



SEO

FITNESS

WORKBOOK

2018

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SEO FITNESS WORKBOOK:

The Seven Steps to Search Engine Optimization Success on Google

2018 EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *SEO Fitness Workbook!* Newly updated for 2018, this workbook explains how to succeed at *Search Engine Optimization (SEO)* in **seven steps**. SEO, of course, is the art and science of **getting your company, product, or service** to show at the **top** of relevant Google or Bing searches, for **free**. With most customers turning first to Google, Bing, or other search engines, SEO is your free gateway to more inquiries, more customers, and more sales.

SEO =
FREE ADVERTISING ON GOOGLE

Free advertising on Google? Yippie! On Bing? Double Yippie! But, here's the rub: **SEO seems really complicated.**

Is it “too good to be true?”

Believe me, I understand your frustration with SEO and with the frauds, scoundrels, and dishonest robbers who plague my beloved SEO industry. I know the complaints, and I hear them often in my classes in the San Francisco Bay Area, including my popular “Marketing without Money” class at Stanford Continuing Studies as well as my new online SEO course also taught via Stanford Continuing Studies (Learn more at <http://jmlinks.com/34y>). Here are some of the most **common complaints**:

- We need to get our company to the top of Google for relevant keywords; our competitors are there, but we're not!
- We redesigned our website and it look fabulous. But now, we hardly show on Google at all, even for our own company name!
- We hired an SEO company, spent several thousands of dollars, and achieved nothing. So-called “SEO experts” are just thieves!
- I don't understand computers, can't write HTML, and I can't do SEO. Game over!
- I pay attention to Google, and SEO seems to change constantly. There's no way we can keep up with Penguin, Panda, Semantic Search, and Mobile-Friendly Website Design. You've got to be kidding!
- We hired an obscure third world SEO firm, they built 50,000 blog links, and now we have been obliterated by Google's Penguin update.
- SEO is just too hard for anyone without a degree in Computer Science from Yale University to be able to do. We give up! (*They then start uncontrollably sobbing*).
- We'll just do AdWords (and spend thousands of dollars). *Google clearly needs more money from struggling small businesses just like ours, so they can invest in self-driving cars and gourmet meals for their pampered employees!*

I hear and feel your pain. I am just a regular guy, and I have been confronted with what I call **techtimidation** probably as much as you have.

TECHTIMIDATION = THE USE OF JARGON BY TECHIES TO INTIMIDATE MERE MORTALS

However, I firmly believe that a little education, a lot of hard work, and some common sense are all you really need to succeed in SEO. The computer nerds (and Googlers) would like us all to believe SEO is difficult – no impossible – without a computer science degree.

Poppycock. Hokum. Hooey. Malarkey, Rubbish, Baloney and even B.S.!

You can do SEO. You can succeed at it. It is easier than you think.

The purpose of this book is to, **first**, make you believe in yourself, **second**, empower you with the basic knowledge of how the SEO game is played, and **third**, help you make a detailed SEO plan for your business.

More on this later.

Let's return to SEO, *the art and science of getting your product, service or company to the top of the search engines.*

Google Algorithm Updates

Recent years have seen some terrifying Google search engine algorithm updates, such as *Penguin*, *Panda*, *Hummingbird*, and *Pigeon*. (*Google algorithm updates are named after scary animals in the zoo*). In a nutshell, *Penguin* has been an algorithm attack against “low quality” links, and *Panda* has been an algorithm attack against poor quality content. In addition, Google has recently penalized sites that are not “mobile friendly” and made major changes to local search results (*Pigeon*). The local “snack pack” box on local searches like “pizza” or “plumber,” for example, has been reduced to three listings, or in some cases just two results, wreaking havoc on local small businesses that depend on Google for customer inquiries.

Google's other moves towards so-called “semantic search” via the *RankBrain algorithm update* have been moves to embed “artificial intelligence” into the Google search engine. Everything seems to be “going mobile,” going “voice,” and getting frightfully complex for your average small business owner or marketer.

Google, in short, has been busy changing the rules of the SEO game. *Or has it?* Here's an important tip: don't believe everything you read on the blogosphere, and don't believe every official statement by Google on SEO. There's a lot of disinformation and misinformation out there, and often changes apply to some industries but not to others.

Have you heard of “fake news?” Well, there's a lot of it in SEO, and one of the whoppers is that “SEO is constantly changing” and implicit to that “Just give up – write content for humans and spend money on Google AdWords.”

I beg to differ. I beg to explain, and I beg you not to panic. Yes there have been changes, and yes Google is “going mobile” and moving to “voice search.” But here's the good news: the **basics** haven't really changed, and if you stick to the **basics** according to “white hat” SEO – you'll be fine.

Let me repeat that:

the basics have not changed in SEO.

This workbook will explain what not to do, and what to do, to succeed at SEO in this post-*Penguin*, post-*Panda* world, RankBrain New World Order. And, it will also educate you on the unchanged basic rules of SEO success.

(If you don't know what *Panda*, *Penguin*, and *RankBrain* are... don't worry – I'll explain later).

Back to SEO.

What is SEO? SEO, of course, is the art and science of getting your company, product, or service to the top of Google's organic (free) results. If you're a seller of "industrial fans," it means that when customers search Google or Bing for "industrial fans," they will see your company's product at the top of the search results. If you're a local business like a pizza restaurant or a probate attorney, it means showing at the top of Google for searches such as "pizza delivery" or "probate lawyers in Houston."

Why is SEO so valuable? Simply put, SEO is valuable because nearly everyone turns first to Google to find products, services, or companies and because SEO costs nothing (other than knowledge, blood, sweat and tears). SEO, in short, is **free** advertising on Google! And there ain't nothing better than free, is there? (*Well, a few things, but please keep your mind on the subject at hand.*)

How the Process Works

Let's step back and ponder how the marketing process works on Google. Customers turn to Google first to find new products and services, new companies and consultants. They tend to ignore ads, and they tend to read and click through on the organic listings that show on page one of Google, especially the top three positions. Looking at it from the perspective of a small business, Google is the beginning of a chain of very valuable marketing events.

Ranking on Google for *free* means you are getting *free* advertising,

free advertising means *free* clicks from Google,

free clicks from Google mean *free* web traffic, and

free web traffic means more sales inquiries and ultimately more sales.

SEO essentially turns “free advertising” into “paid sales,” which if you think about it for a moment, is an incredible return on investment!

(Note that for most of the book I will refer to Google rather than search engines in general, or Google, Bing, and Yahoo specifically. (By the way, Bing powers Yahoo’s search results, meaning there are really just two search engines in the USA, Canada, and Western Europe: Google and Bing). The good news is that the SEO methods to rank on Google will generally work just as well for Bing and Yahoo).

An SEO Checkup

Some questions for you:

1. Do your potential customers use Google or Bing to find companies, products or services like yours?
2. Taking a common search query relevant to your company (e.g., “industrial fans,” or “best pizza in Tulsa”), do you see your company on Page 1 of Google, positions 1, 2, or 3? High on the page, or low on the page? Do you see yourself in the “local” results which occur for “local” searches such as personal injury attorney, CPA, or sushi?
3. Taking a whole bunch of relevant keyword search queries (*the “universe” of search terms by which customers might search for your company, product or service*), do you generally show up on Page 1 of Google, positions 1-3? positions 1-10?, or not at all?

If you *generally* appear on Page 1 of Google, and especially in the top positions 1, 2, or 3, for *all* your relevant keywords, you can stop reading this book. You pass with an A+. If you generally do not appear, then keep reading. Or if you appear only on some search queries, but not others, or if you’re not really sure what your search queries are, then you need help.

If you have no idea what search word “queries,” “positions” on Google, or “high” vs. “low” on the page mean, don’t worry. Don’t feel stupid. You need help, and I am going to teach you.

Isn't SEO Hard?

Well, that's what Google would like you to think (*so spend money on AdWords...*) And that's what many in the SEO industry would like you to think (*so pay us big consulting fees, and don't ask any questions!*)

I don't agree. SEO isn't easy, but it isn't exactly hard either.

I've taught thousands of people in my online classes, in classes at Stanford Continuing Studies and throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, and in corporate workshops, and I can confirm that there is a lot of confusion about SEO. People think it's hard, or impossible, or mysterious, and that's simply not correct.

SEO IS EASY

LIKE GETTING FIT IS EASY

SEO, you see, is a lot like **physical fitness**. Although everyone can conceivably run a marathon, for example, few people make the effort to learn how and even fewer take the disciplined steps necessary to train for and ultimately finish a marathon.

Does that make running a marathon easy?

No.

But does that make running a marathon hard?

Not really.

Like running a marathon, SEO is **conceptually** simple (*exercise a lot, train with discipline, don't give up*) but **practically** hard (*you have to work at it nearly every day*).

And, of course, the Olympic champions don't just work *hard*, they work *smart*.

That's the beginning of the **good news**. If you just learn how to work smarter (not harder), you'll find that SEO isn't really that hard. And it gets better.

For one thing, you probably aren't really aiming to run an SEO marathon. You're probably aiming just to "get in shape," meaning to get to the top of relevant keywords that narrowly fit your industry and/or your geographic area. Your more modest goal of helping your business to get free advertising on Google via SEO means only basic knowledge is required, and only modest effort.

Indeed, once a small business website is in decent SEO-friendly shape, my guess is about five hours a week on "Internet marketing" will suffice to keep you at the top of Google. Results vary, of course, as every situation is unique. But SEO is much, much easier than you'd think.

You're Smarter than Your Competitors

Even better, in most industries, you'll find that your competitors are not that smart! Most industries are not as competitive in SEO as you would think, and metaphorically speaking, you don't have to run faster than the bear; you just have to run faster than your buddy!

Let me rephrase that. You are not competing against Google! You are competing against your competitors, and they aren't that much smarter than you. In fact, I bet they might even be dumber!

Indeed, I'd wager that 90% or more of your competitors are doing little to nothing in terms of SEO. If you just make a modest effort, and if that effort is channeled with the effective knowledge I will teach you in this book, I'll wager that there's a very strong possibility that you'll be on page one of Google, if not in the very top positions.

The Seven Steps to SEO Success

This workbook guides you through the **seven steps** to successful SEO. Along the way, we'll set goals, understand technical details, and have fun. Along the way, I will be your "fitness coach" to explain how it all works and to motivate you to keep trying.

You can do this!

Throughout this workbook, I will share with you other examples of businesses that understand SEO and succeed using the **seven steps**.

The **seven steps to SEO fitness** are built on a philosophy of empowerment. Can you understand SEO? *Yes you can!* Can you implement SEO? *Yes you can!* It takes some knowledge, it takes some effort, but yes you can do it.

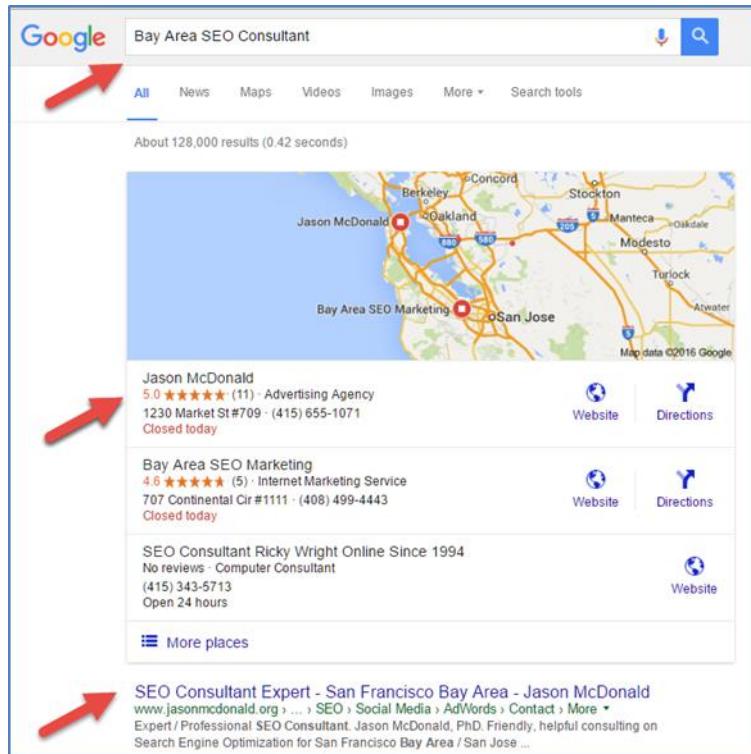
Before we dive in, allow me to share just a few more points of background.

» MEET THE AUTHOR

Well, first of all, who am I and what makes me an expert? My name is Jason McDonald, and I have been active on the Internet since 1994 (having invented the Internet along with Al Gore). I have been teaching SEO, AdWords, and Social Media since 2009 - online, in San Francisco, at Stanford University Continuing Studies, at workshops, and in corporate trainings. Over 3000 people have taken my paid trainings; over 25,000 my free webinars, and over 9,000 subscribe to my YouTube channel. I love figuring out how things work, and I love teaching others! SEO is an endeavor that I understand, and I want to empower you to understand it as well.

Learn more about me at <https://www.jasonmcdonald.org/>, at my corporate website <https://www.jm-seo.org/>, or be brave and email me a question or comment to j.mcdonald@jm-seo.net.

Don't believe I'm good at SEO, Google "Jason McDonald" (*I'm usually in the top three*), Google "SEO Expert San Francisco" (*you'll see me there*), Google "AdWords Expert Witness" (*Yes, I do legal work – there's good money in it, and I have a daughter in college*), or Google "SEO Classes Chicago" (*You'll see the JM Internet Group," my training and consulting company*). Here's a screenshot of *Bay Area SEO Consultant*:



You can even Google “Best Books on SEO,” and you’ll usually see my booklist on page 1, with this book featured on that page. Clever, huh?

Uncle? Give up? Still don’t believe me? Call me up, or email me before you buy this book, and I’ll give you reference examples of my SEO clients (*who don’t want their competitors to know about me*).

» WHY THIS Book IS DIFFERENT

There are quite a few books on SEO out there! There are zillions of blog posts! There are thousands of SEO consultants! There are hundreds of crazy harebrained schemes...

But there is only one **workbook**: the *SEO Fitness Workbook*.

How is a *workbook* different from a *book*? Here’s how.

First of all, this workbook speaks in **practical, no-nonsense English**. Whereas most of the SEO books out there are *by experts for experts*, this workbook explains SEO in plain English and does not get lost in the details. Most businesspeople don’t need to know every gory detail about SEO; rather they need practical, hands-on advice about what to do first,

second, third and so forth. The *SEO Fitness Workbook* is as much about “doing SEO” as it is about “understanding SEO.”

Secondly, the *SEO Fitness Workbook* is **hands-on**. Most SEO books are meant to be passively read. *SEO Fitness Workbook*, by contrast, gives you “hands on” worksheets and deliverables. In fact, each chapter ends with a **DELIVERABLE** marked in **bold**. Each chapter also has **TODOS** (marked in **bold**) because a workbook is not just about reading, it’s about **doing** and **succeeding**. And, new for 2018, each Chapter has a list of “action items” and a quiz to test your knowledge.

Third, while most books are outdated on the day they are published, the *SEO Fitness Workbook* connects to up-to-date **Internet resources** such as free SEO tools via the companion *SEO Toolbook*, and hands-on YouTube videos that show you how to succeed. After all, in the 21st century, a “how to” book should be more than a book, shouldn’t it? It should be a gateway to up-to-date knowledge.

Fourth, within reason, I encourage you to reach out to me with your questions. Simply email j.mcdonald@jm-seo.net or visit <http://jmlinks.com/contact>. I truly enjoy the teaching of SEO, and I truly encourage my readers to ask questions. In fact, I learn as much from my students as they do from me because either I quickly know the answer to the question, or it’s something weird and puzzling, and we’ll learn the answer together. Don’t be shy!

» REGISTER YOUR WORKBOOK FOR FREE ONLINE RESOURCES

Please **register** your *Workbook*. You’ll not only get a full-color PDF copy of this *Workbook* to download with active, clickable links to the resources (very handy to read at your computer). You’ll also get my updated *SEO Toolbook*, my secret *SEO Dashboard*, and all the *Workbook*’s companion worksheets to help you step-by-step.

To register, follow these easy steps:

1. Go to the **JM Internet Group** Website, click on “Register Your Workbook,” or just go directly to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks>.
2. Click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018”
3. Enter your passcode: **2018seo**.
4. If you have any problems, contact me via <http://jmlinks.com/contact> or call 800-298-4065 for help.

Sign up for email alerts at <http://jmlinks.com/free>, and - last but not least- watch a few of my YouTube videos at <https://www.youtube.com/jmgrp>; you'll find I am as crazy and enthusiastic on video as I am in this book!

Access Jump Code Links

Note: throughout this book I use the website <http://jmlinks.com/> to point to resources. You can either click on the resource directly in the book (if you're reading in digital format). Or, simply go to <http://jmlinks.com/> and enter the **JUMP code**. For example, to visit <http://jmlinks.com/7a> simply go to <http://jmlinks.com/> and enter "7a". That will take you to the referenced Internet resource.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial of how to use the jump codes at <http://jmlinks.com/jump> or just visit <http://jmlinks.com/> directly and enter *jump*.

» Who This Book Is For

I have written *SEO Fitness Workbook* for the following groups of practical business folk:

Small Business Owners. If you own a small business that gets (or could get) significant customer traffic from the Web, this book is for you.

Small Business Marketers. If you are in charge of marketing for a small business that gets (or could get) significant customer traffic from the Web, this book is for you.

Marketing Managers. If you lead a Web team of inside or outside bloggers, SEO content writers, or other Internet marketing technicians including external SEO companies, this book is for you.

Web Designers. If you design websites but want to design sites that not only look good but actually rank high on Google search, this book is for you.

Non-profit Marketers. If you work at a non-profit or governmental agency that depends on Web search traffic, then this book is also for you.

Anyone whose organization (and its products, services, or other offerings) would benefit from being at the top of Google, for free, can benefit from the *SEO Fitness Workbook*.

» THE SEVEN STEPS TO SEO FITNESS: TABLE OF CONTENTS

Here are the seven steps to SEO fitness:

1. **Goals:** Define Your Goals
2. **Keywords:** Identify Keywords
3. **On Page SEO:** Get Your Website to “Speak Google”
4. **Content Marketing:** Create Quality Content for Google and for Humans
5. **Off Page SEO:** Build Links, Leverage Social Media, and Go Local
6. **Metrics:** Measure and Learn from Your Results
7. **Learn:** Never Stop Learning!

And here are the seven steps to SEO fitness in more detail –

Step #1: GOALS. SEO, like physical fitness, is purpose-driven! You can't achieve your goals if you don't define what they are.

1.1 Attitude – attitude is everything, and SEO requires a commitment to learning how SEO works as well as a desire to implement positive SEO-friendly changes. Goal 1.1 is to have the right attitude. **PAGE: 32**

1.2 Goals – define what you sell, who your customers are, and how best to reach them. Define website goals such as to get online sales or acquire customer names, phone numbers, and email addresses as sales leads. **PAGE: 40**

Step #2 KEYWORDS – identify your keywords. Keywords drive nearly every aspect of SEO, so you need a well-structured, clearly defined “keyword worksheet.”

2.1 Keywords – identify high volume, high value keywords. **PAGE: 50**

2.2 Keyword Worksheet – build a keyword worksheet and measure your rank on Google and Bing. **PAGE: 78**

Step #3 ON PAGE SEO for your website. Once you know your keywords, where do you put them? It begins with page tags, proceeds through website organization, and ends with an “SEO audit” that outlines your SEO strategy. The nerd word for this is “On Page” SEO.

3.1 Page Tags – understand basic HTML tags, and weave your target keywords into strategic tags such as the TITLE, META DESCRIPTION, and IMG ALT tags. **PAGE: 102**

3.2 Website Structure – build landing pages, restructure your home page, and optimize website layout through keyword-heavy link sculpting. **PAGE: 124**

Step #4 CONTENT MARKETING. They say that “content is king” in terms of SEO, and they are right. In this section, you’ll create a long-term content strategy that moves beyond the “quick fix” of your site to a day-by-day, week-by-week system of SEO-friendly content.

4.1 Content SEO – devise a content strategy, specifically who will do what, when, where, how, and how often – that is, a short and long term SEO content marketing strategy including an inventory of the content you need to succeed. **PAGE: 146**

4.2 Blogging – set up a blog that follows best SEO practices, including all-important connections to social media platforms like Google+ and Twitter. **PAGE: 164**

4.3 Press Release SEO - leverage press release syndication services for SEO, because press releases are an easy technique to get links and build buzz on social media. **PAGE: 178**

Step #5 OFF PAGE SEO – links and social media. “Off Page” SEO leverages external web links and social media to boost your website’s authority on Google. Use the traditional tactic of getting relevant inbound links. Then, leverage social media platforms like Twitter, Google+, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube to enhance your SEO efforts via “social authority!”

5.1 Link Building – conduct a link building audit and create a long-term link building strategy. **PAGE: 190**

5.2 Social Media SEO – look for social media mention opportunities, and enable relevant social profiles to enhance Google’s trust in your website as an authoritative resource. **PAGE: 216**

5.3 Local SEO – local SEO stands at the juncture of SEO, local, and review based marketing, and so we dive into how to optimize a website for local searches. **PAGE: 228**

Step #6 METRICS – measure and learn from your results. Like physical fitness, SEO is a process that starts with a defined set of goals and employs specific measurements about goal achievement.

6.1 Metrics - measure your progress towards the top of Google, inbound keywords, and paths taken by customers once they land on your website. **PAGE: 274**

Step #7 LEARN - never stop learning. SEO starts with self-discovery, proceeds through technical knowledge, and ends with the hard work of implementation.

7.1 Learning – use Chapter 7 to get access to companion **worksheets** and the very important **SEO Toolbook** and my **secret dashboard**, which provide hundreds of free SEO tools, tools to help you in all aspects of SEO, from identifying keywords through page tags to links and social mentions. **PAGE: 298**

» SPREAD THE WORD: TAKE A SURVEY & GET \$5 OR A FREE EBOOK!

If you like the book, please take a moment to provide honest feedback. Here's my special offer for those eager enough to take a short survey –

1. Visit <http://jmlinks.com/survey>.
2. Compete the survey on the book, as indicated.
3. Include your **email address** and **any feedback** (good, bad, positive, negative) about the book).
4. I will gift you \$5 via Amazon gift eCard.

This offer is subject to change without notice and limited to the first 100 inquiries. Offer expires 4/1/2018.

» QUESTIONS AND MORE INFORMATION

I **encourage** my students to ask questions. If you have questions, submit them via the **JM Internet Group Website** at <http://jmlinks.com/contact> by phone to 800-298-4065, or via email to j.mcdonald@jm-seo.net. There are two sorts of questions: ones that I know instantly, for which I'll zip you an email answer right away, and ones I do not know instantly, in which case I will investigate and we'll figure out the answer together.

As a teacher, I learn most from my students. So please don't be shy!

- Jason McDonald, Ph.D.

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This is a completely **unofficial** guide to SEO. Neither Google nor Bing / Yahoo have endorsed this guide, nor has Google, Bing, or Yahoo nor anyone affiliated with Google, Bing, or Yahoo been involved in the production of this guide.

That's a *good thing*. This guide is **independent**. My aim is to "tell it as I see it," giving you no-nonsense information on how to succeed at SEO.

In addition, please note the following:

- All trademarks are the property of their respective owners. I have no relationship with nor endorsement from the mark holders. Any use of their marks is so I can provide information to you.
- Any reference to or citation of third party products or services whether for Google, Yahoo, Bing, or otherwise, should not be construed as an endorsement of those products or services tools, nor as a warranty as to their effectiveness or compliance with the terms of service of Google, Yahoo, or Bing.

The information used in this guide has been reviewed and updated as of December, 2017. However, SEO changes rapidly, so please be aware that scenarios, facts, and conclusions are subject to change without notice.

Additional Disclaimer. Internet marketing is an art, and not a science. Any changes to your Internet marketing strategy, including SEO, Social Media Marketing, and AdWords, is at your own risk. Neither Jason McDonald nor the JM Internet Group nor Excerpti Communications, Inc. assumes any responsibility for the effect of any changes you may, or may not, make to your website or AdWords advertising based on the information in this guide.

» ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No man is an island. I would like to thank my beloved wife, Noelle Decambra, as my personal cheerleader in the book industry. Gloria McNabb has done her usual tireless job as first assistant, including updating this edition as well the *SEO Toolbook*. My daughter, Ava, inspired me on YouTube, and my daughter, Hannah, has inspired me with her grit and determination to master subjects such as chemistry, biology, and physics at Carnegie Mellon University. Last but not least, my black Lab Buddy, kept my physically active and pondering the mysteries of Google on many jaunts through the San Francisco Bay Area.

And a huge thank you to my students – online, in San Francisco, and at Stanford Continuing Studies. You challenge me, you inspire me, and you motivate me!



II

BASICS

I love **analogies** because, as a teacher, I find that they help my students quickly understand new things. Thinking of SEO like fitness, for example, helps people realize that they need to set “fitness goals,” learn some tips and tricks about how to “get fit,” and then create a systematic plan (and stick with it) to achieve their goals. As opposed to having your head swimming with technical mumbo-jumbo, the *fitness analogy* helps you see that SEO is something you can do. It’s empowering.

Before we get into the technical details, I want to give you another analogy that will help you in your quest to get to the top of Google. **SEO is like getting a job.** It has its **job desired** (your **keywords**), its **resume** (your **website**), its **references** (your inbound **links**), and its job **interview** (your website **landing**).

In this Chapter, I will give you a *conceptual framework* to understand search engine optimization. Once you have a conceptual framework, you can then refer back to it, as you dive into very specific tasks such as optimizing a landing page or soliciting inbound links. It’s a map that will keep you oriented in the right direction.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Understand that SEO Parallels Getting a Job
- » Keyword Research
- » Understand “On Page” SEO
- » Understand “Off Page” SEO
- » Set Landing Page Goals

» UNDERSTAND THAT SEO PARALLELS GETTING A JOB

Let's consider the search for a job. How does the job market work? People want to "be found" as the "ideal" candidate for a position. So what do they do? Four important things:

Job Desired – Identify a Desired Job. Job seekers take a look inside their souls and identify the job they want. If they're smart, they took a look outside at the job market as well, and look for **connection points** between the job of their dreams, and the jobs that are in demand in the labor market. For example, my dream job is sipping margaritas in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, writing science fiction novels, but the demand for that isn't so high. So I've taken a passion for language and turned that into a job as an SEO writer and consultant. Notice how the "job desired" matches "keywords" as in (*SEO consultant*).

Resume - Create a resume. Job seekers create a keyword-heavy **resume** that explains the job that they want to get, and their qualifications for that job. If, for example, they want a job as a BMW auto mechanic, they create a resume that emphasizes keywords like "auto mechanic," "auto repair," and even "BMW repair" by prominently displaying them in the right places, including the subject line of emails they send out to prospective employers. And employers "scan" resumes looking for those resumes that "match" their keywords. Notice how "keywords" are embedded in the written resume.

References - Cultivate References. Beyond a great resume, the next aspect of job search is cultivating great **references**. Knowing the boss's spouse, having the head of the BMW auto mechanic school, or someone else important or influential put in a good word can elevate your resume to the top of the heap. In short, strong references get your resume looked at, substantiate that your resume is factually accurate, and possibly get you a job interview. Notice how "references" are external validations that you are as great as your resume claims you to be.

Job Interview – Wow Them Face-to-Face. Once you get their attention, what's next? The job **interview** is the next step towards landing the job, it's the "free glimpse" of what you have to offer that "sells" the employer on making a financial commitment by hiring you. Notice how a "job interview" is a "free" taste of you as an employee. The use of something **free** is obvious, *once you notice it*, and notice how strong websites usually offer customers something **free** as well.

The **marketing equation** is: **job desired > resume > references > job interview > job.**

Hopefully you can already see that SEO is a lot like getting a job. How so?

Identifying the job you want equals identifying keywords that are in demand. Before you put virtual pen to virtual paper to build out your website, you have to understand your Business Value Proposition, and who wants what you have to sell. “Keywords” connect what you have, with what customers want. This is called “**keyword research**.”

Creating a resume equals creating a strong, keyword heavy website. Your website, in a sense, is your business resume, and it needs to have keywords placed on it in strategic places to “talk to” Google as well as human searchers, and just as with a job search, you have to research the hot button keywords that people are searching for and place those in strategic positions. This is called “**On Page**” SEO.

Cultivating references equals getting links and going social. Just as you cultivate references to get your resume elevated to the top of the heap, so you cultivate inbound links, fresh buzz, and social authority to elevate your website to the top of Google search. Getting other websites to link to you, positive reviews of your business on Google, and mentions on social media sites like Google+ or Twitter is called “Off Page” SEO.

The job interview equals the website landing. Once you get noticed, your next step is a fantastic job interview. The equivalent of the job interview is the **landing behavior** on your website. Once they land from Google, you want them to “take the next step,” usually a registration or a sale just as at a job interview, which leads to the final step, getting hired or making a sale.

The **SEO equation** is **keyword research > On Page SEO > Off Page SEO > website landing > sales inquiry or sale.**

Keep this conceptual framework that SEO is like a job search in the back of your head as you read through this Workbook. Here’s a simple model of the parallels:

Job desired = keywords = identify keywords that customers search for.

Resume = *On Page SEO* = create a keyword heavy, easy-to-understand website.

References = *Off Page SEO* = solicit many inbound links, social authority / mentions, and freshness via blogging.

Job Interview = optimize the *landing page experience* to lead to a registration or a sale.

Build a Better Resume (or Website)

Once you realize that the process of SEO parallels the process of getting a job, you'll realize something else. Just because the process is easy-to-understand does not mean that most people do it correctly. If you've ever had the (*mis*)fortune of having to look through job applications and resumes, for example, you can vouch for me that many (if not most) resumes are terrible. They're hard to read, they're ambiguous about the job desired, and they don't systematically substantiate their claim that they are the "perfect" candidate for the job.

Most resumes, in short, stink.

Looking over to the Web, you'll realize that just because SEO is conceptually easy to understand does not mean that most Web sites are SEO-friendly. In fact, most websites are ambiguous at best vis-à-vis their keyword targets, have terrible landing experiences, and don't have any systematic link-building in place.

Most websites, in short, stink.

But just because most people have terrible resumes, or terrible websites, does not mean that yours has to stink, too. In fact, this is the first hugely optimistic observation. With a little knowledge and a little hard work, you can elevate your website above your competition. You can "build a better website" via SEO and vastly improve your performance on Google.

Of course it depends on how competitive your industry is, and how skilled your competition is. It varies industry by industry. But in my experience, most small business websites can see a vast improvement by following a few simple SEO guidelines.

To give you another analogy:

You don't have to run faster than the bear, just faster than your buddy!

Your website, just like your resume, does **NOT** have to be **perfect**. It just has to be **BETTER** than that of your competition. And your competition is not made of Albert Einsteins and Madame Curies, but just regular guys and gals most of whom probably know less about SEO than you do.

» **KEYWORD RESEARCH**

Let's drill down into the first element, "keyword research," the equivalent of identifying a job that you want that's also in demand in the marketplace. We'll get into some cool tactics and tools in Chapter Two, but for now, here are the steps:

1. Write down your Business Value Proposition, with an eye to the "words" that "describe" what you have that people want.
2. Look for "words" that connect "what you sell" with what "customers want."
3. Brainstorm how customers might search Google to find your company, product or service.
4. Write down a "keyword list" with special attention to those keywords that are really, really hot matches connecting a customer who's "ready to buy" with "what you have to sell."

At the end of this process, you'll have a list of keywords that your customers type into Google.

» **"ON PAGE" SEO**

Let's drill down into the second element, "On Page" SEO, the equivalent of a great resume. What are the steps? We'll assume that you have your keyword list in hand; that is, you know "which job" you want, or in SEO terms, which keywords you want to optimize for. Once you know your keywords, where do you put them?

In terms of "On Page" SEO, the main places you put your keywords are as follows:

Page Tags. Place your keywords strategically in the right page tags, beginning with the TITLE tag on each page, followed by the header tag family, image alt attribute, and HTML cross-links from one page to another on your site.

Keyword Density. Write keyword-heavy copy for your web pages, and pay attention to writing quality. Complying to Google's *Panda* update means placing your keywords into grammatically correct sentences, and making sure that your writing contains similar and associated words vs. your keyword targets.

Home Page SEO. Use your home page wisely, by placing keywords in relatively high density on your home page and, again, in natural syntax, as well as creating "one click" links from your home page to your subordinate pages.

Website structure. Organize your website to be Google friendly, starting with keyword-heavy URLs, cross-linking with keyword text, and using sitemaps and other Google-friendly tactics.

"On Page" SEO is all about knowing your keywords and building keyword-heavy content that communicates your priorities to Google just as a good resume communicates your job search priorities to prospective employers. We'll investigate "On Page" SEO more deeply in Chapters Three and Four.

» "OFF PAGE" SEO

Let's drill down into the third element, "Off Page" SEO, the equivalent of great references. Here, you do not fully control the factors that help you with Google (unlike in "On Page" SEO), so the game is played out in how well you can convince others to talk favorably about you and your website. Paralleling job references, the main strategic factors of "Off Page" SEO are as follows:

Link Building. As we shall see, links are the votes of the Web. Getting as many qualified websites to link back to your website, especially high authority websites as ranked (secretly) by Google, using keyword-heavy syntax, is what link building is all about. It's that simple, and that complicated.

Social Authority / Mentions. Social media is the new buzz of the Internet, and Google looks for mentions of your website on social sites like Google+, Twitter, and Facebook as well as how robust your own social media profiles are.

Online Reviews. If you are a local business, customer reviews especially on Google and, to a lesser extent, on Yelp greatly influence your SEO performance. Accordingly, you want to solicit reviews from real, happy customers so that they

write online reviews about your business on Google, Yelp, and other major review sites.

Freshness. Like a prospective employer, Google rewards sites that show fresh activity. “What have you done lately?” is a common job interview question, and in SEO you need to communicate to Google that you are active via frequent content updates such as blog posts and press releases.

“Off Page” SEO is all about building external links to your site just as getting good references is all about cultivating positive buzz about you as a potential employee. We’ll investigate “Off Page” SEO more deeply in Chapter Five. Oh, and due to the recent Google algorithm change called *Penguin*, we’ll emphasize that you want to cultivate *natural* inbound links as opposed to *artificial* links that scream “manipulation” at Google! It’s good *believable* references that help you in a job search, and, post-*Penguin*, it’s good *believable* links that help you with SEO.

» SET LANDING PAGE GOALS

Let’s drill down into the fourth element, “Landing Page Goals,” the equivalent of great job interview skills. The point of a great website isn’t just to get traffic from Google, after all. It’s to move that potential customer up your sales ladder – from website landing to a registration for something free (a “sales lead”) or perhaps even a sale.

So in evaluating your website, you want to evaluate each and every page and each and every page element for one variable: do they move customers up the **sales ladder**? Is the **desired action** (*registration* or *sale*) clearly visible on each page, and if so, is it enticing to the customer usually with something free like a free download, free consult, free webinar and the like?

Just as after a job interview, your family and friends ask whether you “got the job,” after a Web landing you are asking yourself whether it “got the action” such as a registration or a sale. Web traffic just like sending out resumes is not an end in itself, but a means to an end!

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on the basics of SEO explained in “plain English” at <http://jmlinks.com/17k>.

We shall now explore each of these topics in-depth.



1.1

ATTITUDE

Most books on SEO start with the technical details. What's a TITLE tag? How do you understand your Google PageRank? Which factors in the Google algorithm have changed recently? We'll get to all that, but I want to start this book with a pep talk about **attitude**.

Attitude, they say, is everything.

And nowhere is that more true than in SEO. This is an industry full of information overload, pretty rude intimidators of a technical geeky type, and an 800 lb Gorilla (Google), that would really rather you just spend money on AdWords advertising than understand how you can get to the top of Google without paying it a penny.

To succeed, you'll need a positive, "can do" attitude.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Learn from Francie Baltazar-Schwartz that "Attitude is Everything."
- » Identify "Can Do" vs. "Can't Do" People.
- » Learn to Measure.
- »» Deliverable: Inventory Your Team & Get Ready.

» FRANCIE BALTAZAR-SCHWARTZ AND ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

The Internet is a wonderful place, and Google sits pretty much at the center of it. Got a question? "Just *Google* it!" We certainly know the reality of "Just *Google* it" in terms of customers looking for companies, products and services. But it also goes for more important questions like the *meaning of life* (42), and *what is a LOL cat*, anyway?

For example, Google “Who said ‘Attitude is Everything?’” and you’ll find out that this quote is attributed to one Francie Baltazar-Schwartz. You can read it at <http://jmlinks.com/5i>. The point of “attitude is everything” is that you have two choices every day: either to have a **positive, can-do** attitude or to have a **negative, can't do** attitude. (**Remember:** if you are reading this book in print format, visit <http://jmlinks.com/> and enter the JUMP code, in this case “**5i**”).

This relates very dramatically to success at SEO, just as it does to success in pretty much everything else in life from physical fitness to your job to your marriage.

How does it apply to SEO? Well, let’s look at the facts and let’s look at the ecosystem of people and companies in the SEO industry.

Fact No. 1. SEO is technical, and at least on the surface, seems pretty complicated and hard. So, if you start out with the attitude that you “can’t do it,” you’re already on the path to defeat. If, in contrast, you start with the attitude that you can do it, that other people are clearly doing it (*people no smarter than you*), you’re on the path to success. **Attitude is everything.**

Fact No. 2. Google does not want anyone to believe that SEO is easy. In fact, because Google makes its money from *advertising* (nearly 90% of nearly \$20 billion per quarter - see <http://jmlinks.com/13k>), it wants you, too, to believe that *advertising* is the way to go. Google has no incentive to explain how SEO works, and in fact, has every incentive to do the opposite. *If you are intimidated by Google, you're already on the path to defeat.* If, in contrast, you pay attention to the facts and realize that SEO is free, while ads cost money, that you can do SEO, and that you can get to the top of Google for free... you won’t worry about the propaganda from a multibillion dollar corporation. **Attitude is everything.**

Fact No. 3. The SEO industry is full of so-called experts, gurus, tools providers and others who pretty much make their money by intimidating normal folk into believing that SEO is incredibly complicated and only nerds with Ph.D.’s in computer science can do it. They want you to stay in a state of dependency and keep paying them the big bucks... So if you allow technical nerds to intimidate you, you’re already on the path to defeat. If, in contrast, you realize that they aren’t really any smarter than you and that SEO isn’t just about technology, it’s about words and concepts and marketing messages, you’re on the path to success. **Attitude is everything.**

Oh, and as SEO becomes more and more social, you'll want to have an open mind about social media as well. You can really get yourself motivated by watching a video by "Kid President" (Robby Novak), who is twelve years old, has several million views on YouTube, and was actually invited to the White House.

