party" would probably be the main keyword to be found on, as the competition on the keyword "bachelor party" is too high)

Thanks a lot!

jennita edited 6 years ago

Search...

1 1

Rahul Kumar
6 years ago

Nice articulation and such a nice info for SEO beginners. Glad to read your post.

1 1

Centro Comercial Inmobiliario
6 years ago

Great post. I see two months later. Surely it is a very basic question, but I hope someone can solve my doubt. What characters should not be used in my URL's?

1 1

sotelor10
6 years ago

Something very basic but important and necessary in the application of SEO, I've also noticed some web where good url is applied and is tedious reading to be very long, is logical to think that the higher the quality of the web, the better the positioning and nicer presentation of the web.

example:

It's not the same, write a url with many numbers and letters to write one with some description to indicate that the web is the title or subject published.

Excellent article with many practical tips.

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1 1

Satinder singh

5 years ago

Hello Rand,

I read this post thoroughly and got good idea about structuring URL and will implement this in my blog Codepedia.info

But now I have one doubt, just want to clear with you.

I have my blog and its WordPress platform, so my articles are basically a post, as in Moz each article are pages (no post). So in my each post, URL there a year and month part. As I observed in many other Ever green blog article they are not having date part in the URL.

Is it good **to have Date** or **not to have Date** in the URL.

Example

1. http://codepedia.info/2015/06/upload-image-using-j...
2. http://codepedia.info/upload-image-using-jquery-aj...

Can you tell me, here in above example which one is better, or with whom you go .

Thanks

Waiting for your reply :)

Satinder_singh edited 5 years ago

1 1

Toby Bateson
5 years ago

Very useful article, thanks Rand. I loved the way you used the title of the post as an example of how to balance length vs. readability. It is also notable how you recommend using judgement to balance these things rather than trying to stick to an absolute value.

1 1

adya
6 years ago

Nice Tutorial Its Use For Me And When you are get bored plz Visit Entertinement Site http://manatelugusamacharam.com
and you can get telugu movie spoofs , Jandhyala comedy scenes , tips and greatest places

1 1

rajkumarsam
6 years ago

Well.. Very good listing, i am seeking a nice tips and ideas about SEO.
So thats it, i found some useful stuff over here for my site

Thanks Rand

MeganSingley edited 6 years ago

1 1

Sammy6
6 years ago

All pracitces which you wrote I using in my website, I think it`s basic rules which we must using when we prepare our urls structure.

Sammy6 edited 6 years ago

1 1

Harriet Yoder
6 years ago

Patting myself on the back because I do most of this structuring url stuff the right way. Here's a pat on the back to you and Moz for your excellent teaching!!
Oh, and you really should put photographer's credit on those pictures someone special takes for you. #HusbandPoints

1 1

Scott Hamilton
6 years ago

I just started with a client who has a lot of unique setups that we are trying to clear up. Im changing the domains for their sake but just wanted to double check my thinking with the domain setups.

- Main Site: www.abc.com
- Vanity URL: www.def.com
- 2nd Site: www.xyz.com

So at some point a vanity domain (www.def.com) which links to one page on ABC.com but it retains the www.def.com domain, thus creating a duplicate site in parallel to the original site. Included in the footer of the site (remember abc.com & def.com are really just 1 site), a link was included to a 2nd site within this family of sites to www.xyz.com. So XYZ.com has backlinks from BOTH domains now.

I've just updated the pages to have canonical tags with the ABC.com, should I also go through the tasks of making sure that www.def.com resolves to the original www.def.com to remove the duplication and inflation of backlinks?

That is my plan at least, I think Im just looking for the *validation* in my thinking, knowing that it may be a short-term hit with the "loss" of backlinks but that is worth it in regards to making sure the domains are set up properly. thanks for any advice.

KeriMorgret edited 6 years ago

1 1

Steve Morgan
6 years ago

Great post, Rand. However I somewhat disagree about your thoughts on stop words (#8). You say that it's important for the URL to be readable, especially in contexts where the URL serves as the anchor text, but sometimes removing stop words makes it unreadable. Just a word of caution more than anything. i believe that the Yoast SEO WordPress plugin removes stop words as default, but I actually change that setting on my sites so that all stop words show, and then i can write it to be something more readable instead.

1 1

Ketty
6 years ago

Thanks for the great job. It's great to know, that I was right when I start using hyphens instead of underscores.

Just one question, for e-commerce with huge amount of products, is it ok use id of product for be sure that the link is unique and let's say structure links like this: www.mydomain.com/1-category/33-subcategory/234-my-product , where the numbers are ids?

Ketty edited 6 years ago

seo2015
6 years ago

Hey Rand

Very nice post once easy to understand for beginners

1 1

Colin Myerscough
6 years ago

Great article, but now I am in doubt what to do...