VIDEO. Watch a "Can Do" attitude video by "Kid President" at <http://jmlinks.com/5j>.



For your first **TODO**, therefore, concentrate your mind and create a **positive attitude**: this is going to be fun, this is going to be educational, this is going to be a journey! Your **attitude is everything** as to whether you'll succeed or fail at SEO!

In fact, since the video screenshot was taken, this video now tops 41 million views as of November, 2017! If a *twelve-year-old* can get 41 million views and meet the President, don't you think you can at least get to page one of Google?

» IDENTIFY “CAN DO” VS. “CAN’T DO” PEOPLE

In most situations, you'll need to depend on other people. In fact, the attitude of the people on your team (your webmaster, your content writers, your product marketing managers, your executives...) is also incredibly important. Are they “can do” or “can’t do” sort of folks?

Henry Ford, the great industrialist, once made this clear observation:

“Whether you think you can, or you think you can't--you're right.”
— Henry Ford

In terms of SEO, there are those people who think that a) they can't learn it, or b) it can't be done. And, guess what: they're **right**. And there are those who think that a) they can learn it, and b) it can be done. And, guess what: they're **right**, too.

Which camp are you in? Your team members? Can, or can't?

So for your second **TODO**, look around your organization and make a list of those people who need to be involved with your SEO project. For example:

Management and Marketers. These people are involved in the sense of understanding who your customers are, what you sell, and what the sales objectives are for your website. Your website, after all, isn't an end in itself but a means to an end: more sales.

Content Writers. Who writes (or will write) content for the website? These people need at least a basic understanding of your keywords and, even better, an understanding of how “On Page” SEO works so that they know where to strategically place keywords on web content.

Web Designers. News flash: your website isn't just for humans! It's also for Google. You'll have to educate your web design team that your website needs to "talk" to Google just as much as it "talks" to humans. As we will learn, what Google likes (*text*) isn't generally what people like (*pictures*).

Web Programmers. The folks who program the backend, like your URL structure, your XML sitemaps and all that technical stuff. Who are these people and how will you get them on board for the SEO project?

Link Builders. Google heavily rewards websites that have many inbound links to them, and so you'll need "link builders" to ask directories, trade associations or trade shows, bloggers, journalists, and other websites to link back to your website. What people in your company interface with outside websites, and are in a position to solicit inbound links?

Social Media and Outreach Experts. Social media is the new wave in SEO, so you'll need those folks who are (or will be) active on Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Facebook and the like to be "SEO aware," in the sense of how social media impacts SEO performance. You'll need folks who participate in social media and can encourage social influencers to share your website URLs.

Indeed, if you have some really obstructionist "Can't Do" people, you'll need to strategize either how to a) **persuade** them to participate, b) **get them out of the way**, or c) **work around** them.

» LEARN TO MEASURE

As you assemble your team, you'll want to get their buy in on learning SEO. It isn't rocket science, but it's also not something you'll learn in a day. First, they'll need to learn the basics (as we discussed in the previous Chapter). Second, they'll need to learn many of the more esoteric topics as needed. Content writers, for example, will need to be keenly aware of keywords and how to write semantically friendly SEO text. Web programmers will need to understand XML sitemaps and so on. Third, they'll need to be committed to lifelong learning, as SEO changes over time. A good strategy is to schedule monthly meetings or corporate email exchanges about your SEO progress.

Let's also talk a little about **measurement** and **metrics**. One of the biggest stumbling blocks to successful SEO is the idea that it can't be measured. It can. How so?

Know your keywords. Once you know your keywords, as you'll learn in Chapter 2.1, then you can start to measure your **rank** on target Google searches.

Inbound search traffic. Once you set up Google Analytics properly as you'll learn in Chapter 6.1, you can measure your inbound "organic" traffic from Google, including some data on inbound keywords. You'll learn how people get to your website, and what they do once they get there.

Goals. Every good website should have defined goals, usually registrations and/or sales. Once you define goals in Google Analytics, you can track what traffic converts to a sale, and what doesn't. (Then you can brainstorm ways to improve it).

When you first start, you'll often have little idea of your target keywords, little idea of your rank on Google, and little idea of your traffic patterns from landings to conversions. But that doesn't mean SEO isn't a measurable activity! It just means you are not yet measuring.

Why is this important? As you set up your team, and establish the right attitude, you want to establish the idea that SEO is measurable. If someone has crazy ideas (*such as Google doesn't pay attention to URL structure, or keywords don't matter*), you can measure these ideas vs. correct ideas (*that keywords in TITLE tags do matter a great deal, keyword-heavy URL's help a lot*). Establishing a culture of measurability will help you get everyone on your team, even the most recalcitrant "Can't Do" people to realize that SEO works, and SEO can get your website to actually generate sales or sales leads.

Measurability is a critical part of Step No. 1: **Setting (Measurable) Goals.**

>>> DELIVERABLE: INVENTORY YOUR TEAM AND GET READY

Now we've come to the end of Step 1.1, your first **DELIVERABLE** has arrived. Open up a Word document and create a list of all the people who are involved with your website, from the marketing folks who identify the goals (sales or registrations?), to the content writers (those who create product descriptions, blog posts, or press releases), to the Web design people (graphic designers), to the Web programmers, and to your outreach team for social media and links. Make an inventory of who needs to be involved in what aspects of SEO, and if possible, set up weekly or monthly meetings about your SEO strategy.

At a "top secret" level, you might also want to indicate who has a "Can Do" and who has a "Can't Do" attitude. You'll want to work to bring everyone over into the "Can Do" column!

Consider having an “attitude is everything” meeting about SEO, and get everyone to stand up on the tabletops and shout: “We can do this!”



1.2

GOALS

SEO, like physical fitness, can't be accomplished without **goals**. Are you training for a marathon, or a sprint? Want to look better naked, or just be healthier? Want to dominate Google for "industrial fans," for "organic baby food," or for "probate attorney St. Louis?" Is the purpose of your website to get sales leads, or to sell products via eCommerce? SEO can tell you *how* to get to the top of Google, but it can't tell you *what* your company's *goals* are vis-à-vis potential customers. To succeed at SEO, you need to have a clear vision of your *sales ladder* starting at the customer *need* and then proceeding as follows: keyword search *query* → *landing* on your website → *sales inquiry* → *back and forth* → *actual sale*. For an eCommerce site, the goals and sales ladder would be the same, except that rather than a "sales inquiry" the goal would be an actual website purchase.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Define Your Business Value Proposition
- » Identify Your Target Customers by Segment or Personas
- » Establish Marketing Goals
- »» Checklist: Goals Action Items
- »» Deliverable: A Business Value Proposition Worksheet

» DEFINE YOUR BUSINESS VALUE PROPOSITION

What does your business sell? Who wants it, and why? In this chapter, you'll sit down and fill out the "business value proposition worksheet." A **BVP**, or "business value proposition" is a statement that succinctly defines what your business does and the value that it provides to customers. For example, a cupcake bakery bakes yummy cupcakes that

people want to eat; a dry cleaner cleans people's dirty clothes; and an automobile insurer provides insurance for people's cars. You produce something that other people want, so what is it?

Define Your Business Value Proposition

One way to define your business value proposition is to look at other companies on the Web, and "reverse engineer" their BVPs.

Here are some more examples, with links to sample websites.

For a New York watch repair shop such as **Ron Gordon Watch Repair** (<https://www.rongordonwatches.com/>) , the business value proposition is that it provides watch repair services to people living or working in Manhattan who need to get their luxury watches (e.g., Tag Heuer, Breitling, Hamilton) repaired quickly and easily.

For an industrial fan company like **Industrial Fans Direct** (<http://www.industrialfansdirect.com/>), the business value proposition is to provide quality industrial fans for harsh environments such as factories or farms.

For a San Francisco mortgage broker, such as **Natasha Lovas**, the business value proposition is to help people get cheap mortgages easily. Her website is <http://www.san-francisco-mortgage-broker.com/>.

For any business, a *business value proposition* is your "elevator pitch" to a potential customer - what do you offer, that they want?

For your first **TODO**, write a sentence or short paragraph that succinctly defines what your business does and how it provides value for customers. For the **worksheet**, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on "SEO Fitness Workbook 2018," enter the code '2018seo' to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the "business value proposition worksheet."

» IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET CUSTOMERS BY SEGMENT OR PERSONAS

Your *business value proposition* explicitly describes the relationship between what you sell and what they want. Now dig deeper: *segment* your customers into definable groups or what are called "customer personas." Literally imagine a potential customer. What does she look like? What does she want? What are her pain points? Imagine her unique

characteristics and needs, and how they point to how her “needs” can be addressed by your product or service.

For instance, **Ron Gordon Watch Repair** might segment its customers into the following personas:

- Manhattan office workers seeking quick and convenient watch repairs on their lunch hours (*Budget and time conscious*).
- Manhattan residents who own stylish, luxury watch brands like Tag Heuer, Breitling, or Rolex watches looking for expert repairs. (*Luxury watch lovers*).
- USA residents who own vintage Zodiac watches who need expert repairs from a watch shop that they trust. (*Vintage watch lovers, nationwide*).

Similarly, a Las Vegas real estate broker might segment his customers by space need – office, warehouse, retail. Moreover, there might be a segmentation based on those looking to rent vs. buy. And a Miami divorce attorney might segment his customers or clients into men vs. women, those with substantial property vs. those without, those who have children vs. those who do not.

In summary, a “segment” or “buyer persona” is a group of like-minded customers.

For your second **TODO**, open up the “business value proposition worksheet” and identify your **customer segments** or **buyer personas** – customers who differ by type (income level, geographic location), by need (high end, low end, rent vs. buy), or even geographic location. Try to see your customers as specific groups with specific needs, rather than one amorphous mega group. Begin to think about how each might search Google differently, using different keywords.

For a fun tool to help you visualize your buyer personas, visit <http://jmlinks.com/29s>.

» **ESTABLISH MARKETING GOALS**

Moving from business value proposition and customer personas, it’s time to think about definable **goals** or **actions** for your website. For most businesses, a good goal is to get a

registration / email address / inquiry in exchange for something free such as a free consult, eBook, or webinar. A Las Vegas real estate company, for instance, might want visitors to the website to “send a message” about their property needs, or register for a free consult with a leasing specialist. Similarly, a divorce attorney might want a potential client to reach out for a free phone consult, and a watch repair shop might just want people to call or email to discuss their watch repair needs, and get directions to the shop.

For most businesses, marketing **goals** on the Web usually boil down to –

- A Website **registration, contact form, or email via the website** – for a free consult, a software download, a free e-book, a newsletter sign up, etc.
 - Note: a **phone call** generated via the website should count the same as the above.
- **A sale** – an e-commerce transaction such as the purchase of a candy gift tin on an e-store, or an iPhone skin via PayPal.

A well-constructed website will lead customers to an easy-to-see first step. Here’s a screenshot from <http://www.reversemortgage.org/>, one of the top websites for the Google search “reverse mortgage,” with the goal marked by a red arrow:



Reversemortgage.org knows what it wants: first, to **rank** at the top of Google search for “reverse mortgage,” second, to **get the click**; and third, for a potential customer to start towards the **goal**, i.e. the process of *finding a lender* (and giving the Website his name, email address, and phone number for a sales follow up!).

Abstractly, your process and goals are probably as follows:

1. **Rank high** on a Google search query (“reverse mortgage” in this case).
2. **Get the click** from Google to your website.
3. Once they land, get them to take the “first step” or “**goal**” (usually fill out a feedback form, send an email via the website, or for an eCommerce site to make a first purchase.).
4. **Follow up** with them by email or phone, if necessary, to complete the sales process.

Your Sales Ladder

Defining your next steps or goals of your website is inseparable from defining your **sales ladder**. Web searchers are actively looking for an answer to their query, and they are anything but passive: if they don’t see what they want, *click, bounce, bye*, and they’re gone.

*(Some marketers talk of a “sales funnel,” a concept I do not like because it implies that customers are **passive**, like little marbles that fall into your website and into your registration or sale. I do not think people on the Web (or in life) are passive at all. I think of people as **active** searchers, searching Google, clicking to websites, finding what they want (or not), and being quite skeptical about whether they should take the next action.)*

Customers Are Like Salmon

Let me explain why thinking of customers as jumping “up” a “sales ladder” is a better way to think than “down” a “sales funnel.”

I think of *customers* like *salmon* jumping up from sea level in frigid Alaskan rivers, jumping higher and higher up fish ladders (put there by the Alaskan Department of Fish and Game) to get to their goal: the spawning ground. The fish are motivated (*after all, there's mating to be done*), and they are **active** participants in the process. You can't “bait” them with junk either: they need something good at the end of the process.

A good Alaskan fishery expert doesn't engineer one **huge, high** jump for the salmon but rather a series of **smaller, easier-to-jump** hurdles that can move the fish from goal one to goal two, etc. Why? Because if the first jump is too high, and too scary, the fish won't make it.

Similarly, make your own “first step” non-threatening, and easy! Don’t attempt to go from a website landing to a major purchase; rather break the process into smaller, easier, and less threatening “baby steps.” One of the best early steps in your goals is to give away something **free** like a free consultation, free eBook, or free Webinar.

GIVE AWAY SOMETHING FREE IN EXCHANGE FOR CONTACT INFORMATION

Having something **free** (a free webinar, a free consultation, a free e-book) is a tried and true way to make the first step of your ladder easy and non-threatening. People love free, and will give away their email and phone contact information for something free that is also useful. (*From your perspective, this then gives you their email and/or phone number for you and your sales staff to follow up on*). If you are selling something, think of a free sample or money back offer; anything that reduces the risk of making that first buying decision. Using this strategy, make the first step of your sales ladder exciting, enticing, and free!

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial of the importance of giving away something free on your website at <http://jmlinks.com/17p>.

Don’t Make Customers Think!

Your customers are busy, harried people. The phone is ringing, the baby is crying, the boss is there waiting outside the office as they search Google for products or services. They’re busy, multi-tasking people. The design of your website needs to be easy and non-threatening from the perspective of a customer. If you ponder this “as if” you were “inside” the head of the customer, for example, he would be thinking something like the following (using the example of a person who has *international tax problems* and is looking for a CPA or accountant with knowledge of international tax issues):

1. **Customer identifies a need.** “I have income tax issues with respect to international taxes. I need help doing my bookkeeping and preparing my taxes for state, federal, and international tax compliance.”

2. **Customer turns to Google.** “I think I’ll search Google for ‘international tax accountants’ in Oklahoma City, OK” (which is where he lives).
3. **Customer refines his keywords.** “I will type into Google searches such as ‘international tax CPA,’ ‘Accountant for International Tax problems OKC’, and ‘accounting firm overseas taxation in Oklahoma City.’”
4. **Customer browses Google results.** I will browse the first three or four listings on Google (*ignoring the ads*), and click over to the first website at the top of Google.
5. **Customer clicks FROM Google TO each website.** He thinks to himself, “Hm. This looks interesting! They seem to do international taxes, but I don’t know...what else is on this website?”
6. **Customer sees a free offer, or first easy step on the sales ladder.** “Oh look, they have a YouTube video that explains their firm, let me watch that.”
7. **Customer takes the next easy, non-threatening step on the sales ladder.** “That was pretty good, but oh look, they have a ‘free consultation by phone’ offer. Let me fill out their feedback form with my name, email address, telephone number, and good time to call.”
8. **Customer transitions from the Web to human to human interaction.** Ring, ring. “Who is it?” “Jason McDonald Accountants, we see you are interested in our free 20 minute consult.” “Yes, I am... I have these international tax problems... bla, bla, bla.” (Conversation with the customer begins).
9. **Customer consummates the sale.** Enough trust has been established, and the customer signs up for the service.

At the end of this process from customer *need* to keyword *search query* to *landing* to *browsing* the website to taking the *easy free actions* such as watching a YouTube video and signing up for a free consultation, hopefully the lead turns into a sale. What you want to do for your own company is take out a piece of paper, and outline steps similar to the ones above. Work backwards from #9 to #1, and customize the process for your own company, product, and/or service.

You will then see that keywords start the process on Google, but the process (hopefully) ends on your website with a sale or sales lead.

Set up a Focus Group

Don’t make them think! Don’t make your website hard to navigate! Take a moment and look at your web pages from the perspective of a Google searcher. Does it answer a search question? Is the “next step” or “goal” easy to see? Does it look easy or free to take

that “next step”” **Don’t make customers think!** Don’t make customers hunt for goals, or they’ll bounce back to Google and be gone.

Indeed, it’s a good idea to get friends, family, or others outside your company to come in as a “focus group” and have them look at your website, and attempt to find your goals. If they struggle, you need to revise your website to make it easy. **KISS:** *keep it simple, stupid* is a good motto for effective website design!

If average people can understand your website, and can clearly see the “next step” that they should take like a free consultation, free webinar, or free eBook download, then your website works. If not, you need to redesign it.

Put it All Together

For your fourth **TODO**, open up your “business value proposition worksheet” and brainstorm your desired web landing next steps or goals (registrations and/or sales) as well as your sales ladder, including the possible use of something “free” to make that first step easy for customers.

For extra credit, begin to think about how you will **measure** these goals. As we will learn in Chapter 6.1, you can use Google Analytics to measure goals such as registrations or sales. But you can also use tactics like call tracking software (for a sample call tracking vendor, check out *CallRail* at <http://jmlinks.com/34z>), special toll-free 800 numbers, vanity phone extensions, and offer codes to track whether someone is coming from a Web search to a phone call into your call center.

Goals and measurability go hand-in-hand.

»» CHECKLIST: GOALS ACTION ITEMS

Test your knowledge of goals! Take the *Goals and BVP quiz* at <http://jmlinks.com/qzbv>. Next, here are your goals **Action Items**:

- Define** your business value proposition and write a short, one paragraph summary of it. What do you sell?

- Brainstorm and identify your **customer segments** or **personas**. Who wants, what you sell?
- Identify **marketing goals** for your website, namely –
 - Early stage goals** such as ranking on Google or web traffic.
 - Intermediate stage goals** such as registrations for a free giveaway like an eBook or eLetter
 - Late stage goals** such as sales leads and/or eCommerce sales
- As part of the above, brainstorm what you can give away for “**free**” in exchange for capturing customer names, email addresses, and contact information.

»»» DELIVERABLE: A COMPLETED BUSINESS VALUE PROPOSITION WORKSHEET

Now that we've come to the end of Step 1.2, you should have your **DELIVERABLE** ready: a completed **business value proposition worksheet**. This worksheet should define your business value proposition, customer segments, search paths, desired next steps (goals) and your sales ladder, and even how you plan to measure customer progress along the sales ladder. In Chapter 2.1, we will turn to defining your keywords (which builds upon this knowledge), but first let's turn to the “big picture” of how SEO works.



2.1

KEYWORDS

If Step #1 is “Set the Right Expectations,” Step #2 is to define your **keywords**. Customers start their quest to “find you” by typing in **keywords** or **key phrases** into Google, Yahoo, or Bing. (For simplicity’s sake, I’ll use the word *keyword* to mean either a *single* or *multi-word* phrase as a search engine query). Identifying **customer-centric keywords** is the foundation of effective SEO. Your best keywords match your **business value proposition** with **high volume, high value keywords** used by your customers.

- In **Step 2.1**, we’ll brainstorm our list of keywords, focusing on “getting all the words” on paper as a **keyword brainstorm** document.
- In **Step 2.2**, we’ll turn to organizing these keywords into a structured **keyword worksheet**.

For now, don’t worry about how to organize your keywords. Your goal in this Chapter is to get **all** your possible keyword targets on paper; this Chapter is about brainstorming your keyword universe.

Let’s get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Brainstorm Your Keywords
- » Use Google Tricks to Identify Possible Keywords
- » Reverse Engineer Competitors’ Keywords
- » Use Free Keyword Discovery Tools
- »» Checklist: Keyword Action Items

»»» Deliverable: Keyword Brainstorm Worksheet

» BRAINSTORM YOUR KEYWORDS

Sit down in a quiet place with a good cup of coffee or tea, or if you prefer, a martini, i.e. *anything to get your ideas flowing!* Brainstorm the **keywords** that a customer might type into Google that are relevant to your company, your product, and/or your service.

When a potential customer sits down at Google, what words do they type in?

Which keywords are DEFINITELY those of your customers?

Which keywords are CLOSE to a decision to buy? Which are farther away, earlier in the sales ladder?

Which customer segments use which keywords, and how might keywords differ among your customer segments?

Which keywords match which product or service lines as produced by your company?

Conduct a Keyword Brainstorming Session

I highly recommend that you organize a formal **keyword brainstorming session** with your marketing team (it might be just you by yourself, or it might be your CEO, your marketing manager, and a few from the sales staff). Devote at least ONE HOUR to brainstorming keywords; close the door, turn off the cell phone, tell your secretary to “hold all calls” and start drinking (either coffee or martinis).

Brainstorm, brainstorm, brainstorm the keywords that customers are typing into Google. Try not to miss any possible keyword combinations!

Do this, first, individually – take out a piece of paper, and write keyword ideas down WITHOUT talking to the others in your group.

Don’t be shy. Don’t leave anything out. The goal is to get EVERYTHING on paper, no matter how ridiculous it might be.

Then have a group session and go over all the keywords each person has identified.

Drink some more coffee, or more martinis, and keep brainstorming – write all possible keywords on a white board, a piece of paper, or a Word / Google document.

Don't censor yourself because there are no wrong answers. The goal of this exercise is to get the complete “universe” of all possible keywords that customers might type into Google.

“Think like a customer” sitting at his or her computer screen at Google:

- **Assume you are a completely new, novice customer.** Assume you know next to nothing. What single words or multi-word phrases (keywords) would you type into Google?
- **Segment your customers into different “buyer personas.”** What keywords might each group use, and how would they differ from other groups?
- **Are there any specific “helper” words that a potential customer might use?** Common helper words specify geographic locality (e.g., San Francisco, Berkeley, San Jose), for example. Others specify things like “free,” “cheap,” “trial,” or “information.”
- **Don’t miss your synonyms!** If you are a “lawyer,” don’t miss “attorney.” If you are a “dry cleaner,” don’t miss “wash and fold” or “laundry service.” If you are an “SEO expert,” don’t miss “SEO consultant.” If you are an orthopedic surgeon, don’t miss “knee doctor.”

For your first **TODO**, open up the “keyword brainstorm worksheet” in either Word or PDF, and begin to fill it out as completely as possible. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” and enter the code ‘2018seo’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “keyword brainstorm worksheet.”

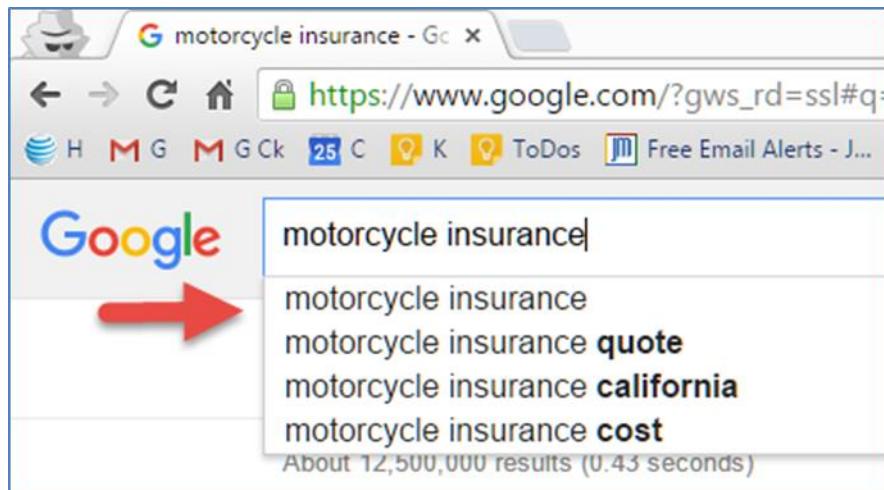
Again, for right now, don't worry about the *organization* of your keywords. Don't police your thoughts. Write down every word that comes to mind - synonyms, competitor names, misspellings, alternative word orders. Let your mind wander. This is the keyword discovery phase, so don't exclude anything!

» USE GOOGLE TRICKS TO IDENTIFY POSSIBLE KEYWORDS

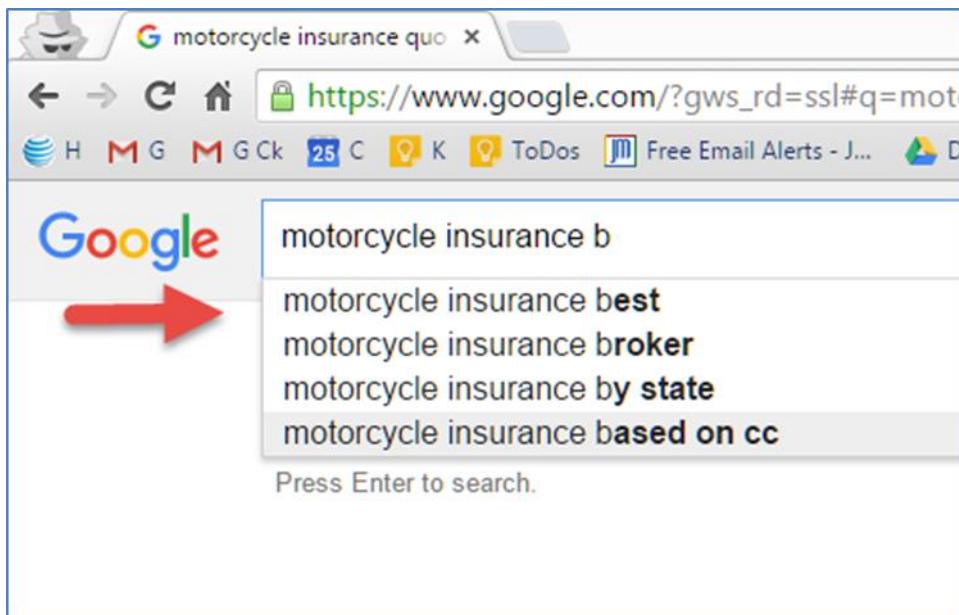
With a list of just a few keywords from your brainstorm session, it's time to turn to some Google tricks and tools to beef up your keyword list from these "starter" words. You can find a complete list of keyword discovery tools in the companion *SEO Toolbook (Keywords Chapter)* or on my SEO dashboard (both available at <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>), but here are my favorite strategies starting with Google's own free tools.

First, simply go to Google and start typing your keyword. Pay attention to the pull down menu that automatically appears. This is called **Google Suggest** or **Autocomplete** and is based on actual user queries. It's a quick and easy way to find "helper" words for any given search phrase. You can also place a space (hit your space bar) after your target keyword, and then go through the alphabet typing "a", "b", etc.

Here's a screenshot of **Google Suggest** using the key phrase "motorcycle insurance:"



Hit your space key after the last letter of the last keyword (e.g., after *motorcycle insurance*) and more keyword suggestions appear. You can also type the letters of the alphabet – a, b, c, etc. and Google will give you suggestions. Here's a screenshot for the letter "b":



Second, type in one of your target keyword phrases and scroll to the bottom of the Google search page. Google will often give you **related searches** based on what people often search on after their original search. Here's a screenshot of Google's related keywords for "motorcycle insurance" -

Searches related to motorcycle insurance

cheap motorcycle insurance	how much is motorcycle insurance
cheapest motorcycle insurance	motorcycle insurance comparison
motorcycle insurance rates	motorcycle insurance cost
best motorcycle insurance	average motorcycle insurance

Note the **helper words** it tells you people use to search: *cheap, rates, best, “how much,” comparison, cost, and average*. Are these not wonderful clues as to how customers search Google? As you look at Google autocomplete and related searches, add these keywords to your master list.

Ubersuggest

A third party tool that pulls data from Bing search queries is Ubersuggest at <http://jmlinks.com/35a>. It basically types through the alphabet for you, and gives you nifty keywords. Spend some quality time with the Google tools as well as Ubersuggest.io, using your “starter” keywords and looking for synonyms and helper words.

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on how to use Google autocomplete and related searches to generate keyword ideas at <http://jmlinks.com/18n>.

These three Google tricks are great ways to find helper words, related phrases, and synonyms for your target keywords and key phrases. For your third **TODO**, open up your “keyword brainstorm worksheet” and write down some keyword ideas garnered from these free tools. You want a messy, broad and complete list of the “universe” of possible customer keywords via your own brainstorming process, via reverse engineering your competitors, and now via Google tools such as autocomplete and related searches.

» REVERSE ENGINEER COMPETITORS

After you’ve completed this first wave of brainstorming, let’s you and your group members do some searches on Google for target keywords. Take a few of the keywords you’ve already identified, and type them into Google. As you search Google, identify your “Google competitors,” that is, companies that are on page one of the Google results and therefore doing well in terms of SEO. You’ll want to **reverse engineer** their keywords.

Here are your steps:

1. Type a keyword into Google from your list.
2. Identify the top three or four websites that show up, especially ones that are companies / competitors.
3. Click over to their website, whichever page ranks for the Google query you entered in step one.

Next, you’re going to view the HTML source code of their ranking page. Here’s how.

First, click over to their home page or whatever page is showing up on page one of Google for a search that matters to you. Next, view the HTML source code of this page. To do this,

in Firefox and Chrome, take your mouse and *right click*, then **View, Page Source**. In Internet Explorer, use **View, Source** on the file menu. **CTRL+U** will also pull up the source code for any web page. Finally, find the following tags in the HTML source code:

```
<Title>
<Meta Name="Description" Content="...">
<Meta Name="Keywords" Content="...">
```

If you have trouble finding these HTML tags, use **CTRL+F** (on a PC) or **Command+F** (on a Mac) on your keyboard, and in the dialog box type

<title (to find the TITLE tag) (Note: you need that “<” character!)

description (to find the META DESCRIPTION tag)

or

keywords (to find the META KEYWORDS tag)

Here's a screenshot of **http://www.globalindustrial.com/c/hvac/fans**, one of the top Google performers for the search “industrial fans” with the three critical tags highlighted -

```
<title>Industrial & Pedestal Fans | Global Industrial</title>

<meta name="category" content="Fans" />

<meta name="keywords" content="Fans, Industrial Fans, Pedestal Fans,"

<meta name="description" content="Shop for high-quality commercial &
```

For each tag you identify, write down those keywords your competitor has identified that might also be applicable to you.

Even better, read each tag out loud to your group members. That is, read the <TITLE> tag of your competitor's ranking page, the META DESCRIPTION tag, and the KEYWORDS tag out loud. (Note: you will almost certainly find a TITLE tag but you may not find a META DESCRIPTION or META KEYWORD tag as those are not always used).

As you read out loud the tags, listen for keywords. Notice how each tag in the source reveals the "thought process" behind this page, showing the synonyms "fan" for "blower," plus the "types" of fans people might search for - *pedestal, agricultural, ceiling*, etc. The goal of viewing the source of your competitors' pages is to "steal" their keyword ideas, and write down any relevant keywords onto your "keyword brainstorm" document.

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on how to use "view source" to reverse engineer competitors at <http://jmlinks.com/5k>.

A Note about the Keywords Meta Tag

Note that at this point you are just using "View Source" to "reverse engineer" your competitors and their keywords. The TITLE and META DESCRIPTION tag are very important for On Page communication, as they communicate keywords to Google. The META KEYWORDS tag, however, is ignored. That said, many people still use the META KEYWORDS tag and it's a useful window into your competitor's thought process. (*It isn't always in use, so you may not always find it in the HTML source code*). So, at this point, you're just peaking behind the curtain at their keyword targets to double check your own keyword list and identify any keyword patterns you may have missed in our own brainstorming session. Don't worry (yet) about what the HTML tags do.

For your second **TODO**, open up your "keyword brainstorm worksheet," and jot down the top five competitors who appear at the top of Google for your target keywords, use the tactic above to view their source, and then write down keyword ideas taken from their TITLE, META DESCRIPTION, and META KEYWORDS tags.

Did you discover any keywords you left out in your first brainstorming session? If so, be sure to write those on your list.

» USE FREE KEYWORD DISCOVERY TOOLS

Now it's time to use some more sophisticated tools. We'll start with the most powerful tool, Google's **Keyword Planner**. Recent changes have meant that you can use only use Google's official Keyword Planner tool, effectively, if you have a **paid** AdWords account and are actually spending money. So, although we'll first investigate how to use this tool, I will also point you to two alternative keyword tools: the SERPS.com keyword tool and Bing's Keyword Planner, which are more open to "free" users.

VIDEO. Watch two quick video tutorials on how to use the Google AdWords Keyword Planner *in general* at <http://jmlinks.com/17j> and *to brainstorm keywords* at <http://jmlinks.com/18m>.

Sign up for AdWords

To use the Keyword Planner you'll need to sign up for AdWords at <https://adwords.google.com/>. You'll need a credit card to set up an account. I recommend doing your best to identify relevant keywords, create some ads, and allocate no more than \$300 / month for your ads. You just want to fund it with enough money so that *after a few months it will fully share data with you*; then you can de-activate your campaigns.

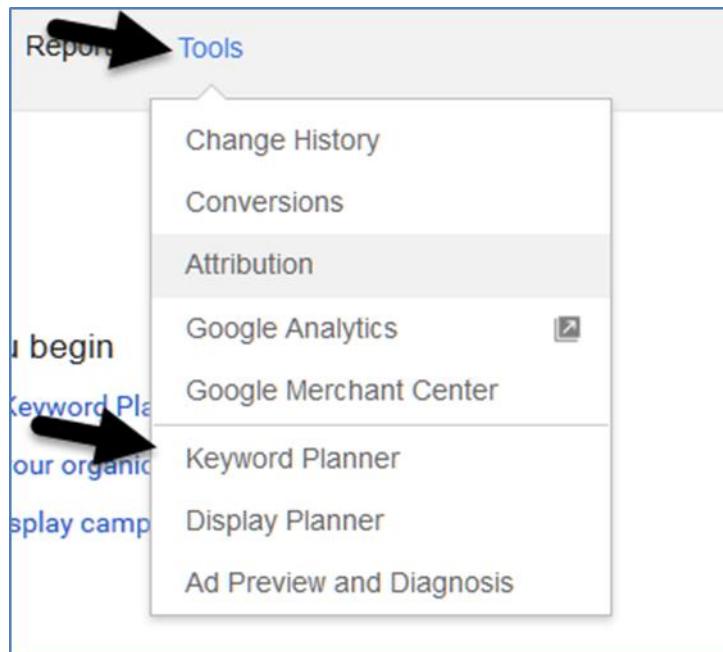
(You can even call AdWords at 866-246-6453 and ask them for help on how to set up your advertising campaigns; just set a low budget such as \$100 / month). If you're worried about credit card fraud, just go to your local grocery store and get a "gift card" with the VISA logo to set up your AdWords account. I know it's a bit of a pain, but once you have an operational AdWords account, you can use the Google AdWords Keyword Planner to research SEO keywords. It's a worthwhile investment!

Now, let's return to the Keyword Planner.

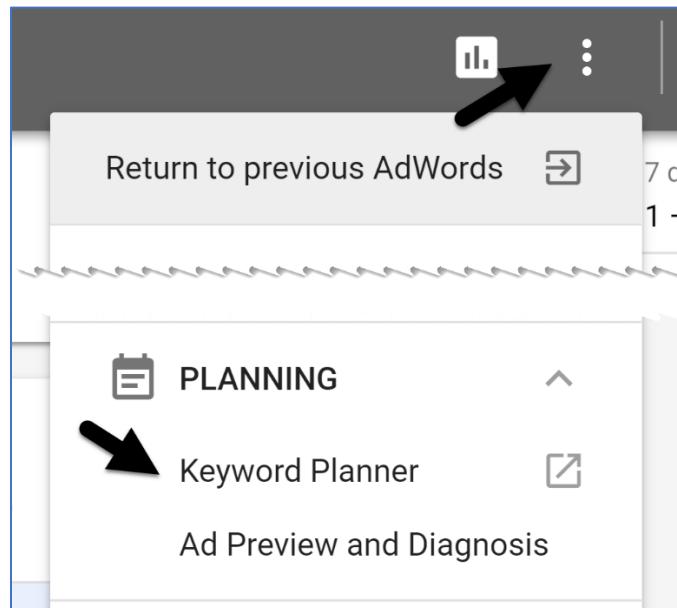
Note: just to complicate our lives, Google is "upgrading" the AdWords interface, so there is an "old" and a "new" version. The discussion and screenshots below, refer to the "old" version. If you are "upgraded" to the new version, you can return to the "old" interface by clicking the three dots in the top right of your AdWords screen and click "Return to Previous AdWords." Once you're logged into AdWords, you can also get to the tool directly via <http://jmlinks.com/35b>.

Use the AdWords Keyword Planner Tool to Identify SEO Keywords

Now that you're signed in to your AdWords account, next, go to the "Tools" tab at the top, and scroll down to "Keyword Planner." Here's a screenshot from the old interface:



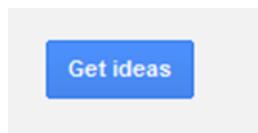
And here's a screenshot from the new interface.



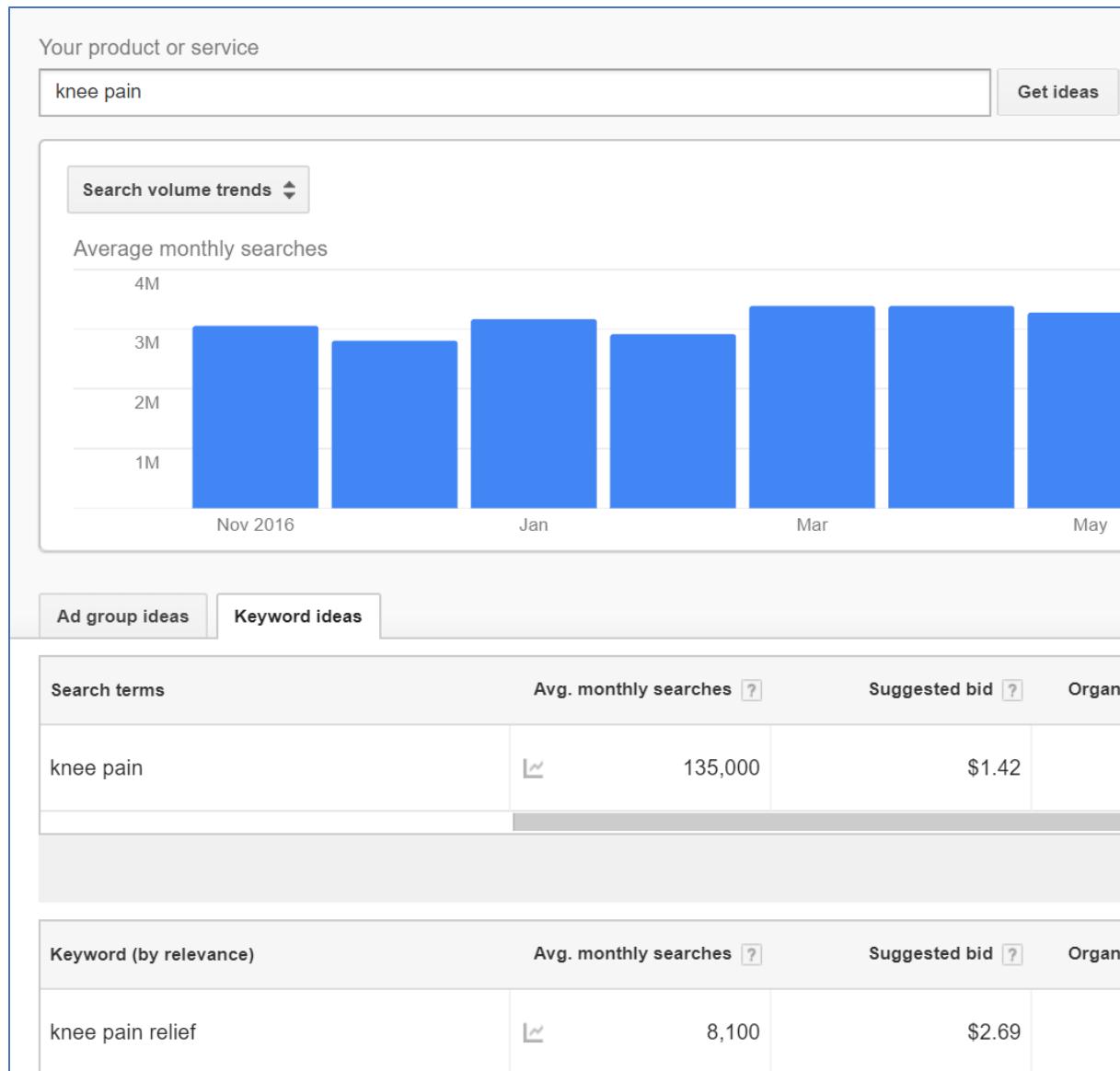
The new interface isn't stable, so you may have to hunt to find the Keyword Planner tool.

Here's how to use it.

First, get past the “welcome screen” by typing your keywords underneath “Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category” and hitting the blue “Get Ideas” button. This will get you into the actual tool. Here's a screenshot:



This gets you into the “real” tool, where you’ll see something like the following screenshot if you enter a keyword / key phrase such as “knee pain:”



A note to the wise: The Keyword Planner is not going to go down in Google history as the best-designed user interface! To be blunt, Google has done a pretty terrible job with the user interface but because of Google's search dominance it remains the data source for keyword research. Google has the data, and you have to master the Keyword Planner! Just be patient, and click around on the tool to learn its operation and secrets.

An Example Project: A New York Orthopedic Surgeon

For purposes of our example, let's assume you are a New York orthopedic surgeon specializing in knee surgery (or the marketing manager who works for one), and so you'll

enter “knee pain.” After you click “get ideas,” you’ll see a tab called “Ad group ideas,” and one called “keyword ideas.” Scroll down under the “ad group” ideas and click “into” the various suggested groups. Google will give you good ideas for related keywords here. For instance, if you type in “knee surgeons,” Google will give you these suggestions:

The screenshot shows a search results page from Google Keyword Planner. At the top, there are two tabs: "Ad group ideas" (which is selected) and "Keyword ideas". Below the tabs, there are three columns: "Ad group (by relevance)", "Avg. monthly searches", and "Suggested bid".

Ad group (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Suggested bid
Orthopedic Surgeons (27) orthopedic surgeon, dr orthopedic surgeon, l...	99,270	\$6.07
Total Replacement (29) total knee replacement, total knee replacem...	24,160	\$4.48
Knee Doctor (27) knee doctor, knee doctor near me, doctor for...	14,590	\$5.82
Orthopedic Doctors (22) orthopedic doctor, orthopedic doctors in my ...	46,710	\$5.47
Replacement Surgery (33) knee replacement surgery, knee replacemen...	34,550	\$4.18

Click on any **ad group**, and Google will drill down into more related searches. All of these give you great ideas for possible keywords. Note that it also gives you **volume information**; a rough approximation for how frequently a keyword phrase is actually used per month; and suggested bid information or **value information**, the amount advertisers are willing to pay for a click. (We’ll discuss those concepts in detail a bit later).

Don't Miss Your Synonyms!

Notice how the tool gives you both *helper* words and *synonyms*. For example, you get *best* knee replacement, telling you that *best* is a helper word, and you get *doctor* as well as *surgeon*, *orthopedic* as well as *knee*. The tool is telling you how people search: some people search for *knee doctors*, and others for *orthopedic surgeons*. Many people search for *best knee surgeons* (and to the contrary, few search for *worst knee surgeons*). Because to Google *a word is just a word*, you want to be sure to capture ALL your key synonyms. A search for “best knee doctor in San Francisco” is different from a search for “best

orthopedic surgeon in San Francisco,” even though the latter may include the former, i.e. many people searching for orthopedic surgeons who do knees. This is true across all domains; a *lawyer*, to Google, is not the same as an *attorney*. In summary be sure to identify all your helpers and synonyms, and write these down on your Keyword Brainstorm Worksheet.

Next, click on the tab “Keyword ideas,” you should see something like:

Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Suggested bid
orthopedic surgeon	90,500	\$6.02
knee replacement	33,100	\$5.26
knee surgery	12,100	\$5.11
orthopedic doctor	40,500	\$5.82
total knee replacement	12,100	\$5.02
knee replacement surgery	12,100	\$5.41

Again, Google is giving you great ideas of related or helper words (e.g. “best”) as well as synonyms (e.g., “knee replacement” for “knee surgery” and a total new keyword pattern of “orthopedic surgeon”). Note the ones down that make sense, and write them onto your keyword brainstorm worksheet.

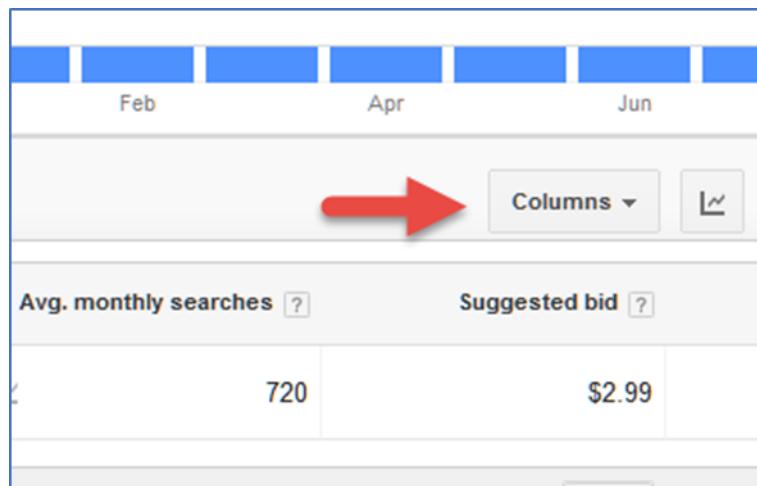
Next, you’ll want to play around with the tool and understand some of its more advanced features. Let’s start with the columns and pull-outs mean. Starting on the left column, take a look at “Targeting.” You’ll see here it will default to “All locations” or perhaps “United States.” If you click the pencil to the right of “United States,” you can drill down to specific states or even cities by typing their names into this space and then clicking

“remove” on other entries. This is useful if you’d like to know keyword search volume for specific states; at the city level, the tool isn’t very useful as the search volume is often insufficient, however. Alternatively, you can “remove” the United States and target “All locations” which is “Google speak” for the entire world. Note that to activate a change just click elsewhere on the screen or hit enter. (The brilliant engineers at Google failed to clarify how to enter data into the tool!)

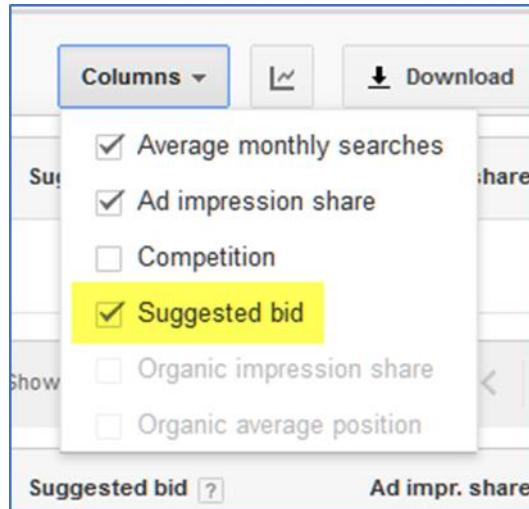
Generally speaking, you’ll need a broad geography: so choose “United States” rather than “Tulsa, Oklahoma” to research “industrial fans” or “knee surgeons” as you brainstorm keywords. If a search is too narrow, the tool returns zero data.

The **Negative keywords** feature also has some utility. You can filter “out” keywords that don’t matter to you. For example, if we type in “exercises” it then filters out keyword phrases that contain the word “exercises.” Many companies want to filter out words like “free” or “cheap,” so use negative keywords for any desired refinement.

Columns. On the middle of the page, find the Columns button and click on the downward chevron. Here’s a screenshot:



Be sure to click the box next to “Suggested bid” as you definitely want this one to show.

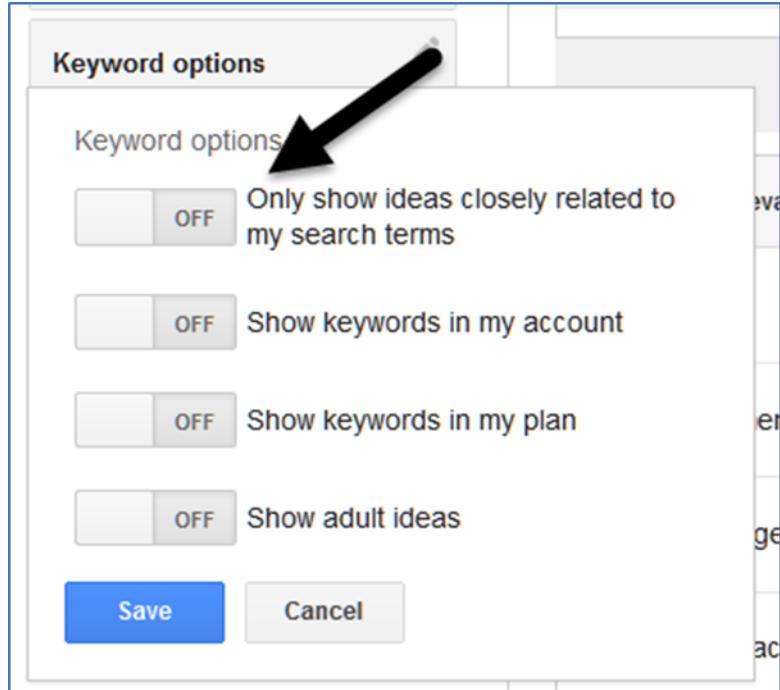


We'll discuss what "suggested bid" means in a moment, but basically it's the average amount competitors are willing to pay Google to get a click from Google to their website via AdWords advertising. I think of it like the "price per pound" of fish at the fish market.

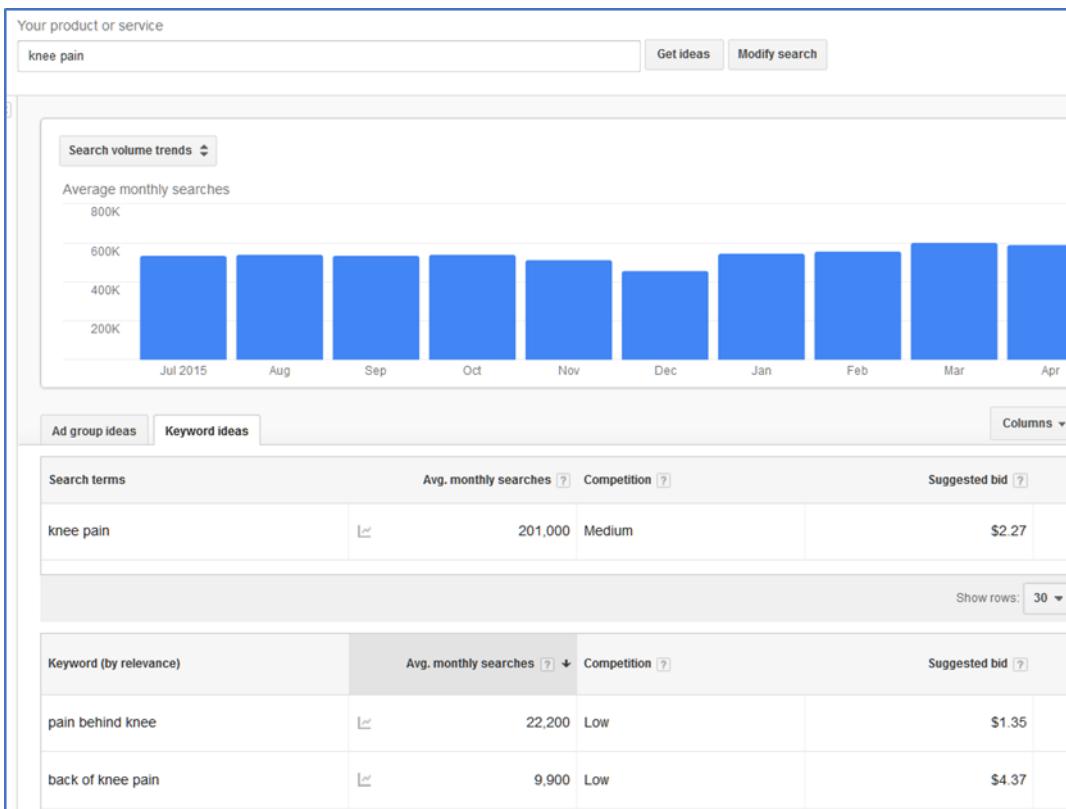
If the "suggested bid" is \$2.99 for "knee pain" this means advertisers are willing to pay Google \$2.99 for each and every click FROM Google TO their website.

Refocusing the Keyword Planner

You may notice that the tool gives you very broad and often irrelevant keyword suggestions, so I often recommend that you refocus it to just your target phrase and related phrases. To do this, on the left-hand column where it says "Keyword Options," click there, and then select "Only show ideas closely related to my search terms" by moving the blue button to "on" and clicking on the blue "save" button. Here's a screenshot:



Once you click “off” to “on” for “Only show ideas closely related to my search terms,” you’ve reset the Keyword Planner to zero in on more specific keywords. Once you’ve done that, you should see something like this:



Now click on the column “Avg. monthly searches,” and the tool will sort your keywords by volume (the number of searches per month for your target geography). The above screenshot is for “knee pain” after having focused the tool by entering “knee pain” with location set to “all locations,” and “Keyword filters” set to “Only show ideas closely related to my search terms.”

You can see the average monthly search volume for “knee pain” for “all locations” is 201,000. The number 1 phrase is “pain behind knee” at 22,200 followed by “back of knee pain” at 9,900. **Note that these search volumes refer to exact match only: they take into account only when a searcher enters that phrase and nothing more.** For example, 9,900 people entered “back of knee pain” and no additional words. Similarly, 201,000 people entered the phrase “knee pain” in the last thirty days and no additional words. If they enter “sharp knee pain” that does NOT count in this total.

(**Note:** the volumes you see may differ from the above, or you may see a “range” of volumes if you have not spent enough money in AdWords. Take all the volumes in the tool as illustrations only – despite Google’s public statements about keyword accuracy, the tool seems to be incredibly inaccurate! Use it more to get a sense of range, which keywords are more popular than others as opposed to a scientific treatise on actual keyword volumes).

If you'd like to drill down to a phrase, then you have to re-enter it in the top. Enter "back of knee pain" and Google will give you the related helper words such as "pain behind knee cap," "sharp pain behind knee, etc."

Unfortunately, the Keyword Planner gives only "exact match" data, so you have to manually enter a bunch of related keyword phrases and then tally them up to get a total for phrases.

The Keyword Planner has been strongly criticized by the SEO community for this flaw, because the old Keyword Tool did allow such functionality, but to no avail. So, so far you can only get keyword volumes for exact match. And, the data that it does provide seems to be rather inaccurate. So for now, to compare keyword volumes you are left with manually "guessing" related phrase and entering them into the tool.

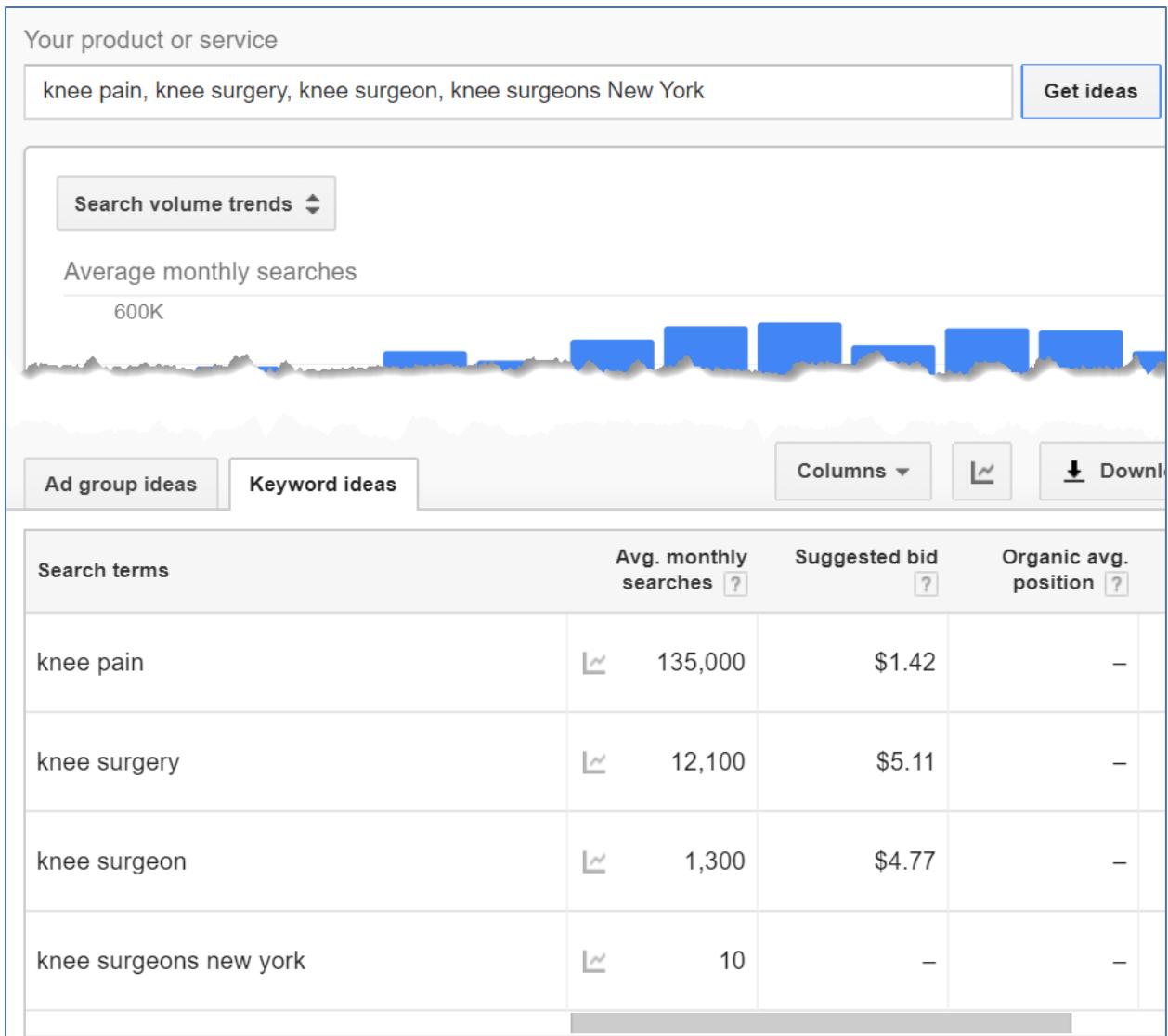
You can, however, enter multiple phrases and compare them. Let's set our location to New York, NY, and let's take these keywords:

*knee pain
knee surgery
knee surgeon
knee surgeons New York*

To compare phrases, enter them as a comma separated phrase as follows and click "Get ideas":

knee pain, knee surgery, knee surgeon, knee surgeons New York

Here's a screenshot:



Here you can see each phrase and the **volume** as well as the **value** or *suggested bid*. This tells you that there were 135,000 searches for “knee pain” at a value of \$1.42 vs. only 1,300 searches for knee surgeon at a value \$4.77. In this way, you can start to see **tradeoffs** between volume and value for your keyword targets. The tool is essentially polling the Google advertising community to identify the best keywords!

Keyword Volume vs. Value

To understand what this all means, let’s use an analogy: **fishing** and **fish**. As the SEO technician, you’re the **fisherman** of course.

First, you want to “fish where the fish are.” This is the column “Avg. monthly searches” and indicating that there is a lot of **volume** for “knee pain.” However, you want to catch yummy fish and the price per pound as set by the market gives you a strong clue as to their value: *tilapia* at \$1.00 a pound isn’t as tasty as organic *halibut* at \$22.00 a pound. Similarly, *knee pain* is worth only \$1.42 per click, while *knee surgeon* is worth \$4.77. One search has a lot of low quality volume, and the other not nearly as much volume but a lot of **value**. Just like fish at the fish market – some fish are common (and cheap) and other fish are rare (and expensive).

Volume vs. Value

There is, in short, a see-saw between **volume** (*fish where the fish are*) and **value** (*catch yummy fish*); the AdWords marketplace is telling you that “knee surgeon” is worth MORE than “knee pain” even though “knee surgeon” has far less volume.

Why? Well, think about what each search query tells you about the customer need.

A search for “knee pain” might be someone who needs an aspirin (a \$1.00 sale at best), while a search for “knee surgeon” is probably someone who is looking for surgery (easily \$50,000).

“Knee pain” is an “educational” search by someone who is using Google to learn vs. “knee surgeon,” which is a “transactional” search by someone who is using Google to find a surgeon to buy knee surgery from.

In general, “educational” searches will have lower average costs-per-click indicating lesser value than “transactional” searches; AdWords is giving you strong clues as to “where the fish are,” and “which fish are yummy to eat.”

Your competitors using AdWords, in short, are bidding up the keywords that are likely to end in sales and thus telling you which keywords you should SEO!

More on Educational vs. Transactional Keywords

Another way to look at this is that keywords that are *early* in the sales ladder occur usually when a person is just learning, just educating himself about an issue and not likely to buy something. These are called **educational keywords** and generally have low cost-per-click in AdWords. Keywords that occur *late* in the sales ladder are when they are looking

to buy something, or make an engagement. These are called **transactional keywords** and generally have high cost-per-click in AdWords. In general, you want to optimize for transactional keywords as they are “where the money is.”

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on distinguishing educational vs. transactional keywords, volume vs. value at <http://jmlinks.com/18k>.

You’re **best SEO** occurs at focused, transactional keywords, not educational keywords. You’re looking for the “sweet spot” between volume and value, education and transaction.

Let me emphasize this:

Identify and optimize for transactional, late stage, high value keywords.

I, Jason McDonald, do not want to be at the top of Google for “SEO.” But I do want to be at the top of Google for “SEO Expert San Francisco.” Why? Because the former is an early stage, low value educational search, while the latter is a late stage, high value transactional search: someone who wants to hire me as a high-paid consultant.

A knee surgeon wants to be at the top of Google for “San Francisco Knee Surgeons” and not for “knee pain,” because the former are potential patients looking for knee surgery and the latter could be practically anyone with a sore knee and just needing an aspirin.

That said, you still need to rely on your instinct to determine your best keywords and then bolster that with real data from your Google Analytics, which we discuss in the last Chapter. The Keyword Planner is only a tool, and the art of SEO still means a lot of head-scratching to identify those keywords that are not just high volume but also high value.

Riches are in the Niches

Back to fishing, if you want to “fish where the fish are” (*high volume keywords*) and “catchy yummy fish” (*high value keywords*), you also want to find “secret fishing holes.” These are keyword phrases that tend to yield good customers yet your competitors have not discovered. They are less expensive in AdWords, and easier to optimize for via SEO (because they are undiscovered). If you discover a “secret fishing hole” vs. one everyone knows about, you have struck gold (to mix metaphors). Don’t tell anyone! **Riches**, in sum, are in the **niches** when it comes to keywords and SEO.

For “knee pain,” the niche search is “knee surgeon” or better yet, “best knee surgeons in the Bay Area.”

Here’s another example. Let’s assume you sell *auto insurance*. The generic “auto insurance” keyword query will have a lot of volume, and a lot of value, and be pretty difficult to show up high on Google for because of intense competition. In this case, look for “niche” keywords such as “auto insurance for teens,” or “auto insurance for high risk drivers,” or even “auto insurance for classic cars.” You may find that highly profitable niches of your business reflect highly profitable keyword queries for SEO, and – to the extent that your competitors are ignorant – a “secret” niche keyword is the best of all.

Micro Search Queries

“Niche” keywords aren’t just long tail (multiword), either. A Los Angeles watch repair shop focusing on high end watch repair, might optimize for “Watch Repair Los Angeles” (lots of *volume*, but low in *value* as it may be people who just need a battery or have a Timex they want repaired). But a little research will identify brand-oriented searches such as “Rolex Repair LA,” “Breitling Repair Los Angeles,” or “Tag Heuer Repair LA.” People who know their brand and are looking for an expert in repairing that brand are likely to convert; watch repair “riches” are in the “niches” of brand-oriented search queries.

Alternatives to the Keyword Planner

As I’ve indicated, Google now requires that you spend money to get accurate data out of the Keyword Planner. Accordingly, my recommendation is to allocate a hundred dollars per month to Google AdWords and run some actual ads for your keywords for three months. For less than \$300 or so, you’ll then be able to use the Keyword Planner for keyword discovery, and AdWords gives you the absolute best data about actual search queries. (Once you’ve done your research, you can turn off your AdWords campaigns).

If you don’t have a few hundred dollars to pay to Google for AdWords, then I recommend you use one (or all) of the following free keyword tools: Bing Webmaster Tools’ Keyword

Tool (<http://jmlinks.com/19g>) or the SERPS.com keyword tool (<http://jmlinks.com/19e>). Other keyword tools are identified in the dashboard at <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>, keyword section.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on alternatives to the Google AdWords Keyword Planner at <http://jmlinks.com/19d>.

The **SERPS.com** keyword tool, in particular, is structured in a very similar way to the Keyword Planner, with the left column indicating “keyword ideas,” the next column indicating volume, and the “CPC” column indicating the price-per-click advertiser are willing to pay for a keyword search query. It’s an excellent alternative to the official Google AdWords Keyword Planner.

Here’s a screenshot for the keyword “knee surgeon” from the SERPS.com tool:

The screenshot shows the SERPS Keyword Research Database interface. At the top, there's a logo with four vertical bars and the word "SERPs". Below it, a dark blue header bar contains the text "Keyword Research Database". Underneath, a search bar contains the query "knee surgeon". The main area is titled "Keyword Search Results" and displays a table with the following data:

Keyword	▼Volume	CPC	Value	+	-
<input type="checkbox"/> filter keyword				+	-
<input type="checkbox"/> knee surgeon	480	\$3.34	\$1,603.20	+	-
<input type="checkbox"/> knee surgeon salary	110	\$0.00	\$0.00	+	-
<input type="checkbox"/> best knee replacement surgeon	110	\$5.21	\$573.10	+	-
<input type="checkbox"/> orthopedic surgeon knee specialist	70	\$4.13	\$289.10	+	-

Notice how, like Google’s own Keyword Planner, you have an “idea” column on the left showing keyword phrase variations, a “volume” column showing the monthly volume estimates, and a “value” column (*Noted by CPC not Value*), showing the bid per click. I’d

ignore the final “Value” column and just use the CPC (Cost Per Click) data which parallels the Google Keyword Planner’s column for “suggested bid.” The SERPS.com tool is a robust, free alternative to Google’s own tool and is simple and easy to use.

You can also easily “check” keywords you like, and then export these into a keyword list.

Get ALL Your Keyword Ideas Down on Paper

For your final **TODO**, open up your “keyword brainstorm worksheet,” and jot down keyword volumes and the CPC values of relevant keywords. Again, don’t worry about being organized. Just indicate – in general – which keywords are higher volume vs. higher value, which ones are educational vs. transactional. It won’t be a perfect map, but you will start to see patterns as to volume and value.

»» CHECKLIST: KEYWORD ACTION ITEMS

Test your knowledge of keywords! Take the *keyword quiz* at <http://jmlinks.com/qzkb>. Next, here are your keyword **Action Items**:

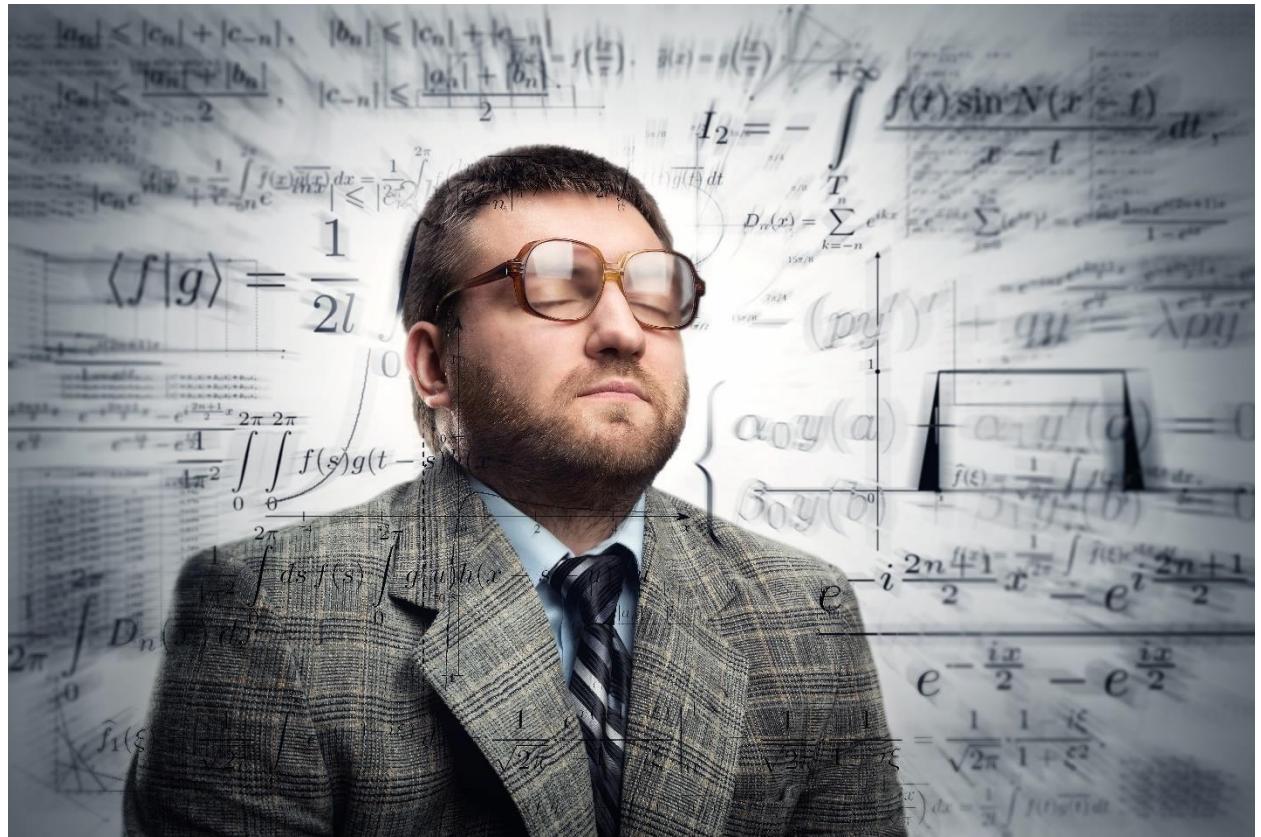
- Hold a **keyword brainstorming session** with your team, and write down your “starter keywords” based on your knowledge of what potential customers type into Google.
- Use **Google autocomplete**, **UberSuggest.io**, and Google’s **related searches** to build out your keyword list based on your “starter keywords.”
- Identify **competitors** who rank for Google on your keywords, visit their websites, view their HTML source code and use their TITLE, META DESCRIPTION, and KEYWORDS tags to help you identify the complete universe of keyword relevant to your business.
- Use the **Keyword Planner** or **SERPS.com Keyword Tool** to look for ideas, volumes, and values as you build out your keyword list.
 - Begin to **organize keywords into logical groups** with core keywords and helper keywords, with an eye to their **volume** vs. **value** data.
 - Be on the lookout for “**niche**” or “**micro**” keywords that indicate high-value search queries by customers who are late in the sales ladder and likely to make a purchase. “Riches are in the niches.”

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Keywords* for my favorite free tools for keyword discovery. Just visit <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>.

>>> DELIVERABLE: A COMPLETED KEYWORD BRAINSTORM WORKSHEET

Now we've come to the end of Step 2.1, and you should have the Chapter **DELIVERABLE** ready: your completed **keyword brainstorm worksheet**.

Remember the “Keyword Brainstorm” document will be messy. Its purpose is to get all relevant keywords, helper words, and keyword ideas about volume and value down on paper. In Step 2.2, we will turn to **organizing** our keywords into a structured **keyword worksheet**.



2.2

KEYWORD WORKSHEET

Now that you have a keyword **brainstorm document**, it's time to get organized! Step #2.2 is all about taking the *disorganized* list of keywords and turning them into an *organized*, structured **keyword worksheet** that reflects your **keyword groups** as well as **volume** and **value**. You'll use your keyword worksheet as your "SEO blueprint" for many tasks, such as measuring your rank on Google, structuring your website to tell Google which keywords matter to you, writing better blog posts and so on. In my method of doing SEO, I emphasize that it is absolutely essential that your company create and use a keyword worksheet to guide your SEO efforts.

Do not skip this step!

The **DELIVERABLES** for Step 2.2 are your **keyword worksheet** as well as a **rank measurement / baseline** of where your website ranks for target keywords searches on Google.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Identify Your Main Keyword Groups
- » Create Your Keyword Worksheet
- »» Deliverable: Your Keyword Worksheet
- » Measure Your Google Rank vs. Keywords
- »» Deliverable: Rank Measurement and a Baseline Score
- »» Checklist: Keyword Worksheet Action Items

» IDENTIFY YOUR MAIN KEYWORD GROUPS

After you complete your keyword brainstorm worksheet, your head may be spinning (*especially if you and your team were drinking martinis rather than coffee as the elixir of choice during the brainstorm exercise*). Now it's time to shift gears and to organize those keywords into "**keyword groups**" with an eye to both keyword volume and value.

Here's where we're going:

Brainstorm your keywords > **organize** them by **keyword group** into a keyword worksheet > **measure** your **rank** on Google / Bing for sample keywords > **restructure** your website to better "talk to Google" vis-à-vis your keyword patterns.

Let's look at some example websites.

Most businesses have a few different product or service lines, and often a few different customer segments. Take a look at Progressive Insurance (<https://www.progressive.com/>), for example, and you'll quickly realize that they have different types of insurance offered such as auto insurance, motorcycle insurance, RV insurance, and even Segway insurance. Take a look at <https://www.progressive.com/insurance-choices/> to see the organizational structure of their website, and you'll quickly realize that the "structure" of the website reflects the "structure" of how people search for insurance. Those who are on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle are searching in one way, and those looking to ensure their Segway are searching in another.

So in terms of **keyword groups** and **matching landing pages**, we have:

motorcycle insurance = a group of keywords around *motorcycle insurance* like *cheap motorcycle insurance*, *motorcycle insurance quote*, etc. = a landing page on the website.

Car insurance = a group of keywords around *car insurance* like *cheap car insurance*, *automobile insurance*, *car insurance quote*, etc. = a landing page on the website.

etc.

Outline a Hierarchy of Your Keywords

If you think of keywords as living in “keyword groups” within a **hierarchy**, you can actually sketch out a **structural hierarchy** to your website. If you worked at Progressive Insurance, for example, you’d have a hierarchy like this:

Home Page

- > Landing Page: “Motorcycle Insurance”
 - > Informational / blog posts: additional pages on “motorcycle insurance” such as “unique motorcycle coverages,” etc.
- > Landing Page: “Car Insurance”
 - > Informational / blog posts: additional pages on “Car insurance” such as “comparing types of auto insurance coverage,” etc.
- > Landing Page: “RV Insurance”
 - > Informational / blog posts: additional pages on “RV insurance” such as “types of RV coverage,” etc.

If you pay attention to the URL structure of the website, you can also see how the organization of the URLs follows the keyword groups:

<https://www.progressive.com> - “home page”

<https://www.progressive.com/auto/> - “auto insurance group”

<https://www.progressive.com/auto/discounts/bundling-insurance/> - “subordinate page”

<https://www.progressive.com/auto/discounts/compare-car-insurance-rates/> - “subordinate page”

etc.

In other words, Progressive has conceptualized their keywords into a structured keyword worksheet that reflects “core” keywords and related “helper” keywords and phrases, and then implemented a highly organized website hierarchy that literally reflects this.

Bruce Clay, one of the gurus of the SEO industry, has coined the term “SEO Silos” to explain how keyword structure should determine website architecture. You can read an excellent article by him entitled, “SEO Siloing: How to build a website silo architecture,” at <http://jmlinks.com/37u>.

KEYWORD HIERARCHY = WEBSITE ORGANIZATION

Another example of a well-designed hierarchy is Industrial Fans Direct (<http://www.industrialfansdirect.com/>). Take a look at their website, and you’ll see that they have product categories such as blowers, man coolers, ceiling, bathroom fans, etc., and that these reflect the “needs” of consumers who “search Google” using words that reflect those needs.

blowers = a group of keywords around *blowers* = a landing page on the website.

roof exhaust = a group of keywords around *roof exhaust* = a landing page on the website.

etc.

As on Progressive.com, you see:

<https://www.industrialfansdirect.com/>

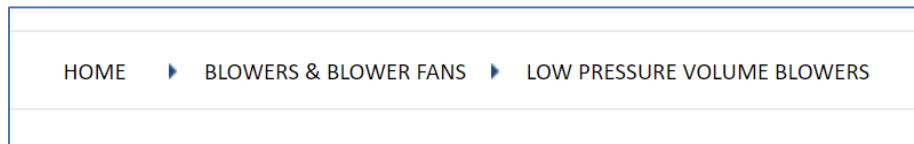
<https://www.industrialfansdirect.com/collections/blowers-and-blower-fans>

<https://www.industrialfansdirect.com/collections/blowers-and-blower-fans/low-pressure-volume-blowers>

<https://www.industrialfansdirect.com/collections/blowers-and-blower-fans/inflation-blowers>

etc.

If you look carefully at the top left quadrant of each web page, you'll also see that the subordinate pages of their site have a "breadcrumb trail" which is a hierarchical set of links up and down the categories. Here's a screenshot:



Again, if you were privy to their internal documentation, you'd find a Keyword Worksheet that is guiding the structure of the website from home page to landing pages ("core keyword groups") to sublanding pages (subordinate keyword phrases).

Organize Your Keywords into a Keyword Worksheet

With these two examples in mind, it's time to revisit your own keyword patterns, and transform your *disorganized keyword brainstorm document* into an **organized keyword worksheet**. First, circle the "core keywords" that reflect your basic product or service categories. Usually you'll see a one-to-one correspondence of a "product group" that matches a "core keyword," as you see in the examples above. These "core keywords" become your "keyword groups." Second, you'll also see a bunch of helper words like *cheap, best, San Francisco, quote, rate*, etc., that are often entered alongside the core keyword. Third, look for phrases that combine a "core keyword" with a "helper keyword" to make a phrase. These become the "subordinate keyword groups" in a child-to-parent relationship to the "keyword groups" above them.

Taking as our example, Commuter Cleaners (<http://www.commutercleaners.com/>), you'll see

Core Keyword	Dependent Phrases
Dry Cleaning	dry cleaning Stamford, dry cleaning Greenwich, specialty dry cleaning, same day dry cleaning, etc., as well as helper words like "best" or "top-rated."
Home Pickup & Delivery Dry Cleaning	home pickup and delivery dry cleaning Stamford, Greenwich home pickup dry cleaning, etc., as well as helper words like "best" or "top-rated."
Wash and Fold	wash and fold Stamford, wash and fold New Canaan, etc., as well as helper words like "best" or "top-rated."
Specialty Cleaning	purse cleaning, leather cleaning, wedding dress cleaning, fur cleaning, etc., plus city names like Stamford or New Canaan as well as helper words like "best" or "top-rated."

Remember: a "core keyword" is the minimum necessary to make a logical search, and it is often more than one word. So it's:

dry cleaning (not *dry* or *cleaning* alone)

wash and fold (not *wash* or *fold* alone)

and even

home pickup dry cleaning, *home pickup and delivery dry cleaning* to represent the very high value service of when Commuter Cleaners literally picks up, cleans, and then redelivers your dry cleaning and wash straight to your home. (It's OK to combine very closely related words into one keyword group).

Throughout, there would be helpers such as *best*, *top*, *top-rated*, *Stamford*, *Greenwich*, *local*, *same-day*, etc.

Remember as well to not “let reality confuse you!” How so? Well, though the company doesn’t actually do “wash and fold,” consumers search for that service. Accordingly, it warrants a target keyword group to rank on Google for a search query like “wash and fold Stamford” only to inform the customer that “wash and fold” is very 20th century and “home pickup and delivery dry cleaning and wash” is very 21st. (We offer the latter, but not the former). Similarly, “specialty cleaning” doesn’t correspond one-to-one with keyword searches like “purse cleaning” or “leather cleaning” but it’s close enough to be the “parent” of that “family.” The point is that the core keywords are like the “parent” in a keyword “family,” so that “specialty cleaning” is the “parent” to the “children,” i.e., “purse cleaning,” “wedding dress cleaning,” and “fur cleaning.” And, because this is a local business, we realize we need to “pepper and salt” the city names Stamford, Greenwich, New Canaan, Port Chester, etc., throughout the content of the website.

Indeed, because **city searches** are incredibly important to this website, the website sports city-specific landing pages such as http://www.commutercleaners.com/lp-norwalk_ct/ in order to rank for searches such as “Norwalk specialty dry cleaners” on Google and Bing. (Note: do not overdo these “city” search pages, as technically speaking, they can be considered “doorway pages” (<http://jmlinks.com/37v>) by Google!)

In short, a keyword group isn’t entirely driven by reality. It’s driven by a group of interrelated keywords that you want to rank for, reality be damned.

How Many Core Keywords do You Have?

People often mistakenly think that they have “hundreds” of keywords, when in fact they usually have only about five to ten **core keyword groups** or **structural patterns**, and these then form hundreds of possible keyword queries. As on *Progressive.com*, *IndustrialFans.com*, and *CommuterCleaners.com*, as listed above, you’ll see that a core keyword should become one, and only one, landing page on the website.

Let me repeat that:

One core keyword will (ultimately) become one landing page on your website.

Looking at keywords for SEO in terms of core keywords makes it easy to see that a company will usually have about five to ten *core keywords*, and about five to ten corresponding *landing pages* on the website. (I'll explain landing pages in more detail in Chapters 3.1 and 3.2).

Keyword Volume and Value

As for keyword *volume* and *value*, you'll then see that you take a core keyword and you can look at the volume of the entire "cluster" of keywords around it, as well as the value as measured in Google's Keyword Planner that reflects the "value" of these keywords in the sense that they are likely, or not, to end in a sale.

Volume = are there a lot, or just a few, searches on Google that reflect the core keyword and its dependent phrases?

Value = if a searcher enters any one of the search queries in the cluster, is it of high, or low value, to your company, as measured in the likelihood that it can become a sale, and if it becomes a sale that that sale makes you a lot (vs. a little) of money?

For your first **TODO**, download the **keyword worksheet**. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on 'SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,' and enter the code '2018seo' to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the "keyword worksheet." Note this is a Microsoft Excel document but can be converted to a Google spreadsheet.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on how to create a Keyword Worksheet at <http://jmlinks.com/17m>.

Inside the document, list each major pattern of your keywords (which reflect a product or service grouping of your company) on a line all by itself in the first column. Return to the Google AdWords Keyword Planner and note both the keyword volume and keyword value (suggested bid) that correspond to each core keyword.

» CREATE YOUR KEYWORD WORKSHEET

Now it's time to fill out your keyword worksheet in more detail. In your spreadsheet, you'll be filling out columns for the following:

Core Keywords. These are the minimum words necessary to create a relevant search. If you are a watch repair shop servicing high-end watches, for example, your core keywords would be phrases such as "watch repair," "Tag Heuer Repair," "Rolex Repair," etc. This is the first column, and reflects the core, structural keyword patterns and indicates volume and value.

Note. If, to your business, a phrase is important enough (e.g., *Rolex watch repair* vs. *Tag Heuer watch repair* vs. just *watch repair*), then break it out into its own core keyword group / line item on your keyword worksheet. Do this even if these words are closely related (e.g., Rolex repair vs. Hamilton repair vs. Tag Heuer repair for watches).

Helper Keywords. Common helpers are geographics like San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland. In the watch examples above, other helpers would be "best," "authorized," "NYC" etc. that combine with the core keywords to make the actual search query (e.g., "Best watch repair NYC").

Sample Search Query Phrases. Take your core keywords plus your helpers and build out some "real" search queries that potential customers might use. Group these by keyword family. For example, you'd have a keyword group called "Rolex Repair" and underneath, related keyword phrases such as "Rolex Repair NYC," "Authorized Rolex Repair Midtown," or "Best Rolex Repair Shop New York," etc.

Search Volumes. Indicate the volume of searches (where available) as obtained from the Google AdWords Keyword Planner.

Search Value. Indicate whether a given keyword family is of high, low, or negative value to you and your business. Does it indicate a searcher who is probably a target customer? If your answer is strongly yes, then this is a "high value" search term! Does it clearly indicate a non-customer? If so, this is a "low value" or even a "negative" search term. I often mark "hot," "warm," or "cold" next to a keyword group.

Competitors. As you do your searches, write down the URL's of competitors that you see come up in your Google searches. These will be useful as mentors that you can emulate as you build out your SEO strategy.

Negative Keywords. Are there any keywords that indicate someone is definitely not your customer? Common examples are *cheap* or *free*, as these are often indicative of people with little or no money, or little or no intention to buy something. (*These negative keywords are not so important for SEO, but if you engage in AdWords, they will become very useful.*)

Priority Order

Not all keywords are created equally. Some are **high volume** (*lots of searches*), and some are **high value** (*they are customers ready to buy something, or take an important action like filling out a feedback form, or calling with an inquiry*). With respect to your business, take a look at your keyword worksheet and think about which queries are a) the *most likely* to be a potential sale, b) the *most likely* to be a high value sale, and c) the *least likely* to be ambiguous. (An ambiguous or problematic keyword is one that has several meanings, that might cross business products or services, and is, therefore, more difficult to optimize on than an unambiguous keyword. Compare *fan* for example, which could be a *hand fan*, an enthusiast for a *sports team*, or an *electrical appliance to blow air* with *insurance* which refers to one, and only one, type of product.)

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on educational vs. transactional, volume vs. value keyword theory at <http://jmlinks.com/17n>.

Prioritize Your Keywords: Hot, Warm, or Cold?

Prioritize your keyword families on the spreadsheet from TOP to BOTTOM with the highest priority keywords at the top, and the lowest at the bottom.

Remember the *volume* vs. *value* trade-off. “Transactional” keywords (those close to a sale) tend to have higher *value*, but lower *volume*; whereas “educational” keywords (those early in the research process) tend to have lower *value*, but higher *volume*.

However, here’s the rub: because of the see-saw between value and volume, there is no hard and fast rule as to what should be your top priority. It can’t be just *volume*, and it can’t just be *value*.

In fact, I recommend you use a column on the far left and call it “hot / warm / cold.” Sit down with the CEO or sales staff, and play a “hot / warm / cold” game by asking IF a customer entered such-and-such into Google, would it be hot (*definitely our customer*), warm (*probably our customer*), or cold (*not our customer*)?

Prioritize the “hot” keywords at the top of the Keyword Worksheet, and the “warm” keywords towards the bottom. I often throw out the “cold” keywords entirely. This will help you see the complexity of keyword patterns as some keywords will be “easy” to see as hot / warm / cold and others might be more challenging – perhaps they have a lot of volume, but are ambiguous, or perhaps they are high value but just so little volume, or the customers don’t know to search for them.

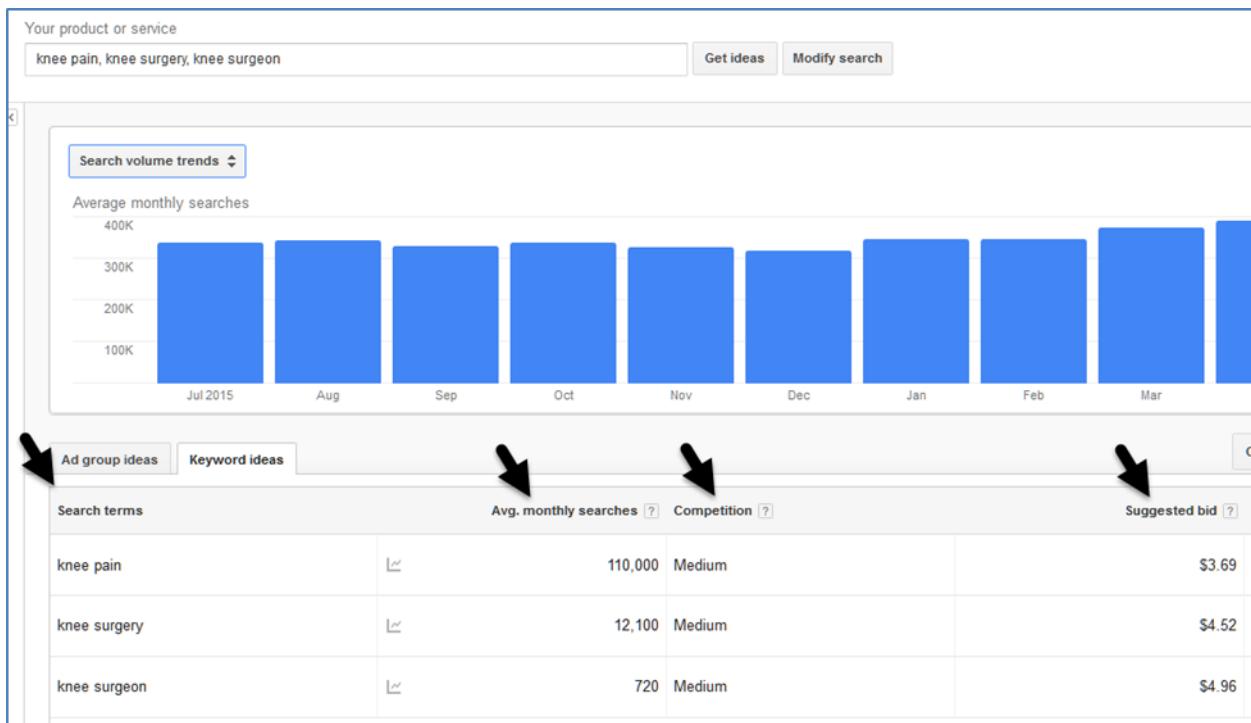
The art of SEO is targeting the keywords most likely to generate high ROI, which is a function of BOTH volume and value.

Competitive Level

Another tricky attribute is **competition**. As you research your keywords, pay attention to the competitive level. You can guess that a keyword is competitive (many vendors want to “get the click”) based on:

- The **suggested bid** in the Keyword Planner: the *higher* the suggested bid, the *more competitive* a keyword.
- The **number of ads** shown for related search queries: the *more* ads you see, the *more competitive* a keyword.
- The *more* you see the **keyword phrase in the ads**: the *more* competitors have “discovered” a high-value keyword phrase, the *more likely* they are to include it in their ad headlines, and the *more competitive* is the keyword.

Remember, you can use the Google AdWords Keyword Planner or the SERPS.com Keyword Tool to gauge the competitive level as measured by volume and cost-per-click. If you are using the Keyword Planner, be sure to click on the *Columns Chevron* and enable “suggested bid” and “competition.” Here’s an example screenshot for *knee pain*, *knee surgery*, and *knee surgeon* for location of United States:



Note that *knee pain* has 110,000 average monthly searches, competitive level is “medium” and suggested bid is \$3.69. Contrast that with *knee surgeon*, which has only 720 searches per month, competition is also seen as “medium,” but the bid is substantially more at \$4.96. (*Remember that this tool only gives you exact match: in those 720 searches are ONLY the exact phrase “knee surgeon.” If the searcher typed in “best knee surgeons,” that does not count in the total of twenty. Therefore, the tool grossly underestimates volume.*)

If you were a New York City knee surgeon building out his keyword worksheet, you’d want to prioritize “*knee surgeon*” and “*knee surgery*” over “*knee pain*,” yet realize that the competitive level is higher for these terms.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial about how to gauge competitive level at <http://jmlinks.com/17q>.

Search Patterns

For now, let’s return to the structural patterns or keyword groups. It is very important to conceptualize the way that people search, i.e., the mindsets by which they approach your

business. Let's take the example of Ron Gordon Watch Repair (<https://www.rongordonwatches.com/>). This business repairs luxury watches in New York City. What are the basic structural search patterns?

Watch Repair. These are searches built around the most basic search: "watch repair" and in some cases with the added helper geographic words of "NYC," "New York, NY" or "Manhattan." These are the more educational, less focused searches.

Watch Type Searches. These are searches by people who have a specific watch brand, e.g., Rolex, or Breitling. Their searches are much more focused such as "Breitling Repair NYC." Note that they are "specific" to a watch brand, and "specific" to a geography. And note that by the time they enter "Breitling Repair NYC" they are nearly ready to engage with a watch repair shop. These are the basic, transactional keyword patterns.

Micro or Long Tail Searches. These are searches by people who have a very specific watch need. It might be, "Rolex Battery Replacement NYC" or "Tissot Repair," which are searches that lack a lot of volume but are high value nonetheless. You're looking for micro or long tail searches that are transactional in nature.

Branded or Reputational Searches. Your brand image is very important to the success of your marketing. You want to monitor your online reputation by ranking highly for your branded or reputational searches, populating the Internet with positive information, and crowding out any negative information about your company. These are important for your keyword worksheet. A branded search, for example, is *Geico insurance* vs. a generic search such as *car insurance*. By the time someone is entering your company name as in *Geico insurance* they are close to a buy decision, and you want them to see flowers, sunshine, roses and positive information about your brand!

In sum, the **keyword worksheet** for your company should reflect keyword *volume*, *value* (as measured by the "fit" between the keyword search and what your company has to offer), and the *structural search patterns* that reflect the "mindset" by which people search.

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on building a keyword worksheet at <http://jmlinks.com/17m>.

» DELIVERABLE: YOUR KEYWORD WORKSHEET

After some brainstorming, hard work, and organization, you should have your first **DELIVERABLE** ready: a completed **keyword worksheet** in an Excel or Google spreadsheet. The first “dashboard” tab should be a high level overview to relevant keywords, reflecting the structural search patterns that generate the **keyword groups**, next the keyword volumes as measured by the Google Keyword Planner or SERPS.com keyword tool, and finally the values measured by the Google cost-per-click data and your own judgment as to which search queries are most likely to lead to a sale or sales lead. Other tabs (which you will fill out over time) include a tab for reporting, a tab to measure your rank on Google vs. keywords, a tab for local search rank, and a tab for landing pages.

Your keyword worksheet is your blueprint for successful SEO, but don’t think of it as a static document! Rather, think of your keyword worksheet as an evolving “work in progress.” There is as much art as science in SEO, and in many cases, the formal tools like the Keyword Planner only get you so far.

The Art of SEO: SEO and Cooking

Gut instinct as to how your customers search, especially which searches are likely to be close to a sale, is just as valuable as quantitative research! In fact, rather than think of SEO as a science, I strongly recommend you use other analogies. For example, I like to think of **SEO like the art of cooking**: it has *technical elements* for sure, but it also has *inspiration* and a *je ne sais quoi* of tricks and techniques that you just have to “do” rather than “learn.”

In fact, at my Stanford Continuing Studies class, I often have students watch a very fun video on Julia Child and then compare the art of SEO to the art of French cooking.

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on how SEO is more like cooking than science at <http://www.jmlinks.com/5q>. Get motivated!

You cannot learn to cook by just reading cookbooks and philosophizing about cooking; you have to actually break some eggs, and make an omelet. And truly good cooks aren’t just technical robots; they have a passion for their patrons, and an instinct about what makes something truly great. *SEO – like cooking – is an endeavor that has both technical and artistic elements.*

The point here is that although you should spend time researching the volume, value, and competitive levels of your target keywords, ultimately you'll see somewhere between five and ten keyword structural patterns. At that point it's "good enough" and you're ready to start optimizing your website. *Good cooks, cook, and good SEO's, do SEO.*

» MEASURE YOUR GOOGLE RANK VS. KEYWORDS

I'm sure you're eager to start optimizing your website, now that you've built out your keyword worksheet. We'll start that process in the next Chapter. Let me advise you, however, to take a moment and begin to measure some **baseline metrics** for your website. Why? Because you want to establish a baseline of your rank on Google at the beginning, before you optimize. This will help you chart your progress, stay motivated, and have a record to show to your pesky boss when she barges in six months from now and says that "SEO is stupid" and you haven't made any progress!

Install Google Analytics

I highly recommend that, if you haven't already done so, you install Google Analytics (<https://analytics.google.com/>) on your website, if possible via Google Tag Manager (<https://www.google.com/analytics/tag-manager/>). Just make sure that the tracking code is on your website and pulling data. We'll discuss Google Analytics in detail in Chapter 6.1.

Measure Your Rank vs. Your Target Keywords

Returning to your rank measurements, Google rank refers to whether your website is on the first page Google returns for a search queries. In the industry it's called *SERP rank* for "search engine results page rank." Counting the organic results only, there are positions 1, 2, and 3 (the "Olympic" positions) and then positions four through ten ("page one" positions). Anything beyond position ten is not good. (*Note that because of localization there is also your rank on the local "snack pack" of three local results originating as Google reviews - more on this below.*)

You want to measure your website rank vis-à-vis your target keyword phrases, whether you are on page one (< 11) or in the "golden" positions of 1, 2, or 3.

Why Rank Matters

Why do we care about our Google rank? First of all, the Olympic positions (1, 2, and 3) capture the lion's share of clicks; by many estimates, over 60%! Second, being on page one (top ten results) means you are at least "in the game." But third, as good SEO experts, we want to measure our rank before, during and after our SEO efforts to measure our progress and return on investment (ROI). We can also feed this data back into our strategy so that we can then focus our content and link efforts (e.g. blog posts, product pages, press releases, link building) on searches where we are *beyond* page one vs. creating new content for searches for which we are *already* in top positions. Indeed, if you are spending money on Google AdWords advertising, you can use your rank for the organic results to optimize your spending; minimizing your spend on words for which you show "for free," and increasing your spend on keywords for which you do not rank well.

In short, measuring Google rank makes us work **smarter**, not **harder**!

Measure Your Rank Manually

With your keyword queries in hand, as built out from your **keyword worksheet**, you can measure your rank manually by simply entering your target search queries, and counting your position on the first page. Be sure to be "signed out" of your Google account or use "incognito mode" (<http://jmlinks.com/18p>) as Google customizes search results. You want to see your true rank on Google searches, not your personalized rank. Here are your steps:

1. Open up a web browser such as Google Chrome or Firefox in "incognito" or "private window" mode.
2. Go to Google.com.
3. Input a keyword phrase from your keyword worksheet.
4. Find your website, counting down from the top of the organic results.
 - a. If you appear on page one, note your rank as in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 up to 10. Be sure to count only the organic results, ignoring a) the ads on Google, and b) the local "snack pack" results which can be visible in a box of three on local searches such as "Sushi" or "probate lawyer," etc.
 - i. If applicable, record the local "Snack Pack" rank separately as A (#1), B (#2) or C (#3).
 - b. If you do NOT appear on page one, note your rank as NP (not present) as it doesn't really matter if you are position 11 or position 110 as few people go beyond page one.
 5. Record your rank on your keyword worksheet, on the rank tab.
 6. Repeat for other keywords on your keyword list.

Usually, a company will have between five and ten core keyword patterns, and between fifty and one hundred variations of keyword phrases built by combining the core keywords and helper words. Don't get discouraged if your rank is horrible when you begin an SEO project. Be positive: the only way you have to go is up!

Measure Your Rank Using Tools

While it's getting harder and harder to use free tools to measure your rank on Google because Google doesn't like to share this data with external companies, there remains one free tool that can systematically measure your rank: SEO Book's **Rank Checker for Firefox**. In addition, there are **paid rank-checking tools** such as SERPS.com, Ahrefs.com, and the MOZ.com tools that, for a fee, will measure your rank systematically. This makes it much easier to track your rank on Google, Bing, or Yahoo vs. keyword targets on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. I highly recommend signing up for the Moz.com toolsuite, as it's the cheapest yet most robust set of tools out there with pricing of around \$99 a month. Check my *SEO Toolbook* or Dashboard at <http://jmlinks.com/seodash> for a complete list of rank checking tools, both free and paid.

How to Use Rank Checker

Here are instructions on how to use Rank Checker.

Go to <http://www.seobook.com/> and sign up for a free account. Next, find the Rank Checker tool on the pull down menus; and download the tool. Remember: it is available only for Firefox, so if you don't have Firefox, you'll first need to download it for free at <http://www.firefox.com/>.

Once the tool is downloaded and installed as a Firefox plugin, enter your keyword list in the tool as follows. You should see a little Owl icon on the top right of Firefox. Click on that, and then click "run." Then click "Add Multiple" keywords. Enter your target keywords plus your domain. In the "Options" tab (Tool, Rank Checker, and Options), be sure to check "Don't use Google Personalized Results" and set "Delay between Queries" to 5 seconds to analyze ten words or less; to 99 seconds if you are going to run a very long list.

(The reason is Google will stop giving you data if you poll it too rapidly).

Once you're inputted your keyword list, and run your first report, you can export the data into CSV / Excel format by choosing "export" at the lower left hand part of the screen.

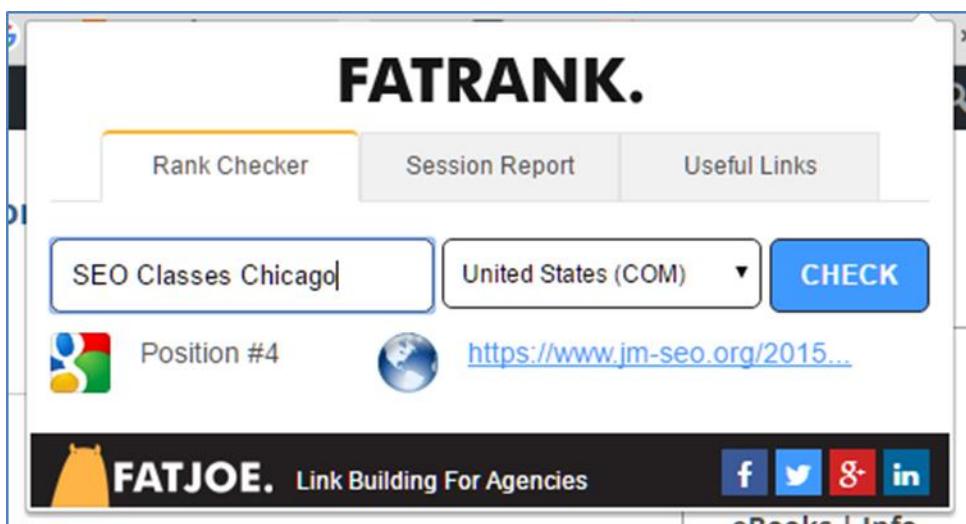
Record Your Keyword Rank Data

I recommend recording your keyword rank on at least a monthly basis, and inputting this into your keyword worksheet on the rank tab. This will give you a baseline before, during, and after you start your SEO project.

On an on-going basis, use the resulting rank data to identify "strengths" (places where you appear in the top three or top ten) and "weaknesses" (keywords for which you appear beyond page one, or not at all). Having identified your keyword rank weaknesses, you now know where to target your SEO efforts!

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on measuring keyword rank at <http://www.jmlinks.com/50>.

Another good free tool to check your rank on Google is the FAT Rank Chrome Plugin at <http://jmlinks.com/18q>. Available for Chrome (not Firefox), you simply install the plugin into your browser. Next, visit your website home page, and then click the Pokemon-looking icon in the top right of your Chrome browser. Enter the keyword phrase that you want to check your Google rank for. Here's a screenshot:



Remember: you MUST first visit your own website, and NEXT click on the FATRANK icon to enable this tool. Then, you enter your keyword.

VIDEO. Watch a video on how to measure your rank using FAT Rank as well as the Google AdWords Preview tool at <http://jmlinks.com/18h>.

Measure Local Search Results Manually

As you check rank, be sensitive to the fact that the free tools generally measure only your organic rank on a non-localized basis. Google “localizes” search results, especially short tail phrases: searchers in different cities, see different results. For example, a search for “probate attorney” in Dallas will return *Dallas probate attorneys*, whereas the same search in San Francisco will return *San Francisco probate attorneys* even though the searcher does NOT enter the city!

This happens with many “short tail” searches that have a local character such as: *attorney, CPA, accountant, pizza, sushi, massage therapist, marriage counselor*, etc. – any search terms that generally indicate someone is looking for a local small business.

The free Rank Checker tools listed above, unfortunately, do **NOT** calculate your rank in a localized fashion. Therefore, if **local search rankings** are important to you, you need to **manually** check your rank on Google+ local as shown in the “snack pack” usually consisting of three results on Google.

To check your local rank (varying your position city-by-city), use the Google AdWords Preview Tool at <http://jmlinks.com/18r> or the free SERPS local rank checking tool at <http://jmlinks.com/18s>.

VIDEO. Watch a video on how to measure your local rank using the Google AdWords Preview tool at <http://jmlinks.com/17s>.

Here’s a screenshot showing the search for “Pizza” and the “snack pack” of three local results with location of Fremont, California:

A screenshot of a Google search results page for the query "pizza". The search bar at the top contains "pizza". Below the search bar, there are navigation links for "All", "Maps", "Images", "News", "Shopping", "More", and "Search tools". A status message indicates "About 686,000,000 results (0.76 seconds)". The main content area displays three local search results, each with a thumbnail image, name, rating, price range, and address. A large black arrow points to the first result, "Domino's Pizza".

Rank	Business Name	Rating	Price Range	Address	Image
1	Domino's Pizza	3.0 ★★★★☆ (12)	\$	Chicken Wings 35248 Newark Blvd	
2	Pizza Hut	3.0 ★★★★☆ (18)	\$	Pizza 2617 Decoto Rd	
3	Round Table Pizza	4.0 ★★★★★ (16)	\$\$	Pizza 37480 Fremont Blvd Closing soon: 10:00 PM	

In this example, therefore, you'd record position #1 (A) for Domino's, #2 (B) for Pizza Hut, and #3 (C) for Round Table Pizza. Positions greater than #3 appear on the "second page" of local results (on both the phone and the desktop) and are worth considerably less than positions, #1, #2, and #3. (Note: it has become industry-standard practice to record local rank in the "snack pack" as A / B / C not 1 / 2 / 3).

For your own company, identify short tail local searches and record these on your keyword worksheet, on the "local rank" tab.

Measuring Your Rank in Different Cities

Let's say you want to look at your locations in multiple cities such as San Francisco, San Jose, and Oakland. You cannot do this directly in Google, you have to use the AdWords preview tool which you can get to directly in AdWords by logging in, and on the top menu, selecting Tools > Preview Tool. Alternatively, you can access the preview tool directly at this URL <http://jmlinks.com/13m>.

Here's a screenshot of the tool with location set to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and search term set to *accountants*:

The screenshot shows the Google AdWords interface for the 'Preview and Diagnosis' tool. In the top right, the search term 'accountants' is entered in the 'Enter search terms' field, and the 'Preview' button is highlighted. On the left, there are settings for 'Location' (Tulsa), 'Language' (English), 'Device' (Desktop or laptop computer), and 'Domain' (www.google.com). A note above the location dropdown says 'Preview your search results page using the options below'. Two arrows point to the 'Location' dropdown and the 'Stanfield & O'Dell' listing in the results. The main area displays a map of Tulsa and a list of local businesses. The first result is 'Stanfield & O'Dell' with the address '1350 S Boulder Ave #800 - (918) 628-0500' and the status 'Closed now'. The second result is 'Kami Painter, CPA' with the address '3326 E 27th Pl - (918) 301-1100'. The third result is 'Kinion Brown & Co' with the address '2720 N Hemlock Ct # B - (918) 258-8888'. At the bottom of the results list is a link 'More places'.

(You can ignore that “No, your ad isn’t showing” blurb as that refers to advertising).

If you want to measure your local rank, you'll need to manually change the tool city by city. In addition to the “snack pack,” notice that the organic ranks themselves will also change for localized keywords. So, in this case, you'll have to manually rank check both your rank in the snack pack and in the organic results.

Finally, you can also vary the view as desktop, tablet, or mobile phone, and in this way also measure your rank on various devices. To do this, change the “Device” on the far left column. Mobile rank does not yet vary as dramatically as rank based on localization but it does vary.

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on using Google and/or the AdWords Preview Tool to measure your local rank at <http://jmlinks.com/17s>.

Because of localization and differences on rank for mobile, tablet, and desktop, it can be very time-consuming to measure your rank for fifty to a hundred keywords and many tens of target cities! For this reason, if local SEO matters a lot to you, I highly recommend paying for a *paid* rank-checking tool such as Serps.com, as this tool can measure your rank in different cities for many different keywords in a systematic and automated fashion. Time is money, and a paid rank-checking tool will save you a lot of time!

»»» DELIVERABLE: RANK MEASUREMENT AND A BASELINE SCORE

The final **DELIVERABLE** for this Chapter is to measure your rank across a statistical sample of between twenty and one hundred keywords, depending on how complex your company is. Using either free or paid tools, input these data on a monthly basis into your keyword worksheet rank tab(s).

»»» CHECKLIST: KEYWORD WORKSHEET ACTION ITEMS

Here are your keyword worksheet **Action Items**:

- ❑ Build out your **Keyword Worksheet** with columns for “core keywords,” “helper keywords,” “sample search queries” as well as volume and value.
 - ❑ **Identify** your core keyword groups, led by one keyword “parent” with various keyword “children” or phrases.
 - ❑ **Prioritize** your keyword groups as *hot*, *warm*, or *cold*, placing the hot keyword groups at the top.
 - ❑ Identify **competitors** and place them on your Keyword Worksheet.
- ❑ Use RankChecker, FatRank, or one of the paid rank-checking tools to do your first **rank analysis** of your website vs. your keywords targets.

- If necessary, chart your rank for "short tail" searches that vary by city location.

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Keywords* for my favorite free tools for keyword discovery. Just visit **<http://jmlinks.com/seodash>**.



3.1

PAGE TAGS

Once you know your keywords, where do you put them? “Page Tag” SEO is the quick and easy answer to that question, and it is the most important aspect of **Step #3**. In **Step #3**, you take your keywords from your keyword worksheet, place them in strategic locations on individual web pages via **page tags** and also **restructure** your website to send clear signals to Google about your keyword targets. In other words, you work at two levels: first, the level of individual web page HTML tags and content, and second, the level of the website as a whole. If you don’t know HTML, don’t worry; most modern CMS systems like WordPress, Squarespace, or Drupal do the hard work for you.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Understand Page Tags, HTML, and Talking to Google
- » Page Tags and Poker
- » Weave Keywords into Page Tags
- » A Visual Test for Keyword Density
- »» Deliverable: A Completed Page Tag Worksheet
- » Set Up Your Home Page
- »» Deliverable: A Completed Home Page Page Tag Worksheet
- »» Checklist: Page Tag Action Items

» UNDERSTAND PAGE TAGS, HTML, AND TALKING TO GOOGLE

HTML is the language of the Web, and it is based on what are called “tags” in HTML. At a very simple level, if you want a word to appear bold on a web page, you put the “tag” **** around the word such as “We sell ****running shoes****” in the HTML text of the web page. This will display in browsers as:

We sell **running shoes**.

If you are using a WYSIWYG editor like WordPress or Dreamweaver, the editor will “hide” this code from you, but behind the scenes the true foundation of the Web is HTML, and the foundation of HTML is **page tags**. For a super simple introduction to HTML, visit <http://jmlinks.com/13n>.

HTML: the Browser, the Website, & Google

Here’s what most people do, and don’t, understand about page tags and the Web:

- **The Browser.** Page Tags such as ``, `<a href>`, ``, etc., structure how the browser displays information to the user – bold, a link, an image, etc. (*This, they understand*).
- **The Website.** Page Tags structure the interrelationship between pages on a website, especially through `<a href>`, the “anchor” or “link” tag but also through CSS style sheets. (*This, they understand*).
- **Google and other Search Engines.** Page Tags send signals to Google about which keywords are important with respect to an individual website, and even the website as a whole (*This, few people understand*).

Viewing the HTML Source / Page Tags

To see the true HTML behind the visible Web, go to any webpage with your browser, right click on your mouse, select “View Source” in Firefox, Microsoft Edge, Safari, or Chrome. (Note: the keyboard shortcut to view source code is CTRL+U (PC) or Command+U (Mac)). The HTML code you see is the true language of the Web, and this code is what Google or Bing actually uses to index a web page. For example, here is a screenshot of the HTML source code for Geico’s page on “Motorcycle Insurance”

(<https://www.geico.com/motorcycle-insurance/>) showing the all-important TITLE tag:

```
27      <title>Free Motorcycle Insurance Quotes Online | GEICO®</title>
28
29      <link rel="stylesheet" href="/public/design-kit/4.0/css/geico-design-kit-light.
30          <link href="/feo-cdn/i/y/Ren-UTF-8~iy6BkLMPImogh-XbDGDWZTwjUOniKYfbhgC-b6mGBQc
31      rel="stylesheet" type="text/css"/><script blzsys="1" type="text/javascript">aFeoOverri
32          <link href="/feo-cdn/5/C/Ren-UTF-8~5CKkT9Bnx4TLmopa3tLeQZix-MXnuUt8XHT
33      rel="stylesheet" type="text/css"/><script blzsys="1" type="text/javascript">aFeoOverri
34          <style type="text/css">@font-face {font-family:'geico';src:url("https://www.ge
35          xlxh80");src:url("https://www.geico.com/public/design-kit/4.0/fonts/geico.eot?#iefix-x
36          kit/4.0/fonts/geico.woff?-xlxh80") format('woff'),url("https://www.geico.com/public/de
37          format('truetype'),url("https://www.geico.com/public/design-kit/4.0/fonts/geico.svg?-x
38
39
40      <link href="https://plus.google.com/104558085076978197022" rel="publisher" />
41
```

Here's their TITLE tag:

```
<title>Motorcycle     Insurance     Quotes     Online     |
GEICO®</title>
```

The TITLE tag controls the top of the browser, the text you see if you bookmark this page, and the headline of the page on Google. And here's their H1 (Header) tag:

```
<h1>Start a free motorcycle insurance <span
class="line-break">quote to see the
savings.</span></h1>
```

The H1 makes this sentence appear in a big bold font.

Most people understand that this HTML code structures how the browser displays the information about Geico's landing page on *motorcycle insurance*. But what they miss is that this HTML code is also sending **powerful signals to Google about keyword targets**.

In a very simple way, if your page has <**strong**>running shoes</**strong**> on it, you are not just bolding the word **running shoes** in the browser; you are also signaling Google that the keyword phrase **running shoes** is important to you. In our Geico example, their page is sending a powerful signal with both the TITLE and H1 tag by including the phrase "Motorcycle Insurance" in them. Guess what? Geico ranks #2 on Google for the search query "motorcycle insurance."

PAGE TAGS SIGNAL KEYWORD PRIORITIES TO GOOGLE

If, for example, you write an HTML page like this:

```
<h1>Learn about our Car Insurance</h1>
We sell the best <strong>car insurance</strong> in Houston
```

Which will render in a browser like Chrome, Firefox, or Safari as:

Learn About Car Insurance

We sell the best **car insurance** in Houston

This is doing two things:

1. Telling the **Web browser** to render the first sentence in big, bold letters, and to render the phrase car insurance in bold text.
2. **Signaling to Google** that the words: *Learn, About, Car, Insurance* are important to you – these are words that you would like to rank for on Google. (Google ignores common words like *learn* or *about*, which are called “stop words” and instead will see *car* and *insurance* as the important words).

Similarly, by placing the words *motorcycle insurance* into strategic tags such as the TITLE and H1 tags, Geico is signaling Google that this page is about *motorcycle insurance* and not about *RV insurance* or *dog toys*. It’s a clear and unambiguous communication to Google about the keyword target.

Your Website is Your Google Resume

Remember the “Job Search” analogy? Your *website* is like a *resume*. If you are looking for a job as a **BMW auto mechanic**, then you would **BOLD** the words **auto, mechanic**, and **BMW** on your resume, wouldn’t you? That bolding would not only make the words appear blacker on the page, it would also “signal” to the person reading your resume that you want to “rank” (i.e., be considered for a job for) those terms.

Your Website = a Resume

Manipulating Page Tags = Bolding / Making Bigger Keywords on the Resume = signals to Google

The concept in terms of SEO is to realize that the tag structure of a web page does two things:

1. Talk to “humans” by making some text **BIG**, and some text *italics*, some text a **HEADLINE** and other text just text, some images ON THE PAGE, and some cross-links so humans can click from one page to another.
2. Talk to “Google,” by using the same tags to communicate which keywords are **IMPORTANT** and which keywords are not very important.

Now that I've drilled this concept into your head through repetition (*it's that important!*), you should realize that you must design for two audiences: humans and Google.

DESIGN YOUR WEBSITE FOR HUMANS AND GOOGLE

Fortunately, you do not have to be an HTML expert. You need to understand just the basics of HTML because modern WYSIWYG editors like WordPress do the HTML coding for you. Using WordPress, for example, here's a screenshot of my webpage on *AdWords Expert Witness* services as seen inside of WordPress:

The screenshot shows the WordPress visual editor interface. At the top, there's a yellow header bar with the title "AdWords Expert Witness". Below it, the permalink is shown as "Permalink: https://www.jasonmcdonald.org/adwords/adwords-expert-witness/" with an "Edit" button. The main content area contains the following text:

Need AdWords expert witness services? [Contact me](#) for a quick, free consult

Beyond my courses taught in the San Francisco Bay Area / San Jose - Silicon Valley, I help thousands of people about SEO, Social Media Marketing, and AdWords and Google AdWords situations.

That said, I am available as a professional AdWords expert witness or consultant at no obligation!

AdWords Expert Witness - Deliverables:

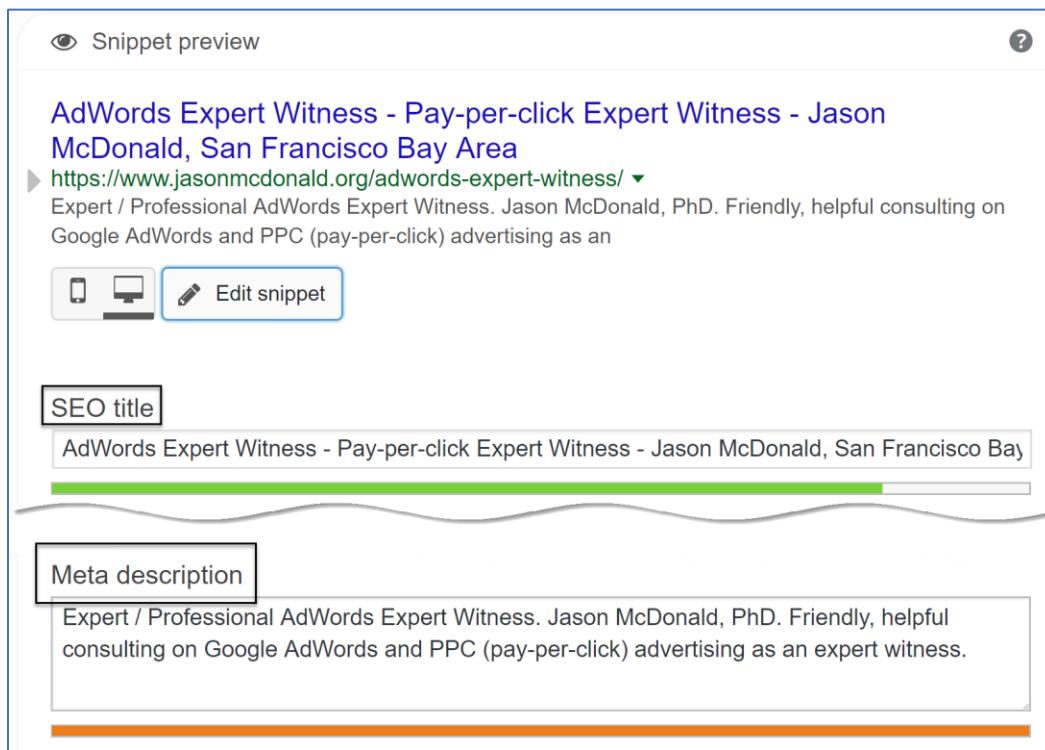
A red arrow points from the word "AdWords" in the first sentence to the yellow header bar. Another red arrow points from the word "AdWords" in the third sentence to the yellow footer bar.

I have highlighted the Page Title (which becomes the TITLE tag), and the H2 (which becomes the Header 2 Tag) in yellow. The red arrows show where you can change the header tag in WordPress, as well as where the actual header text is located. You can view the actual page on the Web at <http://jmlinks.com/5r>. (Right click, and view source to see the HTML code that underlies the browser-visible web page).

In this way, WordPress makes it easy to “speak HTML” and “talk to Google.” You just have to know which tags are important for SEO, and how to get those tags implemented in WordPress. (If you are using another editor, such as Squarespace or Dreamweaver, accordingly, you have to figure out what items in the editor yield what items in HTML).

The Yoast Plugin

Even better, if you are using WordPress, I highly recommend the Yoast WordPress Plugin at <http://jmlinks.com/5s>. It enables you to “split” the WordPress HEADLINE from the SEO-friendly TITLE tag, as well as easily add a META DESCRIPTION tag to your pages. Yoast creates a little box at the bottom of each page where you simply enter your TITLE and META DESCRIPTION information for Google (with an eye to your keyword targets). Here’s a screenshot:



» PAGE TAGS AND POKER

By inserting keywords into your HTML Page Tags, you are “talking to Google.” You want, however, to do more than talk to Google: you want to win.

But which tags send the strongest signals?

To understand which tags are the most important, let’s use a new analogy: **page tags are like the cards in poker.**

PAGE TAGS = POKER CARDS

Now any good poker player knows that the *Ace* is more powerful than the *King*, and the *King* more powerful than the *Deuce*, and that *Full House* beats *two of a kind*. These are the “rules of poker.” (*The fact that many people don’t understand the rules or strategies of poker is akin to the fact that many people do not understand the rules or strategies of Page Tags in SEO. Accordingly, most people play poker poorly, and most people play SEO poorly, too. You, my friend, are going to learn some basic rules, however, and begin to “crush your competition.” You can now begin your “evil laugh.”*)

Your first step is to learn the values of the key HTML tags. To begin, examine the following table showing the most important page tags “as if” you were playing a game of poker with Google and your competitors:

TAG	POKER	COMMENT
<TITLE>	Ace	Most important tag on any page, place your target keyword in the <TITLE> tag of each page. <TITLE> of the home page is the most powerful tag on any website. (59 visible characters; 80 indexed).
<A HREF>	King	Keyword-heavy links cross reference pages to each other, and communicate keywords to Google.

	Queen	Have at least one image per page, and put your target keyword into the ALT attribute of the image.
<H1>	Jack	Google loves the header family, so use at least one <H1> per page. Use <H2>, <H3> sparingly.
<META DESCRIPTION >	10	If you include the target keyword in the <META DESCRIPTION> tag, Google will use it 90% of the time. (155 character limit).
<BODY> or keyword density	9	Write keyword-heavy prose on each and every page of the website. Aim for natural syntax and about 5% keyword density.
, , 	3, 4, 5	Use bold and italicize keywords on the page, strategically.
<META KEYWORDS>	Joker	Ignored by Google. Use it as a “note to self” about the keyword targets for a particular page.

The above table is very important. It tells you that once you know the target keyword for a given page, then place that keyword inside of the <TITLE>, <A HREF>, , <H1>, <META DESCRIPTION> and <BODY> (visible content). Don’t overdo this, but don’t underdo it, either. (*More on writing Google-friendly content in a moment*)

Get and Read Google’s Official SEO Starter Guide

Google produces a very good official guide to SEO that emphasizes just how important tag structure is to Google and SEO. I strongly recommend that you download the guide and read it thoroughly at <http://jmlinks.com/googleseo>. It doesn’t tell you everything, but it’s a good, basic guide to On Page SEO, the art and science of structuring your content to “talk” to Google in terms of your target keywords.

Besides explaining the basics of On Page SEO, the guide also has two other usages:

Sleep Aid. It is an excellent sleep aid, so when you just can’t get drowsy, simply start reading. You’ll be dreaming ZZZZZs in no time. (*I keep a copy under my pillow for this very reason*).

Attack Weapon. If you’re working with a recalcitrant web designer, team member, or CEO, who doesn’t believe what I’m telling you in this book because I’m “just” *Jason McDonald SEO guru of San Francisco, California*, print out the guide on paper. Next, you can roll up the guide, and start beating him or her on the head,

explaining: HERE'S A CRAZY IDEA. TO GET TO THE TOP OF GOOGLE CAN WE PLEASE JUST DO WHAT GOOGLE TELLS US TO DO? If you print the guide with an inkjet and moisten it prior to the beating, you may also be able to get the Google logo to bleed off onto their forehead.

Seriously, the guide is a great basic, official guide to On Page SEO and should be required reading for anyone on your team involved in search engine optimization.

Hate reading? Here are some videos:

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial of TITLE, META DESCRIPTION and KEYWORDS “meta” tags for SEO at <http://jmlinks.com/17r> as well as a video on how to do a page tag analysis at <http://jmlinks.com/5u>.

I also highly recommend you read my “SEO Page Tag Template” at <http://jmlinks.com/18t>. The end result of page tags is to understand that page tags communicate your keywords to Google, so your first **TODO** is pretty obvious: weave your keywords into your page tags, starting with the all-important TITLE tag.

Basically:

Target keyword > embed in TITLE, META DESCRIPTION, HEADER, IMG ALT and VISIBLE PAGE CONTENT

Now, do NOT overdo this! “*A little salt is good for the soup, but too much salt ruins the soup.*” You want to take a specific landing page, and focus Google’s attention around one, and only one, keyword phrase.

Audit High-Ranking Pages and “Reverse Engineer” Their Page Tags

Now that you know how Page Tags “talk” to Google, revisit some top-ranking pages especially by companies like Geico, Progressive, or eSurance that clearly practice high-stakes SEO. Revisit Google searches like “motorcycle insurance,” “car insurance,” or even

“Segway insurance,” and see how the winning websites are “speaking Google” via Page Tags.

The insurance industry is an excellent place to look for SEO Olympians!

For example, revisit a high-ranking page such as the page on Progressive.com for “Segway Insurance” (<https://www.progressive.com/segway/>) view the source code via CTRL+U / COMMAND+U, do a CTRL+F / COMMAND+F and search for “Segway Insurance,” and notice how that target keyword phrase (“Segway Insurance”) has been strategically embedded into the tag structure and visible content. Compare it with other top-ranking pages such as <https://www.esurance.com/insurance/segway> and notice how they do the same. These pages are using Page Tags to communicate to Google that they want to rank for “Segway Insurance.”

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial of a page audit at <http://jmlinks.com/5v>.

Now, toggle back to your sad, pathetic web pages, and notice how inefficiently they are talking to Google. (*I'm joking – I want you to stay positive!* They're not sad and pathetic, they're “ready to work” and “ready for you to optimize them”). Now, toggle back to your web pages and have your “Aha” moment and realize that you need to revise their keywords / page content vis-à-vis their page tag structure to “speak Google.”

» **WEAVE KEYWORDS INTO PAGE TAGS**

In summary, now that you know that the TITLE tag is the most important tag, that Google likes the header tag family, that each web page should have at least one image tag with the ALT attribute defined to include a keyword, and should link across to other web pages based on your target keywords, you are ready to write a strong SEO page or re-write an existing page to better communicate keyword priorities to Google.

Page Tags and Keywords for All Pages Except the Home Page

We will deal with the home page separately, because the home page is incredibly important to SEO and has unique responsibilities. But, for all pages EXCEPT the home page, here's how to write SEO-friendly content for one, and only one, specific page:

1. **Define your target keywords.** Using your keyword worksheet as well as the various keyword tools, define the target keywords for the specific page. A best practice is to focus on a single keyword per individual landing page or blog post.
2. **Write a keyword-heavy TITLE tag.** The TITLE tag should be less than 80 characters, with the most important keywords on the left. The *first 59 characters* will generally appear on Google as your headline.
3. **Write a keyword-heavy META DESCRIPTION tag.** The META DESCRIPTION tag has a 90% chance of being the visible description on Google, so write one that includes your keywords but is also pithy and exciting. Its job is to “get the click” from Google. Character limit is 155 characters.
4. **Write a few keyword-heavy header tags.** Start with an H1 tag and throw in a couple of H2 tags around keyword phrases.
5. **Include at least one image with the ALT attribute defined.** Google likes to see at least one image on a page, with the keywords around the ALT attribute.
6. **Cross-link via keyword phrases.** Embed your target keyword phrases in links that link your most important pages across your website to each other around keyword phrases.
7. **Write keyword dense text.** Beyond just page tags, Google looks to see a good keyword density (about 3-5%) and keywords used in natural English syntax following good grammar.

Presto! You now “speak Google.”

DON'T OVERDO IT!

Finally, don't *overdo* it! That's called *keyword stuffing* and it's dangerous.

» A VISUAL TEST FOR KEYWORD DENSITY

As you are writing new pages or analyzing existing ones, keep in mind that **keyword density** on the Web is more **redundant** than in normal English writing.

Few SEO experts and even fewer average marketers really realize just how *redundant*, *repetitious*, *repeating*, *reinforcing*, and *reiterating* strong prose is for Google! Furthermore, it's not just about stringing keywords in comma, comma, and comma phrases. The Google algorithm, post-Panda, clearly analyzes text and looks for natural syntax, so be sure to write in complete sentences following the rules of grammar and spelling.

So, write keyword heavy text in natural English syntax sentence, while avoiding comma, comma, and comma phrases. What keyword density is “just right?” The best answer is to do your searches and look at who is actually ranking already.

Let's look at “Motorcycle Insurance” as an example. First, here's a screenshot of the Geico motorcycle insurance page, using CTRL+F in Firefox to highlight the occurrences of the word “motorcycle”:

The screenshot shows a landing page for motorcycle insurance quotes. At the top, there's a blue header bar with the text "Get your motor running and get a motorcycle insurance quote". Below this, the main content area has a yellow highlighted section containing the text: "A free online motorcycle insurance quote from GEICO could help you save money. No matter what you do, or where you go, we've got you covered. Whether you're a beginner, an expert, or somewhere in between, we've got you covered. We even offer scooter coverage so you can hit the road knowing that the Gecko®'s got your back!" A circular icon with a blue motorcycle handlebar graphic is positioned to the left of the text. To the right, there's a sidebar with the heading "Protecting more than just your bike" and some descriptive text about accessories coverage. Further down, there's a testimonial quote in blue text.

Get your motor running and get a motorcycle insurance quote

A free online motorcycle insurance quote from GEICO could help you save money. No matter what you do, or where you go, we've got you covered. Whether you're a beginner, an expert, or somewhere in between, we've got you covered. We even offer scooter coverage so you can hit the road knowing that the Gecko®'s got your back!

Protecting more than just your bike

When you carry comprehensive or collision coverage, you could also get protection for your accessories. Accessories coverage may include: saddlebags, backrests, seats, chrome pieces and CB radios. Learn

"We kept hearing that motorcycle insurance was out. We were very surprised to find that our rates were way lower than our current coverage. The switch was a no-brainer."

Second, how keyword dense is a page? Well, according to Chrome, the page has 15 occurrences of the phrase “motorcycle insurance” (using CTRL+F) and according to SEO Centro's Meta Tag Analyzer (<http://jmlinks.com/37w>) it has a density of 1.07% for “motorcycle insurance.” Third, the #1 ranking page (Progressive's at <https://www.progressive.com/motorcycle/>) has 12 occurrences, and density of .96%. So we can see we need well-written text that has about a 1% occurrence of the target phrase.

Keyword density, in short, is higher than if you were to write the pages “for humans” but not so high as to incur a Google penalty.

A less technical way to look at Web content is what I call the **visual pinch test**. Find pages for very competitive Google searches (such as “motorcycle insurance” or “reverse mortgage” or “online coupons”), highlight their keywords by using CTRL+F (PC) / COMMAND+F (Mac) in Firefox, read the text aloud and pinch yourself every time the keyword is used. At the end of the page, you should be in pain! If you are not in pain, the density is too low. If you’re in the hospital, it’s too high. In terms of metrics, a good rule of thumb is about 1-2% density, but remember also that it’s not just numeric density but the occurrence of keywords in normal sentences that matter.

EYE CANDY AT TOP

TEXT AT BOTTOM

Page Content: What Comes First?

Google likes text, but people like pictures. There is a trade-off between the heavy, redundant text favored by Google and the clean, iPhone like picture websites favored by humans. The usual solution is to put the eye candy for humans towards the *top*, and the stuff for Google towards the *bottom*. Revisit many of the pages on Geico.com or Progressive.com and you’ll notice how the eye candy for humans is at the top, and the redundant text for Google is at the bottom.

A page that does this in a really obvious way is <http://www.sfflowershop.com/> (scroll to the bottom, and be horrified).

It ranks well on Google for searches like *same day flower delivery San Francisco*, and it sells flowers – what’s there to complain about?

Now, that said, there’s a trade-off here because Google isn’t stupid. It clearly sees words at the top of your page as more important than words at the bottom. You just have to balance “writing for Google” against “writing for humans,” which is the art of SEO. It’s more like cooking than it is like physics.

The Panda Update

Periodically Google updates its algorithm, to improve the search results and combat what is called “Web spam.” One of the most important algorithm updates was called **Panda**, and Panda specifically targeted *keyword stuffing*, which is the overuse of keywords on a page. In this post-Panda world, the key thing to do is to hit a “sweet spot” of just enough keyword density but not so much as to trigger a penalty. Even more important, don’t think of **keyword density** as a simple numeric percentage, but rather as the strategic weaving of keywords into HTML tags and text. Here are post-Panda principles to writing SEO-friendly content:

1. **Know your keywords.** Keywords remain as important as ever! In addition to your focus keyword, however, look for **related** or **adjacent** keywords. A page targeting “motorcycle insurance” for example should have sentences that also contain words like *riding, rate, quote, Harley-Davidson*, etc. Use Google Autocomplete and Google related searches functions to find “adjacent” words and weave them into your content.
2. Use **natural syntax** and **good grammar**. Write like educated people talk, and write using good *subject, verb, object* structure. Gone are the days when you could just write *keyword, keyword, keyword*. I recommend you should read your page content out loud: it should sound heavier than normal English in terms of keywords, but not so heavy as you sound crazy. Grammar- and spell-check your final visible content.
3. **Avoid comma, comma, comma phrases;** another way of saying write normal, natural prose (but still containing your keywords!). Google is aware of the obvious tricks such as sentences with twenty-five commas, and white text on a white background. Don’t be stupid.
4. **Don’t be too perfect.** Don’t have an optimized, perfect TITLE and META DESCRIPTION and ALT ATTRIBUTE for an IMAGE, etc. – mix things up a bit.

Post-Panda, the trick is to be keyword heavier than normal English, but still retain good, natural syntax. *A little salt is good in the soup; too much salt ruins it.*

A good litmus test is:

- Does your page contain the target keywords in the key HTML tags yet with some variety and adjacent keywords? And,
- Is your numeric keyword density between 1 and 2%? And,

- If a “normal” person reads your page, will he or she be unaware that it has been optimized for SEO yet hear the keyword phrase loud and clear? And,
- Does the page actually convey useful information to the human reader?

If the answer is YES to these questions, you’ll probably survive Panda. If the answer is NO, you are either underoptimized (*keywords do not appear in key tags*) or overoptimized (*density is too high, text is clunky and weird to “normal” humans*).

Another easy rule-of-thumb. Do your target searches and look at the content of the current “winners.” Find the middle ground characterized by the winners in your industry and be as text heavy and dense as they are, but not aggressively more so.

Keywords No Longer Matter?

Finally, you may read on the blogosphere that “keywords no longer matter.” This is an incredibly stupid and dangerous idea, based largely on ignorance and on Google propaganda about so-called semantic search. “Just write for humans and don’t worry about SEO, or SEO-friendly page tags,” is a common refrain among the ignorant.

Indeed, with recent chatter about Google’s **RankBrain** algorithm update, there is more and more talk about AI (Artificial Intelligence) and voice search. The idea is that Google is getting better at a) inferring meaning from how people talk, and b) predicting how a search for one thing (e.g., “pizza”) leads to a search for another thing (“directions to Jason’s Pizza Emporium of Palo Alto”). RankBrain and voice search, however, are far from impacting most searches on Google (especially “transactional” search terms), and are not quite ready for prime time. For those of us with small businesses, we can focus on writing good, keyword-heavy prose in the proper HTML and SEO-friendly format. Follow the instructions above for SEO-friendly prose that is also easy for humans to read, and you’ll be fine. To learn more about RankBrain, see <http://jmlinks.com/35c>.

Even more important, remember that keywords still matter and are not going away anytime soon. Here’s why.

First, people type keywords into Google and speak keywords into their mobile phones and these words are the “connection points” indicating what they want Google to go out and “find” for them. Secondly, language in and of itself is *sui generis* based on keywords, and Google isn’t going to change language. We don’t beat around the bush. Rather, we say things like, “Honey do you want **PIZZA** tonight?” to our wives and “Excuse me, do you know where the **TOILET PAPER** is?” to the employees at the supermarket. So keywords mark what we want in actual human language. They are not going away! Third, the

keywords META tag is ignored but this confusion between a META tag and keywords causes even more confusion. It's the META tag that's ignored, not keywords. And, finally, this idea that "keywords don't matter" is based on a false choice: either you write FOR PEOPLE or you write FOR GOOGLE, when in fact, you can write for both.

Aim for the sweet spot of keyword density high enough for Google but not so high as to be unreadable, or "stuffed" in the parlance of SEO. A little salt is good for the soup, and too much salt ruins it. But you need salt to make soup! Google isn't abolishing "keywords" anymore than cooks are going to abolish salt!

To use another analogy: as I always tell my wife on our yearly road trips: speed a little, honey, but don't be the fastest car on the Interstate. If you don't speed, you won't get there first (or near first), but if you drive the red car, right past the cop at 120 mph, you'll get pulled over. Don't *underdo* your keyword density, and don't *overdo* it either (welcome to post-Panda SEO content).

Oh, and don't believe everything you read on the blogosphere. A lot of it is pure dribble.

» **DELIVERABLE: A COMPLETED PAGE TAG WORKSHEET (FOR ONE PAGE)**

The first **DELIVERABLE** for Step Three is a completed **page tag worksheet** for one specific landing page, other than your home page. Take either a new page or an existing page of your website, and compare it against the desired target keyword. (Note: each page should have one, and only one, keyword target. Using the "page tag worksheet," audit the page for how well it communicates the keyword target to Google. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on "SEO Fitness Workbook 2018," and enter the code '2018seo' to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the "page tag worksheet." Note: you'll want to do this at least for all of your major landing pages.

A nifty tool to use to help you audit existing pages can be found at <http://jmlinks.com/5w>. (If your pages are in the *https://* format you can use <http://jmlinks.com/13p>).

Input your own web page into the tool and check it. The page's target keywords should be clearly and prominently indicated in the tool; if not, you are not correctly signaling keyword priorities to Google. For more nifty tools to help with Page Tags, refer to my SEO

dashboard at <http://jmlinks.com/seodash> and scroll down to the subsection called Page Tags.

Obviously, your **TODO** here is to audit the content of not just one page on your website but rather each and every page on your website, especially your landing pages, and upgrade them to SEO-friendly HTML for Google. Note as you do this that each landing page should focus on *one*, and *only one* keyword group, as Progressive.com does with a unique landing page for auto insurance, another one for motorcycle insurance, and yet another one for Segway insurance. By having a **single keyword focus** per landing page you will fastly improve your chances of ranking on Google.

» SET UP YOUR HOME PAGE

Page tag SEO applies to your home page, but your home page is so important you should handle it in a very specific way. Your home page is your “front door” to Google and the **most important page** of your website. Google rewards beefy, keyword-heavy home pages that have a lot of text. Think carefully about every word that occurs on this page, and about the way each word is “structured” by embedding it into good HTML page tags. Here are your important “to do’s” for your home page:

- ✓ **Identify your customer-centric, top three keywords.** These three “most important” words must go into your home page <TITLE> tag, the most powerful tag on your website!
- ✓ **Repeat the <TITLE> tag content in the <H1> tag on the page.** There should be at least one <H1> but no more than three per page.
- ✓ **Identify your company’s major product / service offerings.** Re-write these using customer centric keywords, and have <H2> tags leading to these major landing pages, nested inside of <A HREF> tags. Be sure to include the keywords inside the <H2> and <A HREF> tags!
- ✓ **Have Supporting Images.** Google rewards pages that have images with ALT attributes that are keyword heavy. Don’t overdo this, but have at least one and no more than about seven images on your home page that have keywords in their ALT attributes.
- ✓ **Create keyword-focused one click links.** Link down from your home page to defined landing pages around target keyword phrases.
- ✓ **Write lengthy, keyword-rich content for your home page.** You need not just structural elements, but lots of beefy prose on your home page that clarifies to Google what your company is “about.”

For good home page ideas, look at Progressive (<https://www.progressive.com/>) or eSurance (<https://www.esurance.com/>), as well as some of SEO-savvy Bay Area medical malpractice attorneys such as <http://www.danroselaw.com/> or <http://www.bayareamedicalmalpractice.com/>. If you're into flowers, check out <http://www.sfflowershop.com/>. Scroll to the bottom and notice all the keyword heavy text "buried" for Google to find! View their HTML source and look at how they weave their keywords into strategic tags. Now, some of this is clearly overdone, but the point is to see that effective SEO home pages have a lot of text, contain the target keywords, and embed the keywords in key tags often with links "down" to specific landing pages.

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on effective SEO home pages at <http://jmlinks.com/18g>.

Or, choose your own industry, do some high level searches on Google or Bing, and reverse engineer the home pages of the winners at SEO. Then, proceed to audit your own home page: how effectively does your own home page "speak Google?"

In auditing your home page, it should:

- Have a **TITLE tag** that succinctly explains your business value proposition, and includes at least three highly valued keywords in the first 59 characters.
- Have a **META description** tag that explains your business value proposition, contains your keywords, and is written in a pithy, exciting way to "get the click" from Google to your website. The character limit, of course, is 155 characters.
- Follow the **principles of Page Tag SEO** by weaving your keywords into the main tags such as the H1 / H2 family, the A HREF anchor tag, the IMG alt tags, etc.
- Have **keyword-dense, well-written text** that explains what you do and contains your target keywords.
- Have "**one click**" links down to your most important landing pages.

It should also be visually appealing to humans, and lead to a desired action such as a sale or a registration form. Don't forget the carbon-based life forms!

A Warning about Too Many Changes

One final warning. Don't change your TITLE tags frequently. Google will penalize a site that has such-and-such Home Page TITLE tag on day 1, and then another on day 7, and still another on day 44. A good rule of thumb is to decide on your TITLE tags for your home page and key landing pages. Run them by your boss and team members, and sleep on it. Then deploy them, and **do not change them again** for at least ninety days. This rule is really for the TITLE tags, but not the content itself. Ironically, Google actually rewards Home Pages that have "new" content such as featured blog posts, so optimize your TITLE tags and leave them alone but feel free to update your content, especially blog posts and press releases.

» DELIVERABLE: A HOME PAGE PAGE TAG AUDIT

In the next Chapter, we'll learn a bit more about how website structure influences Google and SEO, but we can begin the process now by doing a **page tag audit** for your home page. The most powerful tag on your website is the home page TITLE tag, so start there. Drill down to the text content on your home page and verify that it contains the priority keyword targets identified in your keyword worksheet.

WORKSHEETS. For your **DELIVERABLE**, analyze your home page's existing Page Tag vs. target keyword status, and devise a "quick fix" strategy to improve keyword placement in important tags. For the worksheet, go to **<http://jmlinks.com/workbooks>** (click on "SEO Fitness Workbook 2018," enter the code '2018seo' to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the "home page worksheet."

»»» CHECKLIST: PAGE TAG ACTION ITEMS

Test your knowledge of page tags! Take the *Page Tag quiz* at **<http://jmlinks.com/qzpt>**. Next, here are your page tag **Action Items**:

- **Learn** the basics of HTML **Page Tags** and SEO. Which tags are the most important?
 - Download and read the *Google SEO Starter Guide*. Verify that you are implementing its recommendations on your website.

Audit at least one “landing page” for SEO; ultimately, audit all of your key pages for Page Tags. For each -

Identify the keyword target and closely related keywords.

Verify that the **keyword target** is in the TITLE, META DESCRIPTION, IMG ALT, A HREF, and HEADER tags.

Write **keyword-heavy visible content** that is also easy-to-read for humans.

Audit your **home page** for SEO.

Know your **keyword targets** and closely related keywords. *Usually, the Home Page identifies the MOST IMPORTANT two or three keywords for the website.*

Verify that the **keyword target** is in the TITLE, META DESCRIPTION, IMG ALT, A HREF, and HEADER tags.

Write **keyword-heavy visible content** that is also easy-to-read for humans.

Create “one click” links FROM the home page TO the landing pages around keyword phrases.

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Page Tags* for my favorite free tools for tags. Just visit **<http://jmlinks.com/seodash>**.



3.2

WEBSITE STRUCTURE

Website structure - the “organization” of your website - is a major part of **Step #3**. Whereas in **page tags** you approach SEO from the perspective of individual web pages, in website structure you should turn your attention to how your *entire* website communicates keyword priorities to Google. How you name your files, how you “reach out” to Google, and how you optimize your landing pages all combine to make a *good* SEO strategy, *great!*

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Define SEO Landing Pages
 - »» Deliverable: Landing Page List
 - » Write a Keyword Heavy Footer
 - » Create a Blog and Start Blogging
 - » Use Keyword Heavy URLs over Parameter URLs
 - » Leverage the Home Page for One Click Links
 - » Be Mobile-friendly, Fast, and Secure
 - » Join Google and Bing Webmaster Tools
 - »» Deliverable: Website Structure Worksheet
 - »» Checklist: Website Structure Action Items

» DEFINE SEO LANDING PAGES

In SEO, a **landing page** is a page you create that targets very **specific keyword phrases**. For most companies, your landing pages will reflect your product or service offerings, adjusted for how “real customers” search for them on Google. Companies in competitive industries like insurance, law, online coupon shopping and other industries where the SEO competition is fierce all use **landing pages** to help get to the top of Google!

Landing pages, however, are not simply about “page tags.” Rather, they are generally “one click” from the home page, thereby leveraging the home page’s SEO power to focus Google’s attention on these highly valuable keywords. Behind the scenes, there are also link-building efforts for most successful landing pages.

Pet Insurance

In order to visualize SEO-friendly website structure, let’s turn our gaze towards the pet insurance industry. Notice, right out of the gate, that in terms of keyword patterns or search queries on Google we have:

pet insurance at **<http://jmlinks.com/37x>**,

dog insurance at **<http://jmlinks.com/37y>**, and

cat insurance at **<http://jmlinks.com/37z>**.

So we have one ambiguous keyword phrase and two non-ambiguous phrases, and all of the three are pretty transactional. By the time someone is searching for “cat insurance,” he’s done with education and he’s ready to buy (or at least get a quote). Among the high-ranking websites for these patterns we have:

<https://www.petinsurance.com/>

<https://www.healthypawspetinsurance.com/>

<https://www.aspcaPetInsurance.com/>

Now, each has done a very good job at identifying their target keywords and weaving them into the proper HTML tags (TITLE, IMG ALT, A HREF, etc.), as well as writing good SEO-

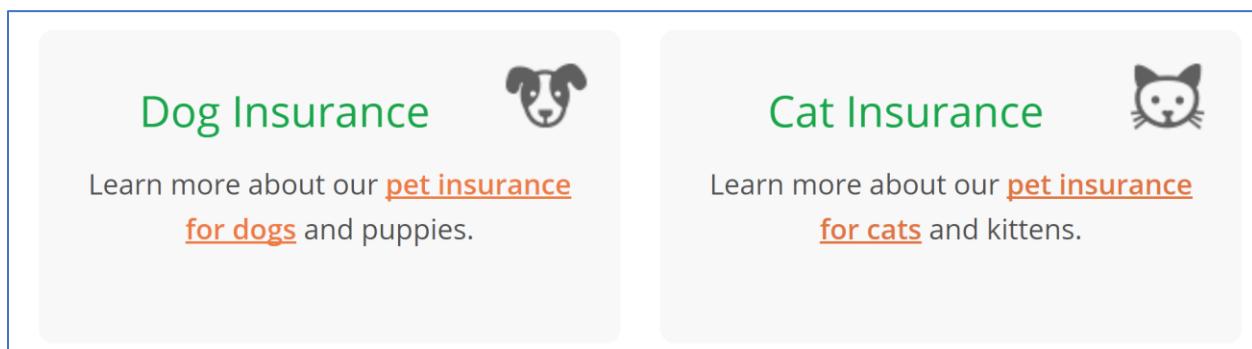
friendly copy that contains not only the target keywords but related words. Let's look at their **website structure** or **organization** and make some observations, using Healthy Paws as an example. We have:

A **Home Page** with optimized TITLE tag and SEO-friendly text, focusing on the more generic “pet insurance” at <https://www.healthypawspetinsurance.com/> and then a

A **Landing page** on “Dog Insurance” with optimized TITLE tag and SEO-friendly text at <https://www.healthypawspetinsurance.com/dog-and-puppy-insurance>

A **Landing page** on “Cat Insurance” with optimized TITLE tag and SEO-friendly text at <https://www.healthypawspetinsurance.com/cat-and-kitten-insurance>.

Notice as well how the Home Page has “one click” links down from the Home Page to each Landing Page. Here's a screenshot:

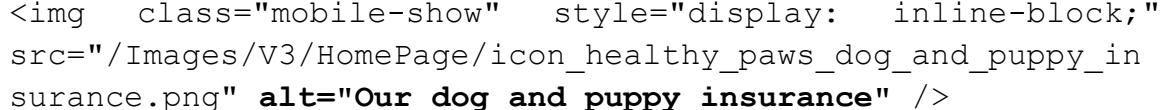


And here are some excerpts of the HTML code linking from the Home Page down to the landing page for “dog insurance:”

```

```

```
<h2 class="greenTitle mobile-hide" style="margin-left: 0;">Dog Insurance</h2>


```

Learn more about our [pet insurance for dogs](/dog-and-puppy-insurance) and puppies.

Take a look as well at the footer of the website and notice how each and every page has textual links to the key landing pages, as indicated by keyword phrases. Here's a screenshot:



And here's the HTML code:

```
<div class="bold">Pet Insurance</div>
<ul class="nodisc footerLinks">
    <li>
        <a href="/dog-and-puppy-insurance" track="Ftr - Dog Insurance">Dog Insurance</a>
    </li>
    <li>
        <a href="/cat-and-kitten-insurance" track="Ftr - Cat Insurance">Cat Insurance</a>
    </li>
```

Well done, well done, well done! Everything is working together as a team – Home Page, Landing Pages, and Footer to send clear signals to Google about the keyword target.

For your homework, take a moment and do the search “Pet insurance” on Google and then visit some of the top ranking websites – petinsurance.com, healthypawsinsurance.com, and aspcapetinsurance.com. Notice how each of them has this same structure of an optimized “Home Page,” optimized “Landing Pages,” and cross-links between them around the target keyword phrases. Don’t miss the use of the site-wide footer as well.

As you are returning to your own website, audit your website to verify that you have a well-defined Home Page and then specific landing pages that represent that core keyword families you identified in your keyword worksheet.

That’s the foundation of SEO-friendly website structure: home page and landing pages. Next, notice as well that most strong websites have a blog as Healthy Paws does at <https://www.healthypawspetinsurance.com/blog/>. Notice as well that they have blog “categories” that touch on their keyword themes:

Pet Care Blog

Dog Health

Funny Pets

Cat Health

Claim Stories

Pet Care

Pet Insurance Reviews

Pet Stories

Thus the blog adds to their SEO symphony by reinforcing to Google the keyword themes and reminding Google that they have new or fresh content. Hence, you need a blog to complete your SEO-friendly website structure.

Localized Landing Pages: a Special Case

If your business has a local element, it is often useful to create localized landing pages for individual cities or towns that are “helper words” for your keywords. For example,

Stamford Uniform and Linen (<http://www.stamfordlinen.com/>) wants to dominate Google not only for keyword phrases such as “Stamford Linen Service” (where the business is located) but for those in nearby towns, such as “Hartsdale Linen Service” or “Greenwich CT Linen Service.” One method to accomplish this is **localized landing pages**.

Check out the company’s home page, scroll to the bottom and notice the “one click” links to landing pages for target cities plus the keyword search “uniform rental service.” For example, the Hartsdale page at <http://www.stamfordlinen.com/Hartsdale/>. Also notice how each landing page is unique, with content at the bottom of each city that is unique and different from the others in the set. Try some Google searches such as “Stamford Linen Service,” “Hartsdale Linen Service,” or “Greenwich CT Linen Service” to see how effective localized landing pages can be!

Another site that uses this effectively is Jonathan D. Sands. Check out his site map at <http://jmlinks.com/13q>. You’ll see localized landing pages for cities such as Larchmont, Mamaroneck, and New Rochelle reflecting localized search patterns such as “Larchmont Personal Injury Lawyer” or “Mamaroneck Personal Injury Lawyer.” Mr. Sands office is actually located in Mamaroneck, NY, but his SEO is trying to capture localized search patterns for nearby cities.

Doorway Pages and Localized Landing Pages

Caution: localized landing pages can be considered “doorway” pages by Google, especially post-Panda. You can read the official Google perspective on doorway pages at <http://jmlinks.com/6a>. The trick for localized landing pages is:

- **Be conservative:** create only a few landing pages for specific cities. Less is more.
- Make sure each has **unique** and valuable **content**.
- **Imagine you are a Googler** reading this page: does it seem to have a reason to exist, other than being optimized for SEO?

To see a company that has gone overboard on this tactic, visit <http://www.certstaff.com>. For example, go to any page of that website and scroll to the bottom: you’ll see page upon page of city-specific landing pages. This is a dangerous tactic, and sets that company up to be penalized, and completely removed from Google. Be careful! Less is more!

A good tactic is to give “driving directions” from various cities to your home office, therefore giving each city-specific page a reason to exist and making it read as useful for humans. At the same time, you can optimize it for SEO. Localized landing pages are close to violating Google’s policy against doorway pages, so please create them at your own risk.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on SEO landing pages at <http://jmlinks.com/5z>.

Moderation in All Things

The Greek philosopher Aristotle famously quipped, “Moderation in all things.” Of course he wasn’t writing about SEO, but his wisdom is applicable to digital marketing as well as arcane philosophy. Here is one of the trade-offs of in SEO content and structure: if you are too *aggressive*, you’ll anger Google. But if you are too *passive*, you’ll never get to the top. Remember: Google writes the rules to frighten people from doing anything (other than advertising on AdWords).

Speed a little, but don’t be the fastest car on the Interstate.

So, don’t overdo localized landing pages, and to every extent possible, make them unique, different, and useful to the human reader!

»» DELIVERABLE: A LANDING PAGE LIST

Inventory your existing or to-be-created landing pages to reflect your major keyword patterns as described in your **keyword worksheet**. Using the “website structure worksheet” in combination with your **keyword worksheet**, create a list of your high priority landing pages. Each page will then be optimized via page tags and ultimately “one click” from the home page, using a keyword heavy syntax. I recommend a tab on your keyword worksheet that identifies no more than ten SEO-friendly landing pages for your website.

» WRITE A KEYWORD-HEAVY FOOTER

Another tactic I recommend is to write a **keyword-heavy footer**. Take a look at Progressive.com, scroll to the bottom, and check out their footer. Notice how the footer has direct links to major pages, all around the phrase “insurance” as in “motorcycle insurance.” Or, take a look at my site <https://www.jasonmcdonald.org/> or <https://www.westpawdesign.com/>. Again, scroll to the bottom and see that target SEO keywords have been embedded in the footer with direct links to landing pages.

Here's a screenshot of the West Paw Design footer, with “one click” links to keyword-specific landing pages:

TOYS	BEDS
Dog Toys	Dog Beds & Mats
Zogoflex® Dog Toys	Montana Nap®
Zogoflex Air® Dog Toys	Heyday Bed®
Fabric Dog Toys	Big Sky Blanket®
	Replacement Bed Parts

Your keyword footer should be short, well-written, and contain only your most important keywords. Link FROM the keyword footer TO your target landing pages. The footer increases the site-wide density of your website for your target keywords and allows for “link sculpting” – linking around strategic keywords to your key landing pages.

Using your Keyword Worksheet and the “landing pages” tab, make sure that as you create new pages for your website as well as blog pages that you link FROM these pages TO your landing pages around keyword-specific phrases. Again, do not overdo this. Just as a general rule, cross-link your pages to each other around important keyword phrases.

» CREATE A BLOG, AND START BLOGGING

Once you have your basic structure of Home Page > Landing Pages, and Footer > Landing Pages, it’s time to create a blog. Blogs are critical for both SEO and for social media marketing, as a good keyword-heavy blog allows you to comment on keywords that matter to you and your customer. In terms of social media marketing, a blog gives you a place to

put content that is of interest to your human readers and customers (See my *Social Media Marketing Workbook* on Amazon at <http://jmlinks.com/smm> for more on this topic).

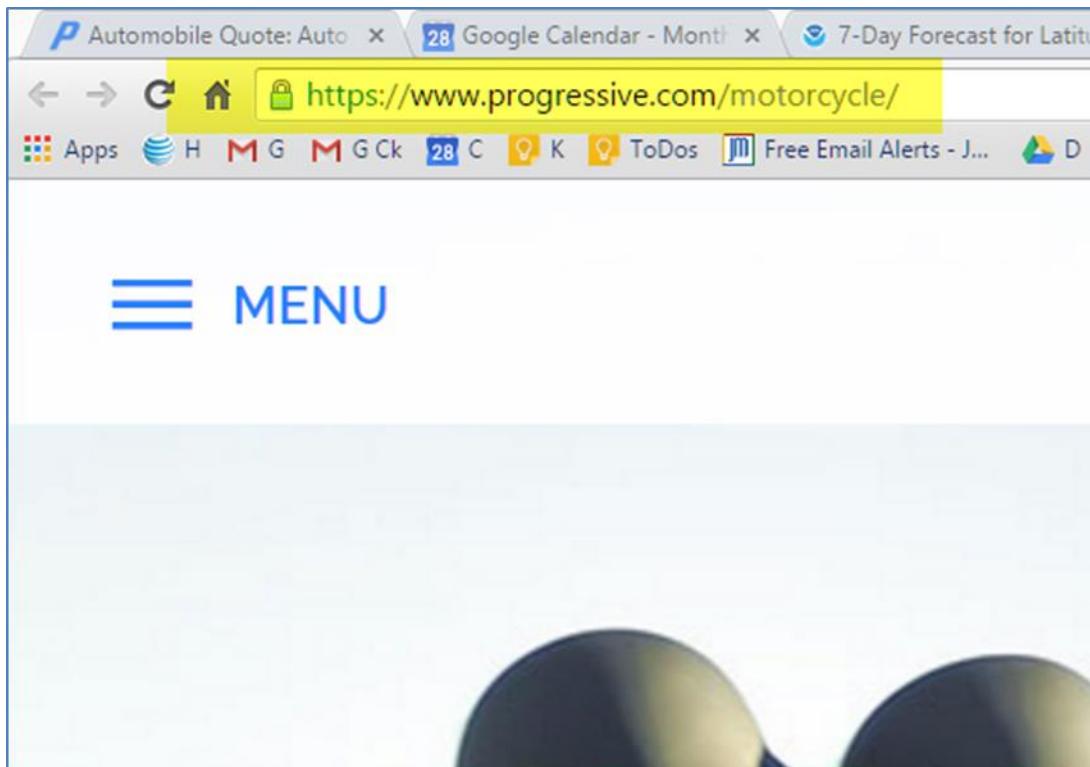
In terms of SEO, a blog allows you to do the following:

1. A blog allows you to write short SEO-friendly posts on **long tail keywords**. Take a look at the West Paw Design blog at <https://www.westpawdesign.com/scoop/>. Notice how the company blogs on topics of interest to pet owners, and also optimizes its blog posts on keyword topics such as “Dog Friendly National Parks” (<http://jmlinks.com/35d>). Also notice how the blog links over to key landing pages, especially those that are product-oriented. Or, take a look at the Mentor Graphics blogs at <https://www.mentor.com/blogs/> and notice how that hi-tech company uses its blogs to write engineering articles yet touch on keywords that matter to it such as “Sensor Modeling and Signal Conditioning Circuit Design” (esoteric keywords for a techie industry) (<http://jmlinks.com/13s>).
2. A blog gives “freshness” to your website, with Google rewarding sites that have frequent postings. Indeed, I recommend that you automate your home page so that it constantly rotates your three most recent blog posts onto the home page as at <https://jm-seo.org/>. Scroll down to “News and blogs” to see my most recent three blog posts.
3. A blog allows you to link “up” to your strategic landing pages, and pass “freshness” to those landing pages. Your landing pages will not change frequently, but by blogging on related topics you can communicate to Google that you are fresh and alive. For an example of this, read my blog post on “SEOs, San Francisco, and Eating Your Own Dog Food” at <http://jmlinks.com/38a>.

Blogs are covered in Chapter 4.1 on content, but in terms of website structure, realize that having a blog and posting SEO-friendly, keyword-heavy content to your blog on a regular basis is a “must” for success at search engine optimization. I recommend you commit to at least four blog posts per month on your keyword themes.

» USE KEYWORD HEAVY URLs OVER PARAMETER URLs

URLs or web addresses are what you see in the URL or address bar at the top of the browser. Google pays a lot of attention to URLs; URLs that contain target keywords clearly help pages climb to the top of Google. Here’s a screenshot of the Progressive landing page URL for “Motorcycle Insurance”:



I have highlighted the URL in yellow.

Try a few competitive Google searches such as “Reverse Mortgage Calculator” (<http://jmlinks.com/13t>) and notice how the URLs that are on page one often contain the target keywords. Here’s the #1 result for “Reverse Mortgage Calculator” at <http://www.reversemortgage.org/About/Reverse-Mortgage-Calculator> and here’s the #3 result at <http://reversemortgagealert.org/reverse-mortgage-calculator/>.

What’s the take-away? If possible, choose a **domain** that contains your target keywords. Beyond that, make sure that your URLs (**file names**) contain the target keywords.

Consider these two examples:

Example 1 / Geek File Name - <http://www.yourcompany.com/files/lk1/2/kyoklaol.html>. No “clues” to Google as to what is “contained” inside these directories and files.

Example 2 / English File Name - <http://www.sf-attorney.com/medical-malpractice/obstetrics.html>. The domain, directories, and file names all indicate that this is a medical malpractice attorney, specializing in suing OB/GYN doctors.

By the way, what goes for URLs also goes for **images**: name your images after keywords just as you name your URLs after keywords. Rather than naming an image “image215.jpg” have your graphic designer name your images after your keywords such as “medical-malpractice.jpg.”

Re-read the *Google SEO Starter Guide* (<http://jmlinks.com/googleseo>) and you’ll notice that Google says, “Improve the structure of your URLs” (pg. 8) and “Optimize your use of images” (Pg. 18), so – again – *just be crazy and do what Google is literally telling you to do*: put keywords in your URLs and IMAGE file names / alt tags!

As part of the **DELIVERABLE** for Step #3, conduct an inventory of your website URLs and image file names (as well as ALT attributes). Are they keyword heavy? Do the visible keywords match the keyword themes from your keyword worksheet?

Parameter URLs

Just as important, **avoid parameter URLs**. Parameter URLs are URLs that contain numeric, crazy, geeky codes such as the question mark (?), percent sign (%), equals sign (=), or SessionIDs (often marked SESSID=), these indicate to Google that these are “temporary” pages not worth indexing. Static, keyword heavy URL’s far outperform URLs that tell Google a website is database-driven via geeky parameter URLs.

PARAMETER URLs = KISS OF (SEO) DEATH

As examples of sites that use parameter URLs, visit <http://www.zilog.com> or <http://dl.acm.org>. Both sites have URL’s full of session IDs, question markets, etc. Refer back to the *Google SEO Starter Guide* (<http://jmlinks.com/googleseo>) and read the section on Parameter URLs. On page 8, Google says:

URLs like (1) can be confusing and unfriendly. Users would have a hard time reciting the URL from memory or creating a link to it. Also, users may believe that a portion of the URL is unnecessary, especially if the URL shows many unrecognizable parameters. They might leave off a part, breaking the link. Some users might link to your page using the URL of that page as the anchor text. If your URL contains relevant words, this provides users **and search engines** with more information about the page than an ID or oddly named parameter would (2) (*emphasis added*)

Here's an example URL on Zilog.com:

`http://zilog.com/index.php?option=com_product&task=product&businessLine=1&id=77&parent_id=77&Itemid=57`

To Google, that URL looks like a mess of information; therefore, this page is going to receive a negative ding in the search algorithm for its target keywords.

Avoid parameter URLs at all costs as Google severely deprecates them in its search results!

If you do have parameter based URLs, **insist** that your webmaster convert them to "pseudo static" URLs. You can Google "pseudo static" URLs for articles on this topic. If you are using WordPress make sure that the "permalink" setting has keyword-heavy URL's.

Siloing and Link Sculpting

Bruce Clay, one of the gurus of the SEO industry, has coined the term "SEO Silos" to explain how keyword structure should determine website architecture. You can read an excellent article by him entitled, "SEO Siloing: How to build a website silo architecture," at <http://jmlinks.com/37u>. Secondarily, Matt Cutts of Google wrote a landmark blog

post in 2009 on “PageRank Sculpting” (<http://jmlinks.com/38b>). The point of this discussion of URL structure and internal linking has been to emphasize the following:

1. Your website URL’s should be **keyword-heavy** and reflect the core keywords as determined on your keyword worksheet. It goes without saying that you refrain from using parameter-based URLs.
2. If at all possible, “like” content should be put into “like” **directories** (e.g., all the content on “cat insurance” should “live” in a directory called *abc.com/cat-insurance* as in *abc.com/cat-insurance/get-a-cat-insurance-quote* and *abc.com/cat-insurance/kitten-insurance*, etc. This is what Bruce Clay means by “siloing.”
3. If siloing is not possible, then links on your website FROM any given page TO your landing pages should be around the keyword phrase, i.e., any blog post that mentions “cat insurance” should link around the phrase “cat insurance” to *abc.com/cat-insurance*. This is what Matt Cutts is implying by “PageRank **Sculpting**.”

In addition, you should refrain from linking outwards to other websites, except when they are in your keyword community and are quite important. A Brahman Cattle breeder, for example, should like to Brahman.org (the National Association of Brahman Cattle breeders) and a San Francisco pizza restaurant should link to both SFGov.org (the City of San Francisco) and the American Pizza Community (<http://www.americanpizzacomunity.com/>) which promotes pizza as a shared meal in communities everywhere and is “in” the keyword community of pizza.

In summary, how you structure your URLs, how you link to and from your internal pages, and how you link outwards are strong signals to Google as to your keyword targets. So do all of this in a very organized, systematic, and judicious way. Don’t take all of this too seriously and drive yourself crazy, however. Do the best you can, the point being to use your keyword themes to structure your links. *And eat a lot of pizza, especially with friends, because a) pizza is good, and b) friends are good.*

» LEVERAGE THE HOME PAGE FOR ONE CLICK LINKS

Google interprets your Home Page as the most powerful page on your website, and as we saw in the Page Tags chapter, you want to have lots of keyword-heavy text on the home page. In addition, you should embed our most important keywords into the home page

TITLE tag. Beyond that, you should leverage your home page as a “one click” gateway to your landing pages. It’s as if your HTML communicated this message to Google:

Home Page > One Click to Landing Pages = Hey Google! These keywords are important to us!

Google also looks at the directory structure, namely the presence of keywords in URLs and how “far” those URLs are from the home page or “root” directory. So, in addition to naming your directories and files after your keyword families and high priority keywords, and placing “one click” links from your home page, create a directory structure that is **“shallow”** or **“flat.”**

http://www.yourcompany.com/medical-malpractice/sue-doctors.html (2nd level)

is seen by Google as “more important” than

http://www.yourcompany.com/1/files/new/medical-malpractice/sue-doctors.html (5th level)

Thirdly, your home page needs to communicate “freshness” to Google by having at least three *fresh* press releases and/or three new blog posts. Having new, fresh content that is “one click” from the home page signals to Google that your website is alive and updated (vs. a stagnant site that might be out of business), so it’s a best practice to rotate press releases and/or blog posts through the home page as “one click” links.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on SEO-friendly home pages at <http://jmlinks.com/18g>.

» BE MOBILE-FRIENDLY, FAST, AND SECURE

For the past few years, Google has emphatically trumpeted the “mobile revolution.” Most searches now occur on mobile devices such as phones and tablets, and Google has

declared itself a “**mobile-first**” company. On November 4, 2016, for example, Google announced “Mobile-first indexing” on the official Google Webmaster Central Blog (<http://jmlinks.com/38y>). The idea is that they will look, first, at how your site looks on a mobile phone and that will become THE index for both the desktop and mobile versions of Google. Sites that are not mobile friendly, and/or slow may be penalized with poor rank on Google, or even drop out of Google altogether. For a good article on how to prepare for the coming “mobile first” index see <http://jmlinks.com/39c>.

Here’s what you need to do. First, make sure you are using a **responsive** website design. If you’re using WordPress, a so-called “responsive” WordPress theme will accomplish this pretty easily. Just verify that your theme is responsive. If you’re using another platform, you’ll need to verify that your platform is responsive. Squarespace, for example, is already responsive (<http://jmlinks.com/38z>). (Use the free AdWords preview tool at <http://jmlinks.com/39g> and change the device type to *mobile device* to check out how your site looks on a phone). Second, make sure your website is fast – as fast as is possible. Use a tool like WebPageTest (<http://jmlinks.com/39a>), Google’s own PageSpeed Insights (<http://jmlinks.com/39b>), or SEOSiteCheckUp.com’s (<http://jmlinks.com/39d>). Inside of Google Analytics, you can click on *Behavior > Site Speed* to get detailed information on your site’s speed over time. Contact your web hosting company and purchase *everything* that speeds up your website! The cost is inconsequential compared with the negative impact of a slow website.

Finally, if you are a big site such as a publisher, you can explore Google’s move to promote **AMP** (Accelerated Mobile Pages) at <http://jmlinks.com/39e>. For most of us, if we are a) responsive, and b) fast, our websites will survive the transition to “mobile first” just fine. Don’t panic.

Be Secure. Be https.

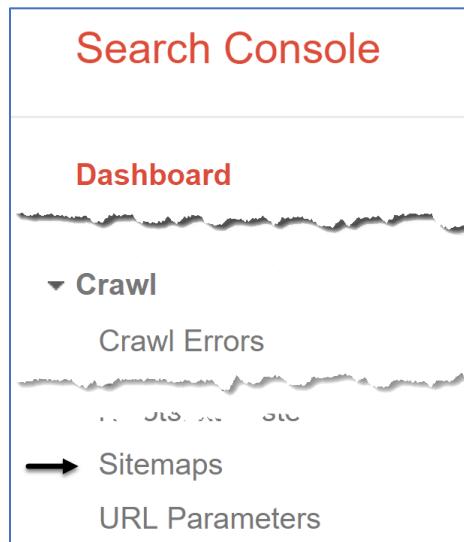
As for **security**, Google is also promoting the transition from *http* and to *https* (secure). A site like the JM Internet Group (<https://www.jm-seo.org/>) is secure and marked by *https*; a site like the JM Links Website (<http://jmlinks.com/>) is not secure and marked by *http*. (The “s” stands for *secure* or *encrypted*). All things being equal, the *https* sites may begin to outperform non-secure *http* sites (non-encrypted). Google is even threatening to “warn” users in Chrome about non-secure elements on websites! To learn more about *http* vs. *https*, visit <http://jmlinks.com/39f>. The bottom line is that you should begin planning a transition to *https*, though in my opinion this is not (yet) a critical SEO factor for most small business websites that are not eCommerce. If you are eCommerce and collecting credit card or payment data, it goes without saying that you should be *https* or secure.

» JOIN GOOGLE (AND BING) WEBMASTER TOOLS

Google rewards websites that make its job easier! Set up sitemaps for Google (and Bing), and participate in their official programs for Webmasters. Sign up for Google Search Console (formerly called “Webmaster Tools”) for your website (<http://jmlinks.com/6c>) as well as Bing Webmaster tools (<http://jmlinks.com/6d>). Then follow the steps below to alert Google to your Google-friendly files as follows.

First, create an **HTML site map** that makes it easy for a search engine spider to go from Page 1 to Page 2 to Page 3 of your website. If you use Javascript / CSS pull downs for navigation, your HTML site map is a critical alternative path for Google to index your website. Second, use the free tool at <http://jmlinks.com/6e> to create your XML site map. If you are using WordPress, look for a plugin that creates an HTML sitemap as well as an XML sitemap. Third, create a robots.txt file that points to your XML sitemap. (Note: if you are using WordPress, just search popular plugins for XML sitemaps and robots.txt functionality). Test your *robots.txt* file to verify that Google can easily index your website.

Fourth, after you have created these files, submit your **sitemap.xml** file via Webmaster tools. Pay attention as well to your “crawl errors” and “HTML suggestions.” All things being equal, sites that participate in Webmaster tools will beat out sites that do not. Here’s a screenshot of how to submit an XML sitemap via Google webmaster tools:

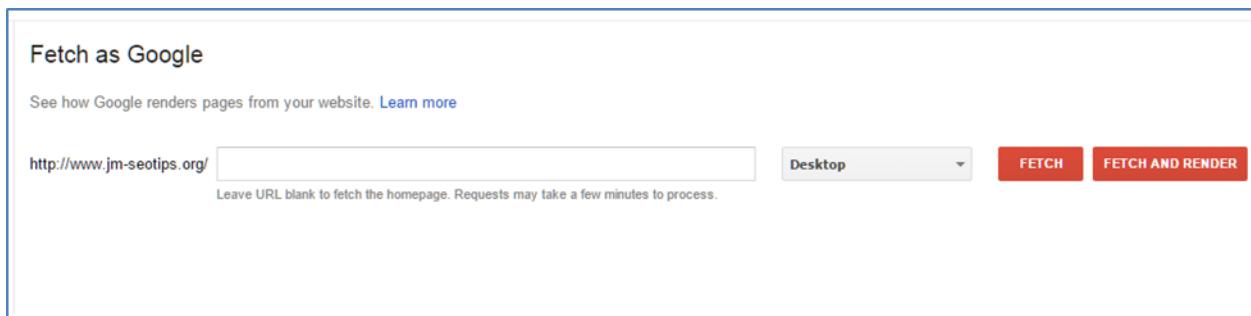


Login to your Search Console, then click on *Crawl > Sitemaps*. Next click on the red “Submit Sitemap” box on the far right to submit your XML sitemap.

Fetch as Google

Another feature available in the Google search console is “fetch as Google” located at Search Console > Crawl > Fetch as Google. What it does is alert Google to new or revised content on your website, thus increasing the speed at which your site gets indexed in Google and is available to rank high.

If you create a new page on your website, or edit an existing page, for example, you can login to the Google search console and “submit” your new URL to Google. In this way, you get into the Google index faster and can more quickly climb to the top of Google. Here’s a screenshot:



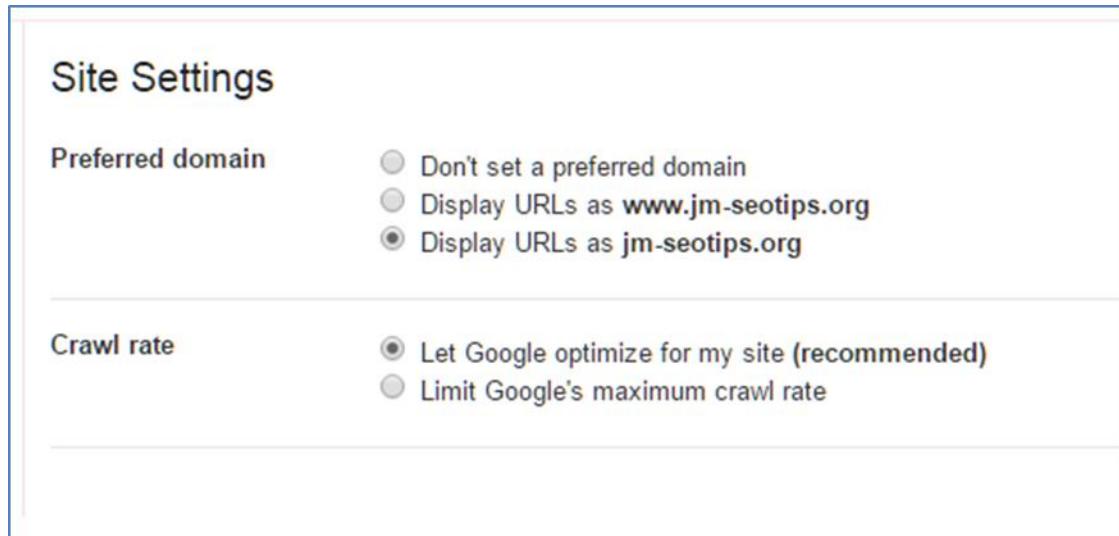
This feature is also useful to get a new blog post indexed. First, write a new blog post. Second, log in to Google Search Console, and go to “Fetch as Google.” Third, submit your URL to Google. This accelerates the indexing of a timely post to your blog.

To find out if content is indexed, use the *site:* command on Google. Enter a URL of your website after *site:* (no space) on Google. To see an example, go to **http://jmlinks.com/13u** which confirms that the blog post at **https://www.jm-seo.org/2016/08/google-local-impness-description/** is “in” the Google index. If not, then I could use “fetch as Google” to alert Google to index / reindex it.

Set a Preferred Domain

You should also set a “preferred” domain (available under the gear icon, top right of the screen, under “site settings.”). This is because you want to tell Google to use **http://jm-**

seotips.org not **http://www.jm-seotips.org**. This prioritizes one format for SEO. Here's a screenshot:



Similarly, via your Web hosting company, make sure that the one you do NOT want redirects to the one you do want. For example, if you go to **https://jm-seo.org/**, it redirects you to **https://www.jm-seo.org/**. The magic word here is the “htaccess” file, which you can read about at **http://jmlinks.com/6f**. Generally, I’d ask your resident computer nerd or the tech support at your web hosting company to make sure one, and only one, format is in use.

Turning back to Search Console, click down from Search Traffic to **International Targeting** and set your country to United States (if you are in the USA), or to whatever country you are in (if you are somewhere else).

Other Todos in Webmaster Tools

There are some other features of value in Webmaster tools. Scrolling down the left menu in Google Search Console, let me point out the following:

Messages. If you are penalized by Google (or Bing), you may see a warning message when you log in. Plus, you can be emailed alerts for web problems such as manual penalties or hacking.

Search Appearance. Drill down into some information about how Google sees your website structure, including so-called “microdata.”

Search Traffic. Google will give you some data about which keywords you rank for, as well as links to your site from other sites. In addition, it has a “mobile usability” check up feature to give suggestions as to how friendly your website is to mobile users.

Google Index. Here, you get information on how indexed your site is by Google, blocked resources, and how to remove URLs from the public index.

Crawl. Google gives you information on how it is crawling your website, including errors as well as the important “fetch as Google” function described above.

Security Issues. If you’ve been hacked, Google will alert you and give you tips on how to recover.

Bing’s Webmaster tools has similar features. In particular, Bing’s information on inbound links to your site and keyword discovery tools are meritorious as is Bing’s SEO Analyzer which gives feedback on how SEO-friendly a URL is.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial of how to use Google Webmaster Tools (Search Console) at <http://jmlinks.com/17u>.

» **DELIVERABLE: A COMPLETED WEBSITE STRUCTURE WORKSHEET**

At this point, you have the major components of the chapter **DELIVERABLE: a website audit** using the “website structure worksheet,” namely:

1. **Your home page.** Optimize your Home Page TITLE tag, META DESCRIPTION tag, IMG ALT’s, and visible text. Link down to your key landing pages.
2. **Your target landing pages.** These are your product or service pages that match common keywords searches your customers do on Google. Inventory the ones that you have as well as the ones that you need to create, and then outline the SEO-friendly content you will write (or rewrite) and weave into the correct tag structure.

3. **Create a Keyword Footer.** Write a short paragraph with keyword-optimized links to your key landing pages.
4. **Your Blog.** Set up a blog, and started to blog on your keywords.
5. **Your URL structure.** Avoid parameter (numeric, special character) based URLs in favor of keyword heavy URLs, and build a “shallow” website organization.
6. **Your Google-Friendly Files.** Make sure you’ve signed up for Google (and Bing) webmaster tools and Google Analytics, including an HTML sitemap and robots.txt file.
7. **Participate in Google (and Bing) Webmaster Tools.** You should have registered for Webmaster Tools and crossed your t’s and dotted your i’s in terms of sitemaps (both XML and HTML) and preferred domain.

DELIVERABLE. Complete the “website structure worksheet.” For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” and enter the code ‘2018seo’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “Website Structure Worksheet.”

»» CHECKLIST: WEBSITE STRUCTURE ACTION ITEMS

Test your knowledge of website organization! Take the *Website Structure quiz* at <http://jmlinks.com/qzws>. Next, here are your structure **Action Items**:

- Define**, based on your keyword worksheet, your 3-10 SEO landing pages.
 - If appropriate, create *localized landing pages* but make sure that they have useful content for humans (!). Do not overdo this!
- Organize your **website structure** from the Home Page to the key landing pages to the blog; write a keyword footer.
 - Make sure you have “**one click**” **links** to the landing pages from the Home Page.
 - Make sure you have “**one click**” **links** to the landing pages from the keyword footer.
- Verify that you have *non-parameter URLs*
- Verify that you are mobile-friendly (“responsive”) and fast.

- ❑ Silo or “link sculpt” to/from your key landing pages based on keyword themes
- ❑ Link out to a few key industry-specific websites.

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Website Structure Tools* for my favorite free tools for website organization. Just visit <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>.



4.1

CONTENT SEO

In **Step #1**, you defined your goals; in **Step #2**, you identified your keywords; and in **Step #3**, you structured your pages and website to talk to Google about your target keywords. In **Step #4**, you begin to populate your SEO-friendly website with keyword heavy content.

Content, after all, is king.

But let's be clear. Just throwing content up on your website willy-nilly won't help your SEO! Why? Well, for one, we've already learned that *well structured content* (SEO-friendly page tags, SEO-friendly website structure) is critical for success at SEO. For two, that content needs to be well-written and include your keywords in sufficient density. And, for three, Google increasingly looks at not only grammar and related words but whether the human user actually finds it interesting, so you need to write content that's good for Google AND good for humans.

In **Step #4**, we will expand on this by creating an **SEO Content Marketing Strategy** (“Content SEO” for short) built upon your keyword targets.

Content SEO is all about creating web pages that *match* Google search *queries* with compelling, relevant *content*, be that on a specific web page, a press release, or a blog post. **Content SEO** is all about creating an on-going “content marketing machine” (*daily, weekly, monthly content*) that produces compelling SEO-friendly content for your website. And, in the new synergy between SEO and *social media marketing*, **Content SEO** is also about creating content that real people want to read, and want to share on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+ and other social networks.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Dispose Yourself of the False Content Dichotomy

- » Identify Keyword Themes
- » Create a Content Map
- » Set up a Blog and Start Blogging
- » Create a Content Marketing Plan
 - »» Checklist: Content Action Items
 - »» Deliverable: A Content Marketing Plan

» **DISPOSE YOURSELF OF THE FALSE CONTENT DICHOTOMY**

Allow me to get up on my soapbox here for a moment. As you've read this book, so far, you've surely realized that I make a big deal about **keywords**. I strongly advocate that you research your keywords and that you identify five to ten core transactional keywords for your website. I also recommend, as we shall see in more detail in a moment, that you focus on keyword families or clusters of keyword, including educational search queries, especially for your blog.

SEO stands or falls, in my view, with keywords.

However, you will undoubtedly read on the blogosphere this notion that Google has “moved beyond” keywords and that Google can “figure out” what you mean (or what the searcher intent) is. Just this morning, for example, I read Neil Patel’s article, “Why You Shouldn’t Do Keyword Research for Your Blog Posts (And What to Do Instead)” (<http://jmlinks.com/38c>). As a good teacher, I want to expose you to this newer, sexier, and easier theory of how to succeed at SEO: just write great content for Google and let Google do the rest. It goes under the ruse of “content marketing,” and it’s wrong.

In this view, you can abandon worrying about keywords (and about your rank on keyword queries as well). You can just write “for humans” and not worry about Google, SEO, and the tried-and-true methodologies of researching keywords, inserting keywords into the proper HTML tags, writing keyword-heavy text and yet not overdoing it in the age of Google Panda. Neil Patel is a smart guy (probably smarter than I am), and there are many gurus who follow this new thinking. Well, like there was the “New Math,” there’s the “New SEO.” (And like the “New Math” or the “New Coke,” I don’t think this is going to end well).

First and foremost, this idea of writing just “great content for Google” is based on a **false dichotomy**, a false choice. Either you write for Google or you write for humans, either you embed your keywords in HTML tags or you write for Google, and so on and so forth. In my humble opinion, you can do *both* and you *should do both*. It’s a “false choice” to think you can’t research keywords and yet write great content, or that you shouldn’t pay attention to the keywords people search for and write content accordingly.

Furthermore, SEO is an endeavor that can be measured. Do some searches that matter to you. Look at the top three winning results. Check to see if they have placed those keywords into key tags, and written content that at the very least spits back the keyword phrase to Google. Or, as you work on your SEO, create keyword-heavy content that follows the system I am teaching and content that follows this “New SEO” of letting Google think for you absent keywords. Then check which content ranks, and which content does not. In fact, in everything that follows in this Chapter, I am assuming that you are going to do your best to write content that humans actually read, humans actually find engaging, and humans actually find motivates them to take your desired action, whether that’s a sales lead or an eCommerce sale.

I believe in “content marketing.” I just believe that you can do so by combining the more traditional SEO focus on keywords with the newer focus on writing great content that’s engaging for your human audience. I believe in “both/and” not “either/or” when it comes to content.

Once you’ve disposed yourself of the notion that you should abandon keywords and create content “just for humans,” you’re ready to dive into SEO-friendly content marketing.

» IDENTIFY KEYWORD THEMES

Every successful website has keyword **themes** just as every successful company or organization has a **focus**. You don’t produce *everything*, nor do your target searchers search Google for *everything*. You **focus**, and they **focus**. If you are Safe Harbor CPAs (<http://www.safeharborcpa.com/>), a CPA firm in San Francisco, for example, your target customers search Google for things like “San Francisco CPA Firms,” “Business CPAs in San Francisco, CA,” or keyword specific searches such as “CPA Firm for IRS Audit Defense in SF,” or “FBAR Tax Issues.” Guess what? Safe Harbor CPAs has matching content on its website for each of those queries, including an active blog, and that’s no accident!

If you are a Houston probate attorney, you'll need lots of content about "Houston" and about "probate" plus related terms like estate planning, guardianships, and wills. Take a look at <http://www.fordbergner.com/> and – guess what – that site has well-optimized content, including an up-to-date blog, on exactly those keyword themes.

Both sites also have lots of content on their blogs about "adjacent" or "educational" keywords as contrasted with more purely transactional keywords. If you take a look at the Bergner blog, for example, you'll see blog headlines such as:

What to do with an IRA when estate planning

What Rights Do You Have as a Beneficiary?

Estate Planning: Tips To Pass on the Family Farm

Not Every State Handles Guardianships as Well as Texas

etc.

If **keyword discovery** is about organizing your SEO strategy around keyword themes, then **content SEO**, in turn, is about creating a strategy to produce the type of content that "matches" your keyword themes on an on-going basis.

MATCH CONTENT TO SEARCH QUERIES

The first step is to match your keyword themes as identified on your keyword worksheet with content that needs to be produced. Among the most common themes are:

Branded or Navigational Searches. These are searches in which customers already know your company, and simply use Google to find you quickly. In the example of Safe Harbor CPAs, a branded Google search is literally "Safe Harbor

CPAs,” while for Ford Bergner Law Firm it is “Ford Bergner.” **Matching content:** your “about you” page on the website.

Reputational Searches. Customers often research reviews about a company, product, or service online before making that final decision to make a purchase. Google your company name plus “reviews” and make sure that what they see about your company is positive; you’ll be creating and encouraging content to proliferate positive content about your company’s reputation. **Matching content:** people don’t search for *testimonials* about a business; they search for *reviews*. So rename your *testimonials* page on your website to *reviews* for better SEO. Also claim and optimize your company profiles on various reviews sites like Google, Yelp, CitySearch, Judy’s Book, etc., and encourage happy customers to write reviews.

Anchor Searches. These are searches in which a core customer *need* matches a core *product or service*. In the example of Safe Harbor CPAs, an anchor search would be “San Francisco CPA Firms,” or “Tax Preparation San Francisco.” For a large company like Progressive Insurance, the anchor searches are “Auto Insurance” or “Motorcycle Insurance.” **Matching content:** your landing pages.

Educational Anchor Pages. Besides transactional keyword searches, there are often common and repeated “educational searches” for which people want long form content. An example would be an explanation of the difference between *follicular unit extraction* and *follicular unit transplantation* as techniques for hair transplants. Or, another example would be an explanation of *how to contest a will under Oklahoma law*.

Matching content: FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) documents, eBooks, and long-form blog posts.

Keyword Specific Searches / Long Tail. Searches that are usually (but not always) long tail searches (multiple search keywords), and reflect a very focused customer need or educational query. For example, “How to defend against an IRS audit?” or “Rights and responsibilities of a trustee in Texas” vs. just “CPA Firm” or “Probate attorney.” **Matching content:** blog posts.

Keyword Specific Searches / Micro Searches. Short but micro-focused search queries such as “Tag Heuer Repair,” or “Breitling Repair,” or “AdWords Coupons.” These are short but very specific search queries. **Matching content:** blog posts or micro landing pages.

News and Trending Searches. These are searches reflecting industry news, trends, and buzz. For example, with recent IRS initiatives to crack down on overseas assets, a search such as “FBAR” reflects an awareness of foreign asset disclosure requirements. Similarly, if you were a networking company, growing

awareness of computer security would make blog posts on “cybersecurity” a good bet to attract interested customers. **Matching content:** blog posts, press releases, and video summaries (with matching YouTube videos)

These are not the only types of keyword queries and matching content that might exist; just the most common. Your **TODO** here is to track trending topics, and blog on them quickly to “get ahead” of the news cycle. Use tools like Google Alerts (<https://www.google.com/alerts>), Feedly (<https://feedly.com>), and Buzzsumo (<http://www.buzzsumo.com>) to monitor trending topics in your industry.

Evergreen Content and Link-bait Content

Many SEO content experts also distinguish between *evergreen* keywords (keywords that are always valuable such as “CPA San Francisco”) vs. *time-sensitive* content (such as “2018 Tax Changes). And don’t forget the difference between *educational* search queries and *transactional* search queries (“knee pain” vs. “best knee surgeon in San Francisco”). Finally, there is *link bait* content (such as infographics, or tutorial posts), designed to attract links, and of course *social media content*, especially content that is designed to be highly shareable on networks like Facebook or Twitter. Brainstorm content that has a long shelf-life, and that will attract user interest and inbound links.

Here’s a screenshot from Backlinko (<http://jmlinks.com/18v>) showing an “Evergreen” FAQ on how to build links for SEO:

Link Building: The Definitive Guide

Link building is the most important (and challenging) SEO skill. Actually, it's a culmination of several different skills: you need to master content creation, sales, programming, psychology, and good old-fashioned marketing if you want other people to consistently link to your site.

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR MORE SEARCH ENGINE TRAFFIC (AND WHO ISN'T?) THEN LINK BUILDING IS A MUST.



And here's a long form post on "How to contest a will in Texas" (<http://jmlinks.com/38d>) from Sheehan Law of Austin, Texas:



Contesting a Will in Texas

Contesting a Will in Texas

⌚ January 30, 2015 Categories: [Contested Probates](#)

Adults have the ability to make their own Will to name who will receive their property upon death. There may be circumstances, however, when the process of making a Will wasn't done properly. Interested persons may wish to step forward and challenge, or contest, the Will, claiming it is invalid. In this article we will discuss [Will contests in Texas](#). Austin probate lawyer [Farren Sheehan](#) can help answer questions and assist families with common issues encountered in Will contests, how to bring such actions, and proper grounds for challenging a Will.

Who May Contest a Will in Texas

Under Texas law, any interested person may contest a Will. While "interested person" is defined

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Regardless of the target keywords, the basic goal is to map out the types of content that are most relevant to you and your customers, and to start a content marketing process that generates highly relevant content on a regular basis. So your process is:

1. **Identify** a target keyword phrase, and match it to branded, educational, evergreen, anchor content, etc. Note: another way to think of this is to brainstorm "customer needs" or "customer pain points." What do your customers want to learn about? What interests them that relates to your company, product, or service?
2. **Brainstorm** the type of content you need to produce that best matches the keyword query such as a long-form blog post, an FAQ document, or a short and quick blog about a trending topic.
3. **Produce** the content on a regular and systematic basis.
4. **Promote** the content, often by syndicating it as a Press Release, sharing it on social media, or even advertising it on Google, Facebook, or Twitter.

For your first **TODO**, review your **keyword worksheet**, brainstorm your keyword patterns, and group your keyword families into patterns that reflect **branded search**, **reputational search**, **anchor search**, **esoteric search**, and **news search** and other patterns.

» CREATE A CONTENT MAP

Now that you have your keyword themes, it's time to brainstorm the types of content you are going to create that will match the relevant keyword theme. Your second **TODO** is to create a **content map**. In a sense, you are “reverse engineering” the process of Google search: taking what people search on Google as your **end point**, and creating the type of content that has a good chance of appearing in Google search results as your **starting point**. Your **content map** will map your keyword themes to the relevant locations on your website.

Here's a table mapping out how keyword themes are generally reflected on website locations:

KEYWORD THEME	WEBSITE LOCATION	COMMENTS ON CONTENT SEO
Branded Searches	Home Page, About You, Testimonial Pages	Branded search is all about making sure you show up for your own name as well as commonly appended helper words like “reviews.” Make sure that at least some TITLE tags communicate your name, and your “about” page is focused on branded search. Don’t forget branded search for key company employees (JM Internet Group vs. Jason McDonald, for example).
Anchor Searches / Transactional Searches	Home Page, Landing Pages, Product Pages (High Level), FAQ documents, eBooks	Anchor or transactional search terms generally reflect your product categories in the format that customers search. Revisit <i>progressive.com</i> , for example, and you’ll see how each anchor search query is reflected in a focused landing page . In addition, the site navigation and links are “sculpted” around keywords to pull Google up to the target landing pages. Besides landing pages, FAQ documents, Q&A

		documents, or infographics can match these anchor keywords.
Very Specific Searches	Product sub pages, blog posts.	Your esoteric searches are generally long tail searches, and/or searches for very niche, focused products or services (“micro” searches). These are less competitive than anchor searches and are well served by content on product sub pages as well as blog posts.
News Searches	Press releases, blog posts	Every industry has news, buzz, and timely topics! The place to put this content is generally either in a press release on your website, and/or a blog post.
Educational Searches	Blog posts, FAQ document, possible eBooks	These are when the potential customer is in “learn mode” as in the “causes of hair loss” rather than “Best Hair Transplant Surgeon in Miami.”

For your second **TODO**, take your keyword themes and map out where they should be reflected on your website into your **content map** or **content calendar**. I recommend doing this in Excel. Check your rank on Google searches vs. relevant search queries for each type – if you are not on page one, or not in the top three positions for a query... you have work to do! If possible, create a content or editorial calendar and divvy up who in your company will be responsible for writing which content. The goal is to make a “content marketing machine” so that you are constantly feeding fresh content to your website and to your social media. Think *factory production*, not *William Shakespeare*!

In some cases, you may have *missing* elements (for example, you don’t have blog or don’t produce press releases); in others you may have the elements there *already* (product specific pages, for example) but their content is not SEO-friendly (has poorly defined TITLE tags, content does not reflect logical keyword target, etc.). Regardless, you are mapping your keyword themes to the logical locations on your website with the goal of getting into a rhythm or content creation process of creating SEO-friendly content on a regular basis.

Social Media & SEO

Google increasingly pays attention to social media, especially shares on Twitter. In addition, what people “share” on social media is also often what they “search for” on

Google and what they “link to” on their blogs. So keep an eye on social media as you research and build out content for your website and blog.

What types of content interests your customers? What types of content are they likely to share? Use a tool like Buzzsumo (<http://www.buzzsumo.com/>), input your keywords, and identify the most shared content on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. This tells you what type of content is popular, and therefore you can produce that content yourself.

Here’s a screenshot from Buzzsumo showing the most shared article on “hair transplant” for the past year:

The screenshot shows the Buzzsumo Pro dashboard. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Content Research, Influencers, and Monitoring. Below that is a secondary navigation bar with links: Most Shared, Trending Now, Backlinks, Content Analysis, and Facebook Analyzer. On the left, there's a sidebar with filtering options: Filter by Date (24 Hours, Past Week, Past Month, Past 6 Months, Past Year, Show Specific Range), In-Depth Articles Only (unchecked), Language (show dropdown), Country (TLD) (show dropdown), Filter Domains (show dropdown), and Content Type (Article selected). The main search area has a search bar containing "hair transplant", a "Search!" button, and a tip: "Tip: You can ignore video results by unchecking "Videos" in the filters to the left". Below the search bar, there's a section for "FACEBOOK SHARES" with a large blue circle containing "30.5K". To the right of this are buttons for "View Backlinks", "View Sharers", and "Share". The main content area displays a single result: "6 Bollywood Celebs Who Got Hair Transplants" from thestorypedia.com, published on Nov 7, 2015.

Another useful tool is Google trends (<http://jmlinks.com/38f>). David Meerman Scott coined the term “newsjacking” to describe a method of first identifying trending topics and second creating blog or social content that “newsjacks” that content for your own purposes. Watch his video at <http://jmlinks.com/38g>.

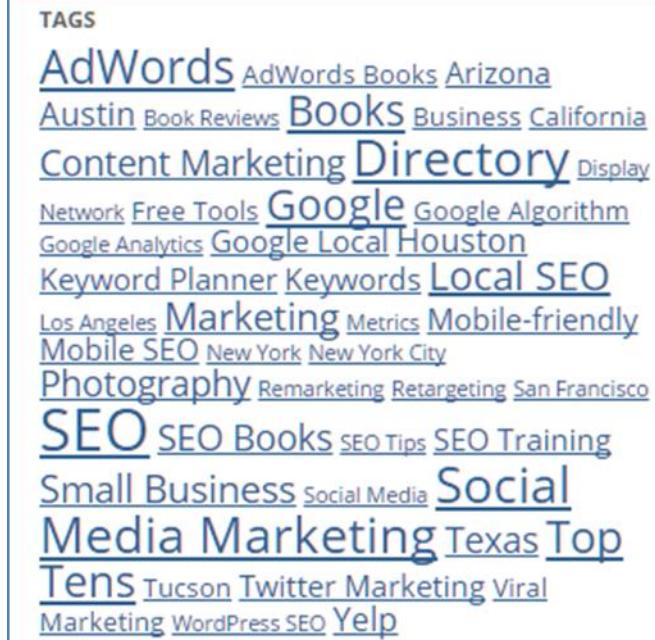
» SET UP A BLOG AND START BLOGGING

To succeed at SEO, you must have a blog! Blogs are great for social media marketing, and for SEO, your blog helps in these important ways:

- **Micro-specific Content.** Whereas your major landing pages must reflect “anchor” searches, your blog can have a nearly infinite number of pages tied together by keyword themes. Your blog gives you the easy ability to create a lot of content and match that content on the many small, fragmented and long-tail searches that make up today’s search behavior. Often you might not win on the “major” searches but you can make up for this by winning on the “micro” searches, many of which will be low volume but high value. (In addition, your blog gives you content to share on social media).
- **Freshness.** Google rewards sites that have new, fresh content. Having a blog gives you an easy way to churn out fresh content and send a freshness signal to Google: we’re alive, we’re alive, we’re alive... I recommend at least four blog posts per month for this reason, and rotating three blog posts on your home page as I do on <https://jm-seo.org/>. Another good blog is Ostrom Morris PLLC at <http://jmlinks.com/38e>. Try Googling various educational searches in your industry and look at what competitors who are ranking on Google are blogging about.
- **Website Size.** Size matters (at least to Google)! Given the choice between *pizza restaurant* No. 1 with 10 web pages, and *pizza restaurant* No. 2 with 1000 pages, Google will prefer the larger website: *it must be more important because it has more content.* A blog allows you to expand the size your web content.

As for blogging platforms, the best, by far, is **WordPress**. If you do not already have a blog, touch base with your Web developer and insist that he or she set up a blog for you. Major providers such as GoDaddy have easy-to-use, out-of-the-box WordPress packages. As you blog on WordPress, be sure to “tag” each blog post with keyword themes that reflect your keyword targets (as identified on your keyword worksheet).

Take a look at our blog at <http://jmlinks.com/15k> for examples of best blogging practices for SEO, including tagging blog posts based on keyword themes. Here’s a screenshot of our WordPress “tag cloud,” located at the far left of every page on our blog:



Notice how our WordPress tags reflect our target keywords such as AdWords, SEO, and Social Media Marketing as indicated with a bigger font, meaning more blog content. To learn more about WordPress tags, please visit <http://jmlinks.com/6n>.

Blog Hosting

Note that it is better to host your blog on your own site (<http://www.company.com/blog>) than on another site (<http://company.wordpress.com/>). However, the “Perfect is the enemy of the Good” (Voltaire), so if you can’t host on your own domain, host on another platform. For a quick blogging platform, I prefer Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com>) to WordPress.com (<http://www.wordpress.com>), as the former is very SEO-friendly while the latter (ironically) is not, and has many obnoxious lock-ins to prevent you from porting your blog to your own site at a later time. (Note: just to confuse you, *Wordpress.org* is the site for the free software (good), whereas *WordPress.com* is a revenue-generating site (bad)).

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on SEO-friendly blogging at <http://jmlinks.com/17t> vs. how to blog for social media marketing purposes at <http://jmlinks.com/16p>.

In a nutshell, a blog post that is *meant for SEO* is meant to be “searched for” and to assist you in propelling your website to the top of a relevant search query on Google; a blog post that is *meant for social media marketing*, in contrast, is aimed at being “shared” by real humans on sites like Facebook or Twitter. Both are important and valuable reasons why everyone needs a blog!

Start Blogging

Having the structure of a blog means nothing if you aren’t blogging! I recommend at least four blog posts a month, each about 3-5 paragraphs in length and each focusing on your keywords. Be sure to identify a keyword target for each blog post plus weave the keyword target into the important HTML tags as well as write content that is good for humans *and* good for Google. (*See the next Chapter for an in-depth discussion of blogging.*)

At this point, begin to outline a blog calendar that identifies the topics you want to blog on and who is going to do the blogging. Wrestle up team members, from the CEO and other executives, to the product marketing managers, and even the sales rep’s. The more people you involve in the blogging process the easier it will be to create the quantity you need.

»»» **CHECKLIST: CONTENT ACTION ITEMS**

Test your knowledge of content marketing! Take the *content quiz* at <http://jmlinks.com/qzcs>. Next, here are your content marketing **Action Items**:

- Revisit your **keywords**, looking beyond landing pages to which keywords match which content types as for example how an “educational search query” can match a blog post or an evergreen FAQ document.
- Build a **content map** or **content calendar**, laying out the matches between keyword themes or types and content to be produced.
 - Research which content tends to be *shared on social media* in your industry with an eye to the “social media” aspect of SEO and content.
 - Assign **content production** to team members, such as who will write which blog posts or which types of anchor or evergreen content.

- If you haven't already, set up a **blog** on your website. Begin to brainstorm your blog topics and *assign who is going to write what* with respect to your blog.

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Content* for my favorite free tools for content marketing. Just visit <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>.

»» **DELIVERABLE: A CONTENT MARKETING PLAN**

Now that you have a **content map** of your website vs. your keyword themes on your **keyword worksheet**, you are ready to produce your **DELIVERABLE: a content marketing plan**. Your content marketing plan will consist of these basic phases.

Phase 1: Quick Fix. Based on your keyword worksheet including the content map, conduct an inventory of existing pages. Adjust their TITLE tags, META DESCRIPTION tags, and content to bring that content into alignment with your logical Google searches. I usually also write a “keyword paragraph” and place on all website pages to increase keyword density and allow for link sculpting. Don’t forget to optimize the content of that all-important home page!

Phase 2: Content Inventory. Are you missing anything? Often times, there will be a very important keyword pattern that has no corresponding landing page, for example. Or your site will not have a blog, or you will have never set up a press release system. Inventory what you are missing and start to prioritize what needs to be done to get that content on your website. Commonly needed elements are:

- **Blog.** I recommend at least four blog posts per month; these can be on easy, man-on-the-street type themes but you really need to commit to at least four, and make sure that they are relevant vis-a-vis your keyword themes.
- **Press Releases.** As discussed in Chapter 4.2, I recommend at least two per month and (if possible), using the CISION / PRWEB system (<http://www.prweb.com/> or [Newswire \(https://www.newswire.com\)](https://www.newswire.com)) to syndicate them (cost is approximately \$350 / month).

- **Landing Pages.** Make sure that each major search has a corresponding landing page. In addition to your transactional landing pages, make sure that you brainstorm educational searches and create long form content such as FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) documents. These are great “link bait,” i.e. ways to attract inbound links to your website.
- **Anchor or Evergreen Content.** Consider writing the “ultimate” guide to major topics in your industry, provocative “hot button” issues, and other timely topics. This type of content is great to a) attract links, and b) to acquire customer email addresses and contact information. Most companies need to commit to one, and only one, type of anchor content.

Phase 3: Content Creation Process. Once you have done the Quick Fix to the website and created any missing landing pages, set up a blog, and/or set up a press releases system, you need to create a content creation schedule and process. This is an assessment of who will do what, when, where, and how to create the type of on-going content that Google and Web searchers will find attractive.

WORKSHEETS. For your **DELIVERABLE**, fill out the “content marketing worksheet,” specifically each phase. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” and enter the code ‘2018seo’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “content marketing worksheet.”



4.2

BLOGGING

Nothing is as easy or as powerful for SEO as blogging! While landing pages reflect your anchor keyword terms, and press releases can build inbound links via syndication, blogging allows you to sculpt content for narrower keyword queries as well as to respond quickly to industry buzz and trends. In addition, frequent blogging - like frequent press releases- sends a powerful signal to Google that your website is “fresh.” Every website should have a blog!

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Why Blog?
- » Make a Blog Calendar
- » Set Up Your Blog for Best SEO
- » Write SEO-friendly Blog Posts
- » Rank for Featured Snippets
- »» Checklist: Blogging Action Items
- »» Deliverables: Blog Calendar and Your First Blog Post

» WHY BLOG?

Why Blog? Blogging is one of the most powerful, highest return-on-investment (ROI) activities you can engage in, after you've SEO optimized your home page and your landing pages. Here's why. First, an active blog sends out a “freshness” signal to Google, Bing, and Yahoo saying “I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive.” You have to look at the world from Google's

perspective. Google's goal is to return highly relevant, active websites for any search query. So, if a user searches for a *pizza restaurant in Okmulgee, Oklahoma*, Google has a set of pizza websites to consider. It will choose the one that has optimized for the keywords "Pizza" and "Okmulgee," plus has active inbound links, plus has many reviews on Google, and – all things being equal – the one with the more active blog. Why? Because Google is concerned that the other pizza restaurant – the one without an active blog – is out of business. If it's June 3, 2018, and the last blog post on Website A was May 3, 2018, and the last blog post on Website B was June 1, 2017, and the last blog post on Website C was... well *Website C doesn't even have a blog...* then Website A is the winner (all things being equal). An active blog with recent blog posts on your keyword themes signals to Google, that you're alive.

AN ACTIVE BLOG TELLS GOOGLE, "YOU'RE ALIVE!"

Second, after freshness, a blog allows you to write content on micro or long tail search keywords. To use our pizza example, the primary keyword might be "Pizza" or "Pizza Okmulgee," but there may be some searches for "best pizza restaurants in Okmulgee for kids' birthday parties." These are *high value, low volume* searches. A quick blog post on how to select the best pizza restaurant in Okmulgee for kids birthdays is an easy way to get to the top of Google for these micro, or long-tail search phrases. So, an active blog allows you to create a lot of content on lots of varied themes. It costs next to nothing, and can be free advertising on long tail keyword queries. How great is that?

Third, an active blog increases the volume of content on your site. All things being equal the bigger site will win on Google. If, for example, Pizza restaurant A has ten pages, and Pizza restaurant B has one hundred pages, then Pizza restaurant B must be better in Google's eyes (all other factors being equal). Bigger means better; more content means a more serious website. Use the *site: command* plus your domain to check how many pages you have indexed on Google, and then use the Search Tools > Anytime > Past Month drop downs to find out if you have new content that is being indexed by Google. Here's a screenshot:

site:jasonmcdonald.org

All Images News Shopping Maps More Search tools

Any time ▾ All results ▾

- Any time
- Past hour
- Past 24 hours
- Past week
- Past month
- Past year

Custom range...

[Search Console](#)
Get indexing and ranking data from Google.

[Consultant - San Francisco: Social Media AdWor](#)
Media expert. San Francisco Bay Area. Jason McDonald: 'Cons

[Donald - SEO / Social Media Consultant, San .](#)
I teach Search Engine Optimization (SEO), AdWords / Pay-per-click Advertising and So

Remember it's *site: no space and your domain* as in *site:jasonmcdonald.org* in the Google search bar. To see this in action, visit <http://jmlinks.com/14d>.

Fourth, a blog allows you to pass link juice up to your landing pages. When you blog on *best pizza restaurant in Okmulgee for kids*, you can link "up" to the landing page for *Pizza* and the landing page for *Okmulgee Pizza* when you use those phrases in your blog, again passing "freshness" and "link juice" up to those landing pages. Finally, a blog (especially long form blog posts) can act as "link bait." When you write an interesting, in-depth blog post on an industry topic, especially trending or puzzling topics, people are likely to find it and link to it, thereby attracting links to your website. In addition, people often share blog articles on social media, helping you both for SEO (by getting social mentions of your URLs and website) and social media marketing (by creating sticky, interesting, sharable content that gets your brand in front of more customers).

In summary, you just gotta blog!

» MAKE A BLOG CALENDAR

As you begin to blog, remember to stick with your keyword themes. Don't blog on just anything – blog on topics that contain your keywords. Stay on topic.

As an SEO Content strategist, look around your company and identify blog topics as well as other company employees who can contribute to the blog. Unlike press releases, blog posts can be much more informal, opinionated and quick. So whereas you might generate just two press releases per month, set a goal of at least one blog post per week, if not more. I generally recommend two press releases per month and four blog posts per month as a solid website goal. The word *blog*, after all, comes from *web log*, and is meant as a running commentary on what's going on on your website, at your business, and in your industry.

COMMIT TO FOUR BLOG POSTS PER MONTH

Think of Captain Kirk on the Starship Enterprise: "*Captain's log, Stardate 4.2.51535, Spock and I have beamed down to the planet to investigate. I will check out the beautiful women, and Spock will be taking soil samples.*" Kirk logged, and logged, and logged his way across his five year mission, and he was pretty shameless. So don't be shy: blog, blog, blog, blog, blog! If you don't toot your own horn, no one will.

You cannot overblog! As long as your blog content is fresh, original, and keyword-heavy, all blogs posts will help your SEO. The more the merrier!

A Blog Calendar

Depending on your company size, a blog calendar can help you keep track of possible blog topics and themes. You can also assign out the blog posts to different members of your team. Don't try to do all the blogging yourself.

Here is a sample blog calendar for a hypothetical roofing company in Dallas, TX.

SAMPLE BLOG TOPIC:	WHEN TO POST:
We complete a roofing job.	Write a blog post about each roofing job, when completed, with information on the city where the job was located, the type of roofing material used, and customer reaction. Goal is to help with geotargeted searches.
Our day-to-day in a host city for a job.	Because geographic search terms are important for a roofing company, create city-specific blog posts such as your favorite “taco joint” in the city, or variances in city roofing codes.
Industry trends and events	Any time there is an industry trend, such as a new roofing material, chime in with an opinion. Ditto for any industry events or events in the Dallas, Texas, area.
New website content	Blog about our website, explaining what new content we are creating and why.
Partnership Announcements	Identify potential blog opportunities with our partners.
Industry Awards or Milestones	Any time we win an industry award or cross a milestone (such as the 1000th follower on Twitter), it's time for a blog post!

You'll see many similarities between successful SEO blogging and SEO press releases. The difference is one of degree: blogging is quicker, more informal, and more a quantity play vs. the more formal, higher quality status of press releases. Commit to writing four blog posts per month, and stick with it.

» SET UP YOUR BLOG FOR BEST SEO

The best blog platform by far is WordPress (<http://wordpress.org/>). Ask your web designer and/or ISP to install WordPress on your site. If you are building a new site, use an ISP like GoDaddy that makes WordPress a “one click” installation. And, if you don’t have the budget for WordPress, I recommend Google’s blogger platform at <http://www.blogger.com/>. Regardless of your platform, follow these basic principles for successful SEO blogging:

Host your blog on your own site. Blogging helps with site freshness vis-a-vis Google as well as acts as link bait. So it makes little sense to host your blog on another site. If at all possible, host your blog at your own domain in the position of <http://www.company.com/blog>.

Check each blog post for good SEO. As you write a blog post, check to make sure that your blogging platform allows for basic “On Page” SEO: a keyword heavy TITLE tag, META DESCRIPTION tag, the use of the header family, one image with the alt attribute defined, and keyword-heavy cross-links.

Make sure your blog allows for keyword heavy tagging and cross-indexing. Make sure that your blog allows you to “tag” a post with keywords and that these “tags” act as URL cross-links.

Verify that your blog URLs are keyword heavy. Numeric, parameter-centric URLs are very bad for SEO, so make sure that your blog generates keyword-heavy URLs for each post.

At the home page level, a best practice is to have “one click” links from your home page down to at least three, rotating blog posts. If you are running WordPress, be sure to install the Yoast SEO plug in (<https://yoast.com/>).

Tag Your Blog in WordPress

Many people do not correctly “tag” each blog post, yet tagging is incredibly important to SEO-friendly blogging! Make sure that your blog tags match your keyword themes, and make sure that when you write a blog post each post gets tagged. One of the better blogs to emulate is by Nolo press (<http://blog.nolo.com/>). Here’s a screenshot of the tags at the bottom of the page for a post on bankruptcy forms:



WordPress has two types of tagging: “categories” and “tags.” From an SEO perspective, both accomplish the same thing: lumping your posts into SEO-friendly cross-linked URL’s. Both are strongly encouraged because both give Google an SEO-friendly URL structure to grab onto. Here’s a link to the Nolo blog “Chapter 7” tag: <http://jmlinks.com/14j>. Notice how the practitioners at Nolo are churning out blog post after blog post on their keyword theme of “Chapter 7,” and related keywords! And notice the URL structure itself, which mimics the target keywords and signals to Google that this blog has quite a bit of content on bankruptcy:

<http://blog.nolo.com/bankruptcy/tag/chapter-7/>

Another example of a good blog can be found on Thomas Upchurch Law. Check out their blog at <http://jmlinks.com/14g>. Notice how he blogs on his target keyword themes such as “estate planning” and “will contests.” To find good blog examples in your own industry, go to Google and do a search for your keywords as in “probate” plus “blog” and then browse the top websites. For an example search, visit <http://jmlinks.com/14h>.

» WRITE SEO-FRIENDLY BLOG POSTS

Blogging is a complementary SEO content strategy to your anchor landing pages, your home page, your product pages, and your press releases. Whereas anchor landing pages focus on your evergreen anchor keyword terms, your blog can focus on more keyword-specific, timely topics. Blogging is especially useful for posting content that responds to quick industry trends. Here are the steps to writing a good blog post:

1. **Identify the target keywords.** A good blog post is laser focused on a very narrow keyword, so do your keyword research first! Use Ubersuggest.io, Google

autocomplete, and the Google Keyword Planner to identify keyword topics and related keywords to your targets.

2. **Follow “On Page” SEO best practices.** Make sure that your post follows all of the “On Page” rules such as a keyword heavy TITLE, META description, at least one image with an ALT attribute that contains the target keyword, etc.
3. **Consider an action or purpose.** Have a defined action for each blog post, usually by embedding a link from the blog post “up to” one of your defined anchor landing pages. Another use of blog posts such as “Top Ten Things that Can Go Terribly Wrong at Your Wedding” is link bait or share bait; people will link to informative, provocative, shocking blog posts and/or share them on social media.
4. **Tag your blog post.** Identify keyword themes for your blog that match those of your keyword worksheet and recognize that each blog post is part of a keyword cluster, supporting the entire website’s SEO themes.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on SEO-friendly blogging posts at <http://jmlinks.com/17t>.

For a template on an SEO friendly blog post, visit <http://jmlinks.com/14e>. For a fun blog topic generator, check out <http://jmlinks.com/14f>.

» RANK FOR FEATURED SNIPPETS

It's no secret that Google is going all out for **voice search**. As Google's own *Google home* begins to compete with Amazon's *Alexa* and Apple's *Siri*, there's a gold rush towards voice searches on the phone and in the home. “Hey Google! How do you tie a tie?” or “Hey Google! How tall is Donald Trump?” or “Hey Google! What are the best movies of 2018?” are becoming common searches as we “talk” to computers on our phone and in our home.

Accordingly, Google has rolled out what are called **featured snippets**. For example, here's the featured snippet for “How to tie a tie” (<http://jmlinks.com/38h>).

A screenshot of a Google search results page. The search query "how to tie a tie" is entered in the search bar. Below the search bar, there are five tabs: All (which is underlined in blue), Videos, Images, News, and Books. A message indicates "About 278,000,000 results (0.55 seconds)". The main content area features a large, bold title "The Windsor Knot Tying Instructions". Below the title is a numbered list of four steps: 1. Start with the wide end of the tie on the the small end on the left. ... 2. Wide end over the small end to the left. 3. Up into the neck loop from underneath. 4. Down to the left.

Featured snippets or also often called “Answer Boxes,” and they are prominent text that occurs on some types of search queries.

Featured snippets frequently occur for searches that are *educational* in nature such as “how to” do something, as well as ratings and reviews, such as “best” of such-and-such as in “best SEO conferences.” They also tend to occur for financial, mathematical and other type of “requirement” queries such as “what are the best home mortgage rates” or “improve my credit score.” But they occur for transactional queries such as “What are the top selling cars of 2017?” and so forth.

Related to featured snippets is a subordinate box called “People Also Ask” or *PAs*. If you search for “improve my credit score,” for example, you’ll also see a box labeled “People also ask.” Here’s a screenshot:

People also ask

How do you increase your credit score?

How can I improve my credit rating?

How can I improve my credit score without a credit card?

How do you increase your credit limit?

Each of the PAAs is essentially a featured snippet in its own right, so the rules of ranking are essentially the same (though not the same answer shows for a featured snippet in its own right vs. a PAA to a related snippet!).

How to Rank for Featured Snippets

It's not easy to rank for a featured snippet, but when you do you get a lot of traffic from Google. Here are the steps to rank for a featured snippet:

1. Identify **relevant search queries** for your company that are also likely to generate a featured snippet such as "how to," "best," or "step-by-step" questions. Pay special attention to those queries that are already generating featured snippets in your industry.
2. **Write and optimize a blog post** vis-à-vis the target featured snippet query, using HTML for numbered or bulleted lists, tables, and other designations that clearly indicate to Google this is "organized" or "step-by-step" content.
 - a. Along the way "regurgitate" the **question(s)** and **answer(s)** to Google, as in "How do make chicken soup," you ask? Well, first, you bring the chicken stock to a boil, second, you add in the vegetables." Imagine you are a Google Home, Alexa, or Siri device that is being asked a question such as "How do you make chicken soup," and you are "answering" step by step.
3. Use all your **Off Page SEO tactics** such as mentioning your post on social media, featuring it on your home page, building external links to it, etc. Conduct an "Off

Page” SEO audit and look for opportunities to promote your potential featured snippets.

Don’t get discouraged. it’s not easy to rank for featured snippets, but it is incredibly valuable. Featured snippets are relatively new and not everyone even agrees on what factors decide which queries generate them, and which factors determine who wins “Position 0,” (“Position Zero”), which is another term for featured snippets. For more information on featured snippets, see <http://jmlinks.com/38k>.

»» CHECKLIST: BLOGGING ACTION ITEMS

Here are your blog **Action Items**:

- **Set up your blog** if you haven’t already; I recommend the WordPress platform. Be sure to enable “WordPress tags” so you can “tag” individual posts on your keyword themes.
- Create a blog **content calendar**, laying out the matches between keyword themes or types and blog posts to be produced.
- **Research** which content tends to be *shared on social media* in your industry with an eye to the “social media” aspect of SEO and content.
- Assign **blog content production** to team members, such as who will write which blog posts and how frequently. Set a goal of at least four blog posts per month.
- **Write each** SEO-friendly **blog post** with an eye to what Google wants (keyword-heavy, SEO-friendly tags and content) and what humans want (interesting, fun content that answers their needs or questions).
- After you write a blog post, use Google Search Console’s **fetch as Google** feature to notify Google to index your content. Then, use `site:yourdomain.com/blogpost.html` to verify that your content is being indexed.
- Make sure that your **home page** has your **three most recent blog posts** on it with “one click” links down to them and that each blog post links “up” to your target landing pages.
- Try to rank for **featured snippets**. They’re the new, new thing!

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Blog Tools* for my favorite free tools for blogging. Just visit <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>.

» **DELIVERABLES: A BLOG CALENDAR AND A SAMPLE BLOG POST**

The **DELIVERABLE** for this chapter is your blog calendar. This can be as simple as a Word document or Google document that serves as an “idea list” of when to generate a blog post. The goal is to avoid writer’s block and get into a rhythm of generating at least one blog post per week, if not more. The second **DELIVERABLE** is your first SEO-friendly blog post, uploaded to your own site and tagged with appropriate (keyword) tags. Use the “page tags worksheet” to step through an SEO-friendly blog post from keyword target to final content.



4.3

PRESS RELEASES

After you've created your landing pages, anchor or evergreen content, and begun to blog, it's time to shift gears towards *Off Page SEO*. We'll cover Off Page theory in greater detail in the next Chapter, but for now just realize that you want people to talk about your website on the Web. An easy way to get started is to issue formal **press releases** and syndicate them via a paid service such as NewsWire or Cision. Why? Because Google rewards sites that have fresh content, and press releases get you easy inbound links.

Here are the reasons. First, websites that have new, fresh content (for example, a press release or blog post put up in the last week) are clearly more "alive" than websites that never get updated. We live in a fast-paced world, and users want the *latest* iPhone software, the *latest* news about Donald Trump, and the *latest* nutritional supplement. Google wants to give users the latest and greatest on any topic as well. Second, fresh content signals to Google that your website and business are still alive vs. the many "walking dead" websites that reflect businesses dead or dying in this age of economic turmoil. And third, press releases have a unique SEO advantage: **syndication**. Free and paid syndication services like PRLog, NewsWire, and Cision's PRWeb connect with blogs, portals, other websites and even Twitter feeds to push your press releases across the Web, creating inbound buzz and backlinks which Google interprets as signs of community authority. Press release SEO, in short, gives a three-for-one benefit!

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » What is a Press Release?
- » Make a Press Release Calendar
- » Upload Your SEO-Friendly Press Releases
- » Leverage Press Release Syndication Services

»»» Checklist: Press Release Action Items

»»» Deliverables: Press Release Worksheet

» WHAT IS A PRESS RELEASE?

Have you ever heard the quip about the weather, that everyone talks about it, but no one does anything about it? Or, if you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own? Well, there's some truth in these adages: you need to toot your own (marketing) horn to be successful, and press releases allow this in spades.

But what is a press release, and how does it differ from a blog post? Think of a blog post as a much shorter, more informal, off-the-cuff type of content vs. a more formal press release in which your company FORMALLY ANNOUNCES something NEW AND EXCITING. A common example would be when you launch a new product. If you're the Ford Motor Company, for instance, and you're announcing the new and improved 2018 Mustang, then it's time for a press release, usually written in the format of:

***Detroit, Michigan – January 2, 2018.** The Ford Motor Company, the leading producer of American-made sports vehicles, is proud to announce their new 2018 Mustang. With a venerable history as an American “muscle” car, the new 2018 Mustang will also be eco-friendly with its hybrid engine.*

etc. etc.

Basically Ford has some NEWS and it's ANNOUNCING that news to the world via press release.

You can browse sample press releases at <http://jmlinks.com/13x> and <http://jmlinks.com/13y>. Focus on those in your industry, and notice how company after company is “tooting its own horn” by announcing “news.”

» MAKE A PRESS RELEASE CALENDAR

What can make a good press release? **Almost anything.** Keep your keyword worksheet in mind and look for press release opportunities around your company, products, or services that match up with your SEO keyword targets. I recommend you create a **press release calendar** of opportunities.

Tip. Many people are too “shy,” acting as if they and their company don’t have any “legitimate” news. Don’t be shy! If you don’t toot your own horn, no one will toot it for you. And remember that for SEO purposes, we’re really aiming our promotion at Google, so if “real people” read our press releases, that’s great, but our real objective is to use press releases to influence Google to rank our website higher. If they influence Google, we’re happy!

For your first **TODO**, open up a Word document, title it “Press Release Calendar,” and write down a list of possible press release topics and dates of the release. For example:

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE TOPIC:	WHEN TO RELEASE:
New product or service	Every time you have a new product or service, generate a press release.
Annual Trade Show	Generate a press release before the annual trade show, as well as after announcing your participation to celebrate your success.
Personnel Changes	Generate a press release for every major corporate hire.
New website content	Generate a press release after any major blog post, list of “top seven resources,” infographic, etc., and even when you update a landing page or anchor content.
Partnership Announcements	Generate a press release after any cooperative partnership with a company or supplier.
Industry Awards or Milestones	Any time you win an industry award or cross a milestone (such as the 1000th follower on Twitter), it’s time for a press release!

Your **press release calendar** will help keep you focused, and tie your press release opportunities to your keyword worksheet. The goal is to avoid writer's block and get into a rhythm of at least two press releases per month, minimum. Have a company meeting and divvy up the responsibilities by assigning writing a press release to different people in the company for different events, or for different months. Make your SEO a "team sport," rather than attempting to do it all yourself.

Steps to Writing an SEO-friendly Press Release

Once you have an idea in hand, here are the steps to create a press release:

1. Identify the **press release idea**. Realize that a press release can be not only a new product or a new technology but something as simple as your participation in a trade show, an event that you may be having, a new hire, new inventory, or even your commentary on an industry trend. **Literally, anything new can become a press release!**
2. Connect the press release idea to a **target keyword** from your keyword worksheet. The point of generating press releases, after all, is to improve keyword performance.
3. Include an *http://* format link to your website in your press release, preferably near the target keywords. For example, have a sentence that says something like "*To learn more about our amazing car insurance, visit <http://www.ourcompany.com/car-insurance>.*"
4. Create your **press release** following "**SEO best practices**" for on page SEO as explained in Chapter 3.1. Be sure to include your keywords in the Headline / Title, and in the actual content of the release itself.
5. **Upload** the press release to your website, be sure that your website has a press release section with each press release on an independent URL, and include a "one click" link from the home page to the press release.
6. Leverage free and/or paid **syndication services** such as PRLog.org and PRWeb.com to proliferate mentions of your press releases around the Internet.

» **UPLOAD YOUR SEO-FRIENDLY PRESS RELEASES**

Double-check your press release to make sure that it follows "On Page" SEO best practices. Here's your checklist:

ITEM	SEO PAGE TAG STRUCTURE
Pithy, exciting headline	<TITLE> tag
First paragraph with “main idea”	<META DESCRIPTION> tag and first paragraph. Include a link to your website in the first paragraph usually around a keyword phrase.
Target URL	A target URL on your website, to which you want to attract Google. Embed this in the first paragraph, and have it as a “naked” URL (http://) format in the third paragraph.
Several paragraphs describing your news and an image.	Write keyword heavy copy and include at least one image with ALT attribute.
Contact information for more info.	Embedded URL early in the press release, set up in http:// format plus contact information at the end of the release

In other words, follow your HTML page tag template to optimize your press release in terms of its on-page SEO. Be sure to embed your target keywords in your <TITLE> tag, and use best SEO practices like the H1 family, , , ALT attributes, for images etc. Write **keyword-heavy** text for the press release body! Make sure that it has a snappy <TITLE> and a snappy META DESCRIPTION / first paragraph so that people will be interested in “reading more.”

At the website structure level, your best practice is to have a directory called “news” as in <http://www.yourcompany.com/news/> and to host each press release in HTML linked to from a primary news gateway page. I also recommend that you run at least three press releases on your home page, with “one click” links down to each new press release. All of this freshens your website and pulls Google into your new content.

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on how to write an SEO-friendly press release at <http://jmlinks.com/18f>.

Good examples of press releases can be found <http://jmlinks.com/13z> and <http://jmlinks.com/14a>. Duct Tape Marketing has a nifty tool to help you write a press release at <http://jmlinks.com/14b>. Here's a screenshot:

The screenshot shows the homepage of Duct Tape Marketing. The header features a large, stylized logo with "DUCT TAPE" on top and "MARKETING" below it. To the right of the logo, the text "The World's Most..." is visible. Below the header, there are three main navigation links: "Small Business Products", "Coaching Services Workshops/Speaking", and "Marketing". The main content area contains a large, bold instruction: "Fill in the blanks for each section below and hit "Show Me The Press". You will then be directed to your perfectly formatted press release". Below this, a note says "(Hit reset if you want to start over Bookmark this page and come back often.)". There are several input fields: "Timing" (set to "For Immediate Release"), "Your Contact Name" (a placeholder text), "Contact" (an empty input field), "Your Company Name" (a placeholder text), "Company" (an empty input field), and "Your phone number" (an empty input field). The entire form is contained within a light blue border.

Press Releases After the Penguin Update

Before the Penguin update to Google, you could use Press Releases to “optimize” your inbound links. (Remember that the Penguin update is a Google algorithm penalty for suspicious inbound links). For example, you’d create a bunch of press releases all linking back to your site around the phrase “industrial fans” or “motorcycle insurance.” This manipulation did not make Google happy, so the search giant pressured the major services to add the NOFOLLOW tag to their releases, which nullified much of this benefit, as part of Google’s so-called Penguin algorithm update.

Thus, for a short while, press releases had little impact on SEO. However, there is always another turn of the screw. Now, despite the fact that press release URL's remain "nofollow" in most circumstances, Google does tend to reward sites that issue them. (*Trust me: I know this based on client experiments; the reason probably being that in many industries, Google has so few links to choose from among competing sites that the sheer quantity of press release links can be sufficient to help a site get to the top*).

In addition, if you use ONLY the *http://* format for your clickable links, there are still a small percentage of sites that retain the DOFOLLOW link structure. So be sure to include links FROM the press release BACK to your site in the format of **http://www.company.com**. The reality is that Google is often forced to choose not between two GREAT sites to rank for a search query but between two just OK sites: if yours is the site with a few inbound links via Press Releases, including *nofollow* links, you can often win.

The perfect is the enemy of the good (Voltaire).

You don't have to run faster than the bear, just faster than your buddy (Unknown).

Google might publicly say one thing, but the reality might be something altogether different and this includes the value of nofollow links.

To see examples of Press Releases issued by the JM Internet Group with examples of proper link formatting, visit **http://jmlinks.com/6q**. As is so often true in SEO, “A little salt is good for the soup, but too much salt ruins it.” In other words, I recommend that you create two – *but no more than two* – press releases per month for syndication, that you use the *http://* format in your links, and that you write them in proper English with real or quasi-real news in them. Strive for them to be “good for humans” and “good for Google,” and they work.

» LEVERAGE PRESS RELEASE SYNDICATION SERVICES

Once you've created your press release and uploaded it to your own website, you are ready to leverage press release syndication services. The best **free** service is PRLog.org (<http://www.prlog.org/>) and the best **paid** services are Newswire (<https://www.newswire.com>) and PRWeb.com ([http://www.prweb.com/](http://www.prweb.com)), owned by Cision. You can learn more about the available packages from Newswire at <http://jmlinks.com/35e>. Cision is just as good at a technical level, if not a bit better,

but their website is so stupidly designed you can't make heads or tails of it, so just call them at 866-459-2598 and inquire about their press release packages. They also run PRWEB at <http://www.prweb.com> which has self-service options.

If you have budget, I highly recommend setting up a paid account on one of these services. With a yearly package, the cost per release is about \$175. A paid service gets you many times the benefit of the free services like PRLog.org.

After you've set up your account on one of these services, open your press release in one browser window. In another window, log into the press release syndication service and begin the process of submitting a release. Copy and paste the following from your press release into the syndication service -

Headline. Make sure it includes your target keywords!

Quick Summary. Write a pithy, exciting one-to-two sentence summary. This will usually become your META DESCRIPTION tag on the syndication service.

News Body. Copy and paste your news body. Be sure to embed a URL after the first or second paragraph, and write in the simple *http://* format (since embedded links may not be retained in syndicated press releases).

URL / Active Link. Make sure that your press release has at least one prominent link to your website, and **make sure it is in the http:// format.** News is especially good at getting Google to index new web pages on your site!

Contact Information. Include a description of your company with a Web link and email address for more information. This is another link-building opportunity.

Tags. Select appropriate tags for keyword / content issues as well as target geographies.

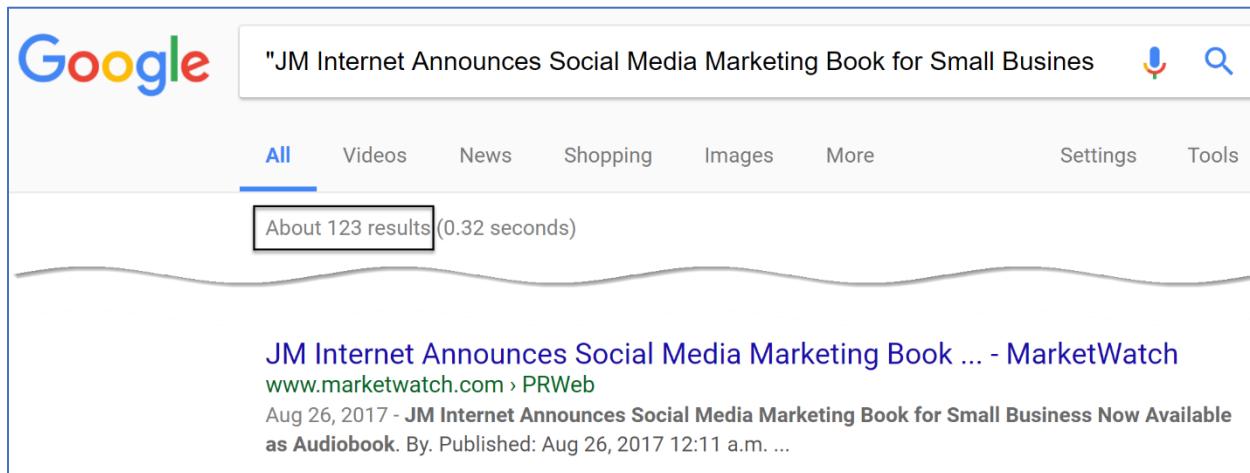
Finally, commit to publishing press releases on your website and using news syndication on a regular, consistent basis. It's better to publish one release per month, consistently, than six releases in one month and nothing for six months. For an online press release template, visit <http://jmlinks.com/6r>. To see sample press releases on PRWEB as written by the JM Internet Group visit <http://jmlinks.com/14c>.

VIDEO. Watch a quick video tutorial on how to syndicate press releases at <http://jmlinks.com/18f>.

WORKSHEETS. For the corresponding worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” enter the code ‘2018seo’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “press release worksheet.”

Measure Your Results

As you churn out press releases, measure your syndication by doing Google searches for the headline of your release in quotation marks. For example, our press release headlined, “JM Internet Announces Social Media Marketing Book for Small Business Now Available as Audiobook” garnered approximately 123 results on Google (<http://jmlinks.com/38m>). Here’s a screenshot:



In this way, you’re getting the benefit of syndication links back to your website, pickup on real sites on the Internet, and even social media pickups on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. You can even go into Google Analytics and measure referrals from various websites that ran your press release, in that way seeing which actual websites real people read and click over from.

»» CHECKLIST: PRESS RELEASE ACTION ITEMS

Here are your press release **Action Items**:

- **Identify** press release **opportunities** around your company such as new products, participation in trade shows, new hires, or even pseudoevents such as new blog posts.
 - Create a **press release calendar** of two press releases per month.
 - **Write** each press release *following SEO best practices* and post to your website.
 - **Syndicate** your press release via a service such as PRLOG, PRWEB, or NEWSWIRE and include an *http://* format link in the release.
 - **Measure** your results, especially replication across the Internet, by searching for your press release by the headline in quotation marks

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Press Releases* for my favorite free tools for press release issues. Just visit **<http://jmlinks.com/seodash>**.

» DELIVERABLES: A PRESS RELEASE CALENDAR AND A SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

The first **DELIVERABLE** for this chapter is your press release calendar. This can be as simple as a Word document or Google document that serves as an “idea list” of when to generate a press release. The goal is to avoid writer’s block and get into a rhythm of generating at least two press releases per month. The second **DELIVERABLE** is an SEO-friendly press release, uploaded to your own site and pushed out via a syndication service such as PRLOG.org or PRWEB.com. Use the “press release worksheet” to guide you to success.



5.1

LINK BUILDING

Steps #1 to #3 are “On Page” SEO: things you do to your own website. **Step #4** is about **content**: *content marketing, blogging and press releases*. In **Step #5**, we cross the Rubicon, shifting our attention 100% to the actions of others through “Off Page” SEO. Just as *references* matter to an effective job search, external *links* matter a great deal to effective SEO.

Step #5 in the **Seven Steps to SEO Success**, therefore, is to “go social.” Google pays incredible attention to how others talk about your website, whether in the format of inbound HTML *links* or inbound *social mentions*. We’ll turn first to **links**, the more traditional of the two, and in the next chapter look directly at **social authority** and **social mentions**. In Chapter 5.3, we’ll turn to **reviews**, which for local companies, are a key aspect of “Off Page” SEO.

Remember that a link *from* a directory, blog, web portal, or other industry site *to* your website is counted as a **vote** by Google that your site is important. The *more* links (votes) you have, the *higher* you show on Google search results for your target keywords. But how do you get links? In this Chapter, we outline the basics of effective link building for SEO.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Understand Links and Off Page SEO
- » Beware the Penguin
- » Define Your Link Objectives
- » Solicit the Easy Links First
- » Identify Directory, Blog, and Other Link Targets
- » Reverse Engineer Competitors’ Links

- » Create Link Bait
- »» Checklist: Link Building Action Items
- »» Deliverable: Link Building Worksheet

» **UNDERSTAND LINKS AND OFF PAGE SEO**

Google's genius was to be the first search engine that effectively counted links as votes. Prior to Google, search engines basically looked at page content, and it was therefore very difficult to figure out which site was better if the page content itself contained the keywords. Google realized that you could look at how websites linked to other sites, in a kind of grand vote scheme on the Internet.

For example, why do I rank so well for the searches *SEO expert Bay Area*, or *AdWords Expert Witness*? Among the reasons is that I have many sites linking to JasonMcDonald.org. BAVC.org, for one, links to my website, JasonMcDonald.org at <http://jmlinks.com/6u>. In this way, BAVC.org is “voting” that my website is important. Similarly, the Authors Guild (*Authorsguild.net*) (<http://jmlinks.com/18w>) also links to me. These “votes” reinforce my On Page SEO and propel me to the top of relevant searches on Google. The same is true for Progressive.com and Geico.com for searches in the insurance industry; these sites have many *other* sites linking back to them, thus “voting” to Google that these are the “most important” sites for a query like “motorcycle insurance.”

Links are Like Votes

In short, a site with *more links to its website from other sites* than its competitors have is seen by Google as more important, and ranks higher on Google, all other things being equal.

LINKS ARE LIKE VOTES

Think of *links* like *votes in an election*, and you'll begin to understand how it works.

Quantity. How do you win the US Presidential Election? Get more votes. Generally speaking, the candidate who wins the popular vote becomes president. (*OK, not always – but, at least, that's what we tell our kids!*) If two websites are competing, the website with more links must be more important and therefore wins. (**Link quantity**)

Quality. Not all votes are alike, however. The voter must correctly vote for a candidate by marking his or her name correctly on the ballot. (*Think hanging chads in Florida and confusion about voter intent in 2000*). If two websites are competing, the website with more links that contain the keyword target will win (**Link syntax**).

Authority. Not all votes are equal. In the 2016 Presidential election, the votes of people in Michigan counted a lot more than the votes of people in California. Indeed, if you look back to 2000, the votes of the justices on the Supreme Court counted the most, throwing that election to George Bush, even though Al Gore had won the popular vote. (**Link authority** or **PageRank**).

In general, therefore, links are like votes, and you want to secure as many external websites as possible linking to your website. But that's not the whole story; it's more complicated than simple quantity (*just like votes in a US Presidential election*), so you need a more detailed understanding of how Google counts links.

Let's dive in to the three variables at play in the game of link-getting or "link-building," as it is called in the industry.

#1 Link Quantity

All things being equal, the website that has *more* websites linking to it will rank higher on Google. If, for example, Website A in the "industrial fan" industry has 1,000 sites that link to it, and Website b has only 500 sites that link to it, Website A will rank higher on Google.

#2 Optimized Link Syntax

An *optimized link* contains the target SEO keyword. If, for example, Website A has many (or more) links that have the blue linkable text around the phrase "industrial fans" vs. Website B that has more links that say only **http://www.myfans.com/** or "click here," then – all things being equal, Website A will outrank Website B for the query "industrial fans" on Google.

If you're confused as to what an optimized link is, here's an example at <http://jmlinks.com/14m> (a link to me from the Professional Outdoor Media Association). Here's a screenshot:

Jason McDonald is one of POMA members' favorite conference presenters. Jason is director of the JM Internet Group, and has been active in Internet marketing since 1994, first in hi-tech for embedded engineers and increasingly in teaching **SEO, social media, and AdWords** to businesspeople and marketers online. Jason also teaches live at Stanford University's Continuing Studies Program as well as in San Francisco. His philosophy is can-do, and hands-on: to position Internet marketing as a marketing challenge – first- and a technical challenge, second. His published books include "**SEO Fitness Workbook**" and "**AdWords Gotchas**," both with many tens of positive review on Amazon. You can find Jason on the Internet by just Googling, 'Jason McDonald' (he's number 1). In his spare time, Jason is devoted to his new Labrador retriever puppy, Buddy.

And here's the HTML code:

```
<a href="http://www.jasonmcdonald.org/" target="_blank">SEO, social media, and AdWords</a>
```

This means that the link itself is telling Google to rank my website for the keywords *SEO, Social Media, and AdWords*. That's link **syntax**.

#3 Domain Authority or PageRank

If quantity matters, and quality or syntax matters, there's a third element: **authority**. Links from more powerful sites count for more than links from less powerful websites. It stands to reason, for example, that a link from the New York Times (NYTimes.com) is worth more than a link from the Tulsa World (Tulsaworld.com). Accordingly, the Google algorithm quantifies this difference in authority.

While Google doesn't share its algorithm, third-party tools like AHREFS.com allow you to peek behind the curtain and see the relative Domain Authority of different websites.

For example, NYTimes.com has a Domain Authority of 82, while TulsaWorld.com has a domain authority of 66. Similarly, the *Professionaloutdoormedia.org* has a Domain Authority of 51, and *BAVC.org* has one of 58. In other words, not all links are created or valued equally: a link from the NYTimes.com is worth an incredible amount, and link from Professionaloutdoormedia.org – while valuable – is not worth nearly as much.

If, in other words, Website A has more links from more *authoritative* websites than Website B, then – all things being equal – it will outrank Website B. *Authoritative* isn't just raw domain authority, however – it's *relevance*, too. For a Brahman cattle breeder, a link from Brahman.org may be worth more than a link from NYTimes.com because of the relevance of the linking website.

Summing Up

Before your head explodes with all this complexity, let's keep it simple. You want other websites to link to you –

1. in high **quantity** (more is better);
2. with the **right syntax** (try to get your keywords in the link text itself, rather than just an http:// link or a “click here” link); and
3. from **high Domain Authority** websites (NYTimes.com is worth more than TulsaWorld.com), as well as from sites that are **relevant to your industry** (a link from Brahman.org is worth more to a Brahman cattle ranch website than a link from Pizzaexpo.com).

In summary, **links** are like **votes**, and you want **quantity**, **quality**, and **authority**. As you solicit links from other websites, remember, however, that you won't always get a *trifecta* or perfect *quantity*, *quality*, and *authority* from a link, so get what you can. As Voltaire said, “The perfect is the enemy of the good.”

SOLICIT LINKS (AND DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF)

It Gets Complicated

This is only a simple model of how links work in the Google algorithm. The reality is more complicated. For instance, what if Website A has a higher quantity of links to it, but Website B has better syntax vis-à-vis the target keyword? Or, what if Website A has better syntax, but Website B has a few links from very high authority websites? Or what if Website A has many, high quality links but Website B has a few, high quality links and better “On Page” SEO? The Google algorithm takes all these factors into account; so remember, it’s not just *one* factor that propels you to the top of Google but the algorithmic *summation* of these weighted factors vs. your competitors.

Because “it’s complicated,” just remember – in general – to always be on the lookout for links to your website as you also remember that success at SEO is “everything working together” factor-by-factor.

A Word about NoFollow

Here’s another wrinkle about links and link-building. At a technical level, the `rel="nofollow"` attribute tells Google to ignore a link; these types of links are devalued by Google. So if you see *nofollow* in the HTML source code it’s a sign that given link is not as valuable. Here’s a screenshot of the Pokemon page on Wikipedia, for example, with an outbound link to the official Pokemon website:

External links

- Official Japanese website of *Pokémon*  (Japanese)
- Official US website of *Pokémon* 
- Official UK website of *Pokémon* 

And here’s the HTML source code showing the link, including the *nofollow* attribute, therefore nullifying the link:

```
<a rel="nofollow" class="external text"  
 href="http://www.pokemon.com/">Official US website of  
<i>Pokémon</i></a>
```

You can see it at <http://jmlinks.com/6w>. What this means is that the link FROM Wikipedia TO pokemon.com does NOT help its SEO because the *nofollow* attribute tells Google NOT to count the link as a vote. Commonly, as you look for links to get to your website, be sure to look at the source code and if you see the *nofollow* attribute then these links are not valuable. The most common “*nofollow*” links are links from blog comments, links from social media sites, and links from some associations or directories.

Note: a link that does NOT contain the *nofollow* attribute is commonly referred to as a *dofollow* link, although there isn’t technically a *dofollow* attribute.

Don’t freak out, however, and don’t overthink it. You don’t have to be an HTML source code genius to understand links! Just realize that, generally speaking, links in comments on blogs are all *nofollow*. Craig’s list, Wikipedia, and many directory links are also *nofollow*. Press release links are commonly *nofollow* too. These links are not as valuable as links that do not have the *nofollow* attribute (called *dofollow* links in SEO lingo).

However... in SEO there's always another twist of the screw...

Do Nofollow Links Matter?

The first take-away is that *nofollow* links do *not* help SEO. This is the official Google position and commonly held position in the SEO community. However (*there's always a however in SEO*), my opinion is that *nofollow* links actually *do* count, and can help your SEO. Think of links like a stock portfolio: you want diversity in your links – some *nofollow*, some *dofollow*, some in the HTTP format, some in your brand name, and some in your keyword syntax. *Nofollow* links are like “penny stocks” – one-by-one, not very valuable but in totality, they can indeed be valuable.

Google, in short, probably devalues the weight of *nofollow* links to the tune of 90% or 95%, but they still seem to carry some weight. No one knows for certain but because Google has terrified so many sites into making blank *nfollows* across all outbound links, Google has created a problem for itself. For many smaller sites (competing for many narrow keywords), there aren’t many links that differentiate site #1 from site #2. This is often the case for many small businesses. You might have ten links, and your competitor

might have seven. And if all (or most) of these links are nofollows, then Google still has to decide. Presto! *Nofollow* links suddenly count.

Just Get Links

Again, before give up in despair at all this technical mumbo-jumbo: just remember to **get links**. Ask customers, suppliers, and other business contacts whom you know to add a link FROM their website TO your website. It can be as simple as asking the janitorial company that cleans your office, or the pizza company that delivers your office pizza, to go on their website and add a link FROM their site TO your site. Or, to ask a customer who has a blog to write a product review about her experience, and have her include a link in that blog post FROM her blog TO your website. Or, ask Mom, Dad, Uncle Jay, your best friend... anyone who has a blog to write up an article about you, and link TO your website.

Register for professional associations that include links to your website. Set up your social profiles on Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and other sites. Ask everyone you know who has a website to write something about your company and link over to it.

Just get links!

Just like in real-world elections, the most important part of successful link building is sheer **quantity**. Politicians don't always sweat the small stuff; they kiss a lot of babies, and shake a lot of hands in their quest for high quality votes. So should you in your quest for links!

POLITICIANS KISS BABIES

SEOs ASK FOR LINKS

For further step-by-step directions on how to solicit links, I highly recommend the MOZ guide at <http://jmlinks.com/14n> and the Point Blank SEO link-building tactic list at <http://jmlinks.com/38r>.

» BEWARE THE PENGUIN

Google's "Penguin" update, launched in April 2012, is an on-going algorithm attack against artificial link-building. While officially Google says that you should NEVER "build links" but rather just wait "passively" for links to come to your site, a passive strategy will get you nowhere.

You can, must, and should "build links."

However, you have to be aware of Penguin, and solicit links in a smart fashion. First, let's consider what Penguin penalizes, and then let's turn to the "big picture" of link-building, post-Penguin.

First, Penguin penalizes a large quantity of in-bound links from "low quality" websites as well as "overoptimized links." "Low quality" websites are generally artificial blogs – blogs that are poorly written, contain non-related content, and are clearly created "for search engines" and not for people. A good example of this scenario is Indian-based SEO companies that built thousands upon thousands of blogs (called a blog network), and then (for money) will link back to your site around a target keyword phrase such as *Miami divorce attorney*, or *organic baby food*. It is easy for Google to detect this chicanery and penalize sites with this sort of a link footprint.

In fact, if you are solicited by SEO companies offering link schemes that directly involve posting links to your website on low quality blogs or low quality directories, do **NOT** fall for these schemes! They will hurt you much more than help you.

What are Overoptimized Links?

"Overoptimized" links are links from other websites to your website that all include the same keyword phrase over and over. A "divorce attorney," for example, might create / pay for / solicit links from blogs all around the exact phrase "divorce attorney." He would end up with, for example, 1000 blogs all linking back to his website, all having the format of:

bla, bla, bla, bla, bla **divorce attorney** (linking to:
<http://www.divorceattorneywebsite.com>) bla bla bla bla bla bla bla

Now, to have 1000 links all exactly alike, all linking back to the same website is “unnatural,” isn’t it? So what Penguin did was look at the “link footprint” of websites and identify “unnatural” link footprints. It then penalizes these sites by taking them off of Google or harshly pushing them from Page 1 to Page 101.

Penguin looks for “unnatural” link profiles: many links from low quality blogs or directories as well as many optimized links. You can use the Remove ‘em tool at <http://jmlinks.com/6x> to check your own link footprint.

Link Diversity

Second, when building links post-Penguin, you should a) never solicit links from low quality blogs and/or easy, free directories, and certainly not get links from sites that blatantly advertise “links for sale,” and b) pay attention to the (over)optimization of your link structure. A good general rule of thumb is 1/3 *http://* links, 1/3 *branded* links (links to your company name), and 1/3 *optimized* links. In HTML code these are written as:

Check out Jason McDonald’s SEO consulting website at <https://www.jasonmcdonald.org/> (naked or http link).

Check out [" >Jason McDonald's](http://www.jasonmcdonald.org/) SEO consulting website. (branded link)

Check out Jason McDonald, an amazing [" >SEO consultant](http://www.jasonmcdonald.org/) in San Francisco. (optimized link)

Link diversity means having people link to you in different formats, and to get links from a variety of sources: trade associations, blogs, directories, non-profits, etc.

Fortunately, for most companies, too many links and *too many* overoptimized links are the least of their problems; most companies just have *too few* links. But, that said, if you engage in serious link-building, you must “beware the Penguin” and build a “natural” yet robust inbound link profile. Build links at your own risk!

Outbound Links from Your Website

Finally, Penguin penalizes websites that are “too perfect.” Pre-Penguin, many SEO experts would advise you never to link out FROM your website TO other websites. This advice is no longer correct; a website that has zero outbound links looks suspicious to Google. Similarly, many websites would use the *nofollow* attribute on all outbound links, or to “sculpt” links internally. After Penguin, this kind of behavior is a dead giveaway that you are attempting to manipulate Google. So, don’t be “too perfect.”

Do not refuse to link outbound to other websites because a website with zero outbound links looks suspicious to Google.

Do not “nofollow” all your links to other websites, as the use of “nofollow” on all outbound links can also look suspicious to Google.

Do not “nofollow” certain internal links in an attempt to link sculpt, as this also looks suspicious to Google.

Therefore, post-Penguin, I advise you to strategically link out to highly reputable websites in your industry. A breeder of Brahman cattle, for example, should link out to sites like the National Brahman Association (brahman.org) as well as other websites in the cattle industry. A San Francisco attorney might link to the city of San Francisco (SFgov.org). The objective is to convince Google that you are a good “Net citizen,” and you are linking *out* as well as receiving links *in*. Just keep your outbound links to a minimum, and make sure that they are to highly reputable sites in your own industry.

You may also hear a warning that “reciprocal links” will cancel each other out – if the Brahman cattle breeder is listed on Brahman.org, and he also links over to Brahman.org, this will “cancel out” the “link juice,” for instance. While this might theoretically have some truth in it, in practical terms I do not find this to be so. Yes, it is better if people only link to you (and you do not reciprocate), but I just wouldn’t stress this too much. In all of this, I am assuming you have a) relevant links, and b) you aren’t massively engaging in reciprocal link schemes. So much of proper link building is proper scale. Did I ever mention to you, that “A little salt is good for the soup, but too much salt ruins the soup?” Don’t overdo any type of link-building.

Google’s Hypocrisy

As we conclude this explanation of what links are, why they matter, and the basic ideas on how to build links *post-Penguin*, let me stop for a moment and talk about Google’s hypocrisy. Google famously had the phrase “Don’t be evil” as their corporate motto, which

besides being pretentious, has probably turned out to be yet another empty platitude by yet another big corporation. Google, like all big corporations, keeps its eyes on profits, and has a very effective corporate marketing machine working hard to create a brand image of efficiency and honesty. Google isn't any better, or any worse, than any other big corporation.

In terms of links, the official propaganda of Google is that no one should ever build links. (Read it at <http://jmlinks.com/14r>). In Google's opinion, we should all just passively wait until links "spontaneously" emerge on the Web, and then Google will "objectively" evaluate the link footprint of competing websites and choose the "best" website to place at the top of its results.

I'm sorry to destroy your illusions, but if you've read this far in this book, you should realize, by now, that the idea that Google results are "objective" is pretty ridiculous. It's a competitive war between companies to get to the top, and in any serious keyword competition, everyone is working very hard to "manipulate" Google. Your competitors (at least the smart ones) are building links, and you pretty much have to, too, even though Google's official public line is that you should NEVER solicit links.

Everyone, quite simply, has to violate the rules without any clear guidance as to what the "real" rules are. Google simply looks the other way, and occasionally smacks down a vendor or two when it gets out of hand. You can either be 100% compliant with Google's policy on links (*and end up spending a fortune on AdWords*), or you can violate Google's policy and succeed.

It gets worse. Google even encourages companies to "turn in" competitors that are violating its policies. Watch an official video on this at <http://jmlinks.com/14t>. You can even "turn in" a competitor via the official Google webspam form at <http://jmlinks.com/14u>. Here's a screenshot:



Search Console

Help us maintain the quality of Google search results.

We work hard to return the most relevant results for every search we make. We have users' best interests at heart. Some site owners attempt to "buy" links.

Google uses a number of methods to detect paid links, including algorithmic submissions, and we'll use your data to improve our algorithmic detection.

Report paid links

Website selling links:

Website buying links:

Nefariously, the effect of all these activities is to encourage users to turn in other users as well as what to create “negative SEO” when one competitor “fakes” noncompliance by another competitor (and turns them in) to destroy their website performance. It’s a mess, and far, far from “don’t be evil” in terms of its impact. Yet Google, happily making millions, doesn’t seem very concerned about the devastating impact its policies have on websites, or on the “unintended consequences” of its policies.

Now, I’m not saying go 100% to the dark side via black hat SEO and build or buy fake links. And I’m not saying I have a solution for how this could be done differently. I’m not Google, and I don’t have a zillion dollar budget to figure out a solution. *It’s Google’s world; we just live in it.* But what I am saying is put your best foot forward, solicit real links from real websites, and you’ll go a long way towards succeeding. But don’t publicly announce what you’re doing, and don’t wave a red flag under Google’s nose.

Similarly, with respect to the *nofollow* attribute in Web links, Google publicly says that it nullifies the value of all links, but in my experience, this isn't exactly true. Some *nofollow* links do seem to help. And, even more ominously, there are many, many examples of websites that are heavily violating Google's policies on links, and doing very, very well. Enforcement of any rules is sporadic at best, and Google takes periodic action against high profile violators to "frighten" the SEO community into compliance. See, for example, the "Rap Genius" incident in which Google made an "example" of Rap Genius as a site that had gone "too far" in soliciting links at <http://jmlinks.com/14s>. There are many, many sites that are violating Google's policies just as badly, but Rap Genius was singled out, and made an example.

Be Skeptical. Experiment and Do What Works

The bottom line is that you should be skeptical about what Google says are the rules, and what the rules are. You should be skeptical about what you read in the blogosphere about these policies. And you should be silent when, and if, your website is doing well in terms of SEO for fear that a competitor will turn you into Google. You should not get greedy and "go too far." The art of SEO is figuring out what actually works despite what Google says, despite what you read, and staying pretty silent about it. Just as you might drive on Highway 101 in California – speed, but don't be the fastest car on the freeway. As for the posted speed limit, it's not the "real" limit, but who knows what the "real" limit is? You certainly can't ask the Highway Patrol!

So, now that we've taken a little side journey into Google's misleading and contradictory policies on links, let's return to some relatively safe tactics to build links to your own website (at your own risk, of course).

» DEFINE YOUR LINK OBJECTIVES

Now that you know the game – that *links are like votes*, it's time to define your objectives. We'll assume you've SEO-optimized your home page, landing pages, keyword footer, and that you've begun to blog and issue press releases. Those tasks are done, or underway. In terms of links, therefore:

- Links are like votes, i.e. quantity.
 - **Objective:** *get people to link to you.*
- Link syntax matters, i.e. quality. It matters whether links are around your keyword phrases and/or come from content that talks about your keyword themes.

- **Objective:** get links that contain your keyword phrases.
- Link PageRank or Web Authority matters, i.e. authority. Some sites (e.g., NYTimes.com) are more authoritative than others (e.g., TulsaWorld.com).
 - **Objective:** get authoritative sites to link to you.
- Link Footprint matters, meaning you want a “natural” footprint of about 1/3 naked http links, 1/3 branded links, and 1/3 optimized links from quality websites.
 - **Objective:** increase inbound links to your website but do so in a “natural” way in terms of the footprint.

In terms of authority, also realize that in any given industry, certain industry hubs are considered very authoritative. If you are selling Brahman cattle, for example, <http://www.brahman.org/>, the website of the American Brahman Breeders Association is the most authoritative website for the keyword Brahman cattle. If you are a pizza restaurant, getting the “American Pizza Community” (<http://www.americanpizzacomunity.com/>) to link to you is your goal. Every industry has certain key websites, key associations, key directories, key bloggers, key trade shows, etc., and your **objective** here is to identify the most authoritative websites in your industry and get them to link to you!

Don’t Get Discouraged

Now that you know the link game, don’t get discouraged. People commonly think, “Dratz, no one will link to us... we are so boring... or our industry is so dumb that no one will link to anyone.” However, you don’t have to run faster than the bear, just faster than your buddy! You’re not running for President of the United States, it’s more likely that you’re running for school board in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, an election decided by tens or hundreds of votes. Your competitor faces the same challenges as you, so if you just proactively solicit links – even just a few links – you’ll usually win.

He might have two links to his website, and you’ll have three. You win.

He might have ten links to his website, and you’ll have twelve. You win.

Let’s turn, now, to **link-building**: systematic strategies for getting other websites to link to your website for SEO. (For an in-depth list of ideas to help you brainstorm your link-building tactics, check out the PointBlankSEO guide at <http://jmlinks.com/14p>.

Another good one is Quick Sprout's *Advanced Guide to Link-building* by Neil Patel at <http://jmlinks.com/38n>.)

» SOLICIT THE EASY LINKS FIRST

Your **ecosystem partners**, i.e. those companies you do business with on a regular basis, are your easiest link targets. If you attend an industry trade show as an exhibitor, for example, ask for a link back to your company website from the trade show website. If you buy a lot of stuff from a supplier, require a link back to your company website from their website as a condition of doing business. If you sponsor a local charity like the *Breast Cancer Walk Pittsburgh*, ask for a link back to your company website from the charity website. If your boss teaches a class at the local university, help him set up a link from his profile page back to your company website. If anyone in your company gets interviewed or is able to write a guest blog post on another website, make sure that they get a link back in their author profile! If Grandma or Grandpa (or the friends, family, or contacts of key employees), has a website or blog, ask them to link to you.

You get the idea: create a **culture of link solicitation** in your organization, so that on a day-in and day-out level everyone in your company is soliciting links, and (over time) getting them.

Don't forget your **social media profile** links! If local search is important to you, make sure that your company is included in Google My Business, Yelp, Citysearch and other local listing sites. Be sure to set up a Twitter, Google+, Facebook and other social media profiles for your companies and include links in those profiles. Don't forget your **directory links**! If your industry has serious, quality, industry-specific directories, make sure you are included in those directory listings with links.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on easy link-building tactics at <http://jmlinks.com/17w>.

Your first **TODO** is to open up the "link building worksheet," and fill out the easy link target section. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on "SEO Fitness Workbook 2018," enter the code '2018seo' to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the "link building worksheet."

» IDENTIFY DIRECTORY, BLOG, AND OTHER LINK TARGETS

Quality directories, blogs, and other websites found on Google make great link targets. How do you find them? For **directories**, do a Google search for keywords such as “AddURL + Your Keywords,” “Directory + Your Keywords,” and/or “Catalog + Your Keywords.” As you browse these sites, make note of their **Web Authority** (*use MOZ.com or AHREFS.com, and the Domain Authority metric*) and **keyword themes** that align with your own target keywords. Use the Solo SEO link search tool (<http://jmlinks.com/14q>) for a quick and easy way to look for possible link targets.

A marriage counselor in Bethesda, Maryland, for example, might search Google for:

marriage counselor directory (view this search at <http://jmlinks.com/6y>)
directory of therapists
relationship therapist directory
directory Maryland businesses
directory woman-owned businesses

Her goals are to a) identify quality directories that have *dofollow* outbound links, b) figure out how much it costs and/or what are the procedures to be listed, and c) acquire those directory links. **Remember:** if it's absolutely easy to get in, every SEO will do it and the directory will be low quality or contaminated. **You want serious directories that either cost money and/or have real qualifications to be included. Do not list yourself in free directories.** Quality is important!

Identify Relevant Blogs

To find **blogs**, type your target keywords plus the word “blog” into the Google search box. For example, our marriage therapist might type in “marriage therapy blog” at <http://jmlinks.com/19h>. You’re looking for blogs that will allow a guest post and/or blogs that are interested in your keywords. Remember to also pro-actively ask customers if they have a blog, and if they do, solicit them to write something about your company, product or service. Then you have to devise an idea / solicitation that they’d like to include on their blog, plus include a link back to your website.

A common tactic is to give out product samples, for free, in exchange for a product review and link back on the blog. (Again, with an eye to Google’s sensitivity about links, don’t “overdo” this – find high quality, legitimate bloggers, and don’t publicly announce your

product-review-link program!). Do NOT go to a public blog exchange and buy links – that's way too obvious, and too dangerous!

Complementary Competitors

Finally, do searches for your major keyword phrases. As you search, segregate your **direct competitors** (sites so similar to your own that there is no way that they would link to you) from your **complementary competitors**. These are sites like blogs, personal websites, portals, directories, Wiki entries and the like that “show up” on your searches but may have a complementary reason to link to you. A wedding photographer, for example, might search for not only directories of wedding suppliers but also florists, priests, caterers, bakers, and facilities that would likely exchange links due to the complementary nature of their businesses.

Sponsor Non-Profits and Include Links

Another great tactic is non-profit link-building. Solicit non-profit links: identify relevant non-profits, and pay them as a “sponsor” with a link from their website to your own. As with all link-building tactics, do not overdo this.

A good way to do this is to search Google using the site: command, as in:

site:*.org “your keywords”

For example: site:*.org “organic food” (<http://jmlinks.com/7d>).

For example: site:*.org “organic food” “link to your website” (<http://jmlinks.com/7e>).

You thus identify non-profits in your keyword community, and can even drill down to those that allow paying sponsors to link back to their website. Voila: a link-building strategy based on helping non-profits!

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on how to identify nonprofits for link-building at <http://jmlinks.com/18e>.

Todo for Link-Building

Your second **TODO** is to fill out the section of the “link building worksheet” focusing on blogs, portals, and directories. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” and enter the code ‘2018seo’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “link building worksheet.”

» REVERSE ENGINEER COMPETITORS’ LINKS

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to be able to “reverse engineer” who links to your competitors, and then solicit links from those websites? You can easily do this.

Many free fabulous tools exist to “reverse engineer” inbound links of competitors. Your objective is to identify complementary websites that link to a competitor but who may also be willing to link to you. Type each competitor’s home page URL into these tools, and then surf to the appropriate websites, making note of the PageRank (domain authority), content, and contact information for your “Link Building” target list. Here are my three favorites:

Open Site Explorer by Moz (<https://moz.com/researchtools/ose/>). Type your competitor’s home page into this tool, or the URL of a highly ranked site on Google. Browse to see who is linking to your competitors.

Ahrefs (<http://ahrefs.com/>). Similar to Open Site Explorer, this free tool allows you to input a competitor URL and reverse engineer who is linking to that competitor.

Open Link Profiler (<http://www.openlinkprofiler.org/>). This tool tracks new links to your website (or to competitors), and requires no registration and no payment. It’s totally free!

Here’s a screenshot of Open Site Explorer’s analysis of <http://www.progressive.com/> showing that that site has over 3900 linking domains totaling to over 34,000 inbound links. No wonder *progressive.com* dominates searches for insurance!

The screenshot shows the Moz Pro interface with the "Open Site Explorer" tab selected. On the left, there's a sidebar with various link analysis options like Inbound Links, Just-Discovered, Top Pages, Linking Domains, Anchor Text, Compare Link Metrics, Spam Analysis, Link Opportunities, and Advanced Reports. The main content area has a URL input field with "http://www.progressive.com/" and a note about redirection. It displays authority metrics (Domain Authority 82/100, Page Authority 85/100) and page link metrics (30 just-discovered links, 3,957 root domains, 34,363 total links). A "Hide Metrics" button is visible.

VIDEO. Watch a video on how to use the AHREFS tool and other link discovery tools to “reverse engineer” competitors at <http://jmlinks.com/18d>.

At the end of this process, you should have a defined list of “link targets” sorted by PageRank (Domain Authority) and their keyword themes with your “keyword community.” Your third **TODO** is to take this list, and then go one by one through the results, soliciting links from the various targets. If summer is here, link solicitation is a great task for a cheap intern! Or, go to a site like Fiverr.com (<http://www.fiverr.com/>) and identify a cheap outsourced worker to do the “grunt” work of your link solicitation system.

» CREATE LINK BAIT

Link bait takes link building to the next level. Link bait is the art of creating content that is so compelling that people will *spontaneously* link to it, without you even having to ask. Let’s run through some common link-bait ideas.

Content Bait

People love in-depth content, so write an in-depth “Frequently Asked Questions” document or article that fits the needs and interests of your industry. If you’re a probate lawyer, for example, write a beefy article to your blog on “How to avoid probate