I now have /connections/audio/cables/productname-3m-rca-jack as URL..

But after reading this... it puts my most valuable content on the lowest depth, but to the user the URL is exact the path they take to get to the URL.

Would it be good to re-write all URL's to /productname-3m-rca-jack and jump from /connections/audio/cables back to root?

1 1

kamleshparekh
5 years ago

I donno if I got your question correctly, but it is the best practice to rewrite the URL in understandable form. Having such URLs you have mentioned will lead to reduction CTR (I guess).

1 0

Skins
6 years ago

Thank you for this post. It's a much needed reminder to update my permalink structure on under performing sites. I use the default Postname on Wordpress now because I realize it's easier to copy and paste the link.

1 1

ankityng
6 years ago

Hi Rand,

Nice Post! But i want to know that any E commerce website has very long URI Like http://example.com//home-furnishing/bed/bedsheets/pr?sid=vdm,uj4,64i&otracker=hp_nmenu_quicklinks_Bedsheets, still they are getting no.1 in Google SERP.

1 1

Salman Sharif
6 years ago

There are more than one factors for a page to rank in Google, URL structure is one of them. Usually the E-commerce websites that you are referring here have a gigantic domain authority that plays a vital part in their ranks.

Junior Motsei
6 years ago

Hi Rand - Thanks for this post. Really informative.

What I would like to query is about your "**Shorter URLs are, generally speaking, preferable.**" statement.

Is it not better to have the full url to show the pipeline or breadcrum as for snippets in Google

If it resolves to the short URL, there is no pipeline or breadcrum.

Kindly advise.

1 1

Rob Gazzola
6 years ago

Thanks, great read and nice to see your focus on some fundamentals.

Questions regarding #2

#2: The more readable by human beings, the better

I agree with this suggestion, and we have some existing wordpress sites, where it is easy to modify the URL string to include more readbable wording, but if we do, do we also then need to set up a 301 redirect for the previously modified URL, or is that not necessary?

Thanks in advance

Rob

1 1

Dustin Christensen
6 years ago

I don't think there's a better breakdown of URL best practices out there, thanks Rand. I've worked with several websites that have seen tremendous organic growth after cleaning up their ugly/ineffective URLs, and as much as I dislike seeing ugly URLs, I also know that when a client has them, that can be a great way to improve organic traffic relatively quickly if everything is updated correctly.

1 1

ngaire stirling
6 years ago

Really great post rand- some of it went way over my head but still really good - lucky I think my developer instilled a lot of this early on.
Wondering on your thoughts of putting a keyword further along in a URL vs being the first word that is in it- if that makes a difference to ranking at all.

1 1

Michael Johnson
6 years ago

Great to read it all in one place. Thanks!

1 1

Shubham Tiwari
6 years ago

Hello Rand,

Good Points & interesting concept.

I would like to add one more thing that if our website has three butoons on the home page (black, blue, red) and if any user click any one of them to read something then it become a new url. For example - mydomain.com/black!?1245, mydomain.com/blue!?%1 , etc..

Google consider it as new domain which could be case of duplicate content. In that case, we should use # after the main url finished. Like, mydomain.com/#black!?1245 , because google do not consider the url after # and that will help to save from making new domians automatically.

Thanks,
Shubham

2 3

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Blog

About

Resources

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Moz Local

Free SEO Tools

Log In

Sarvodya Sei
6 years ago

very interesting information about SEO URL analysis. thank you.

1 2

Ponibass A
6 years ago

Useful post !

1 2

Search...

Cristian Capraru
6 years ago

Thanks Rand, the good taxonomy is the most important thing for structured url's

1 2

John Sherrod
6 years ago

Great article, appreciate the shout out Rand!

1 2

Emanuel M Consorte
6 years ago

Thanks - will add that to the post.

1 3

Chirag Nayyar
6 years ago

Good Points !!! learn lot of new things .....

Thank you for sharing

1 3

johnston1210
6 years ago

I notice you didn't mention having keywords in the URL will benefit rankings - do you believe the URL is a ranking factor, or not? I was under the impression it is. For example https://www.google.co.uk/search?num=100&espv=2&q=how+to+do+good+seo+%22php - sites 3 and 4 have .php in their URL however nothing on site/content etc is relevant to PHP. Welcome any thoughts.

1 3

zDucketz
6 years ago

He did.. Read again without skimming.

3 1

Amrina
6 years ago

Hey Rand,

Thanks for posting such a useful info, I am getting so many things by reading your article like internal page structure, keywords in URL and so on. Please be update like this article.

Search...

1 5

anikilator
6 years ago

Interesting article about SEO basics. Very nice tips for those new to SEO.

1 6

Dabbebi Anis
6 years ago

good job !

3 9

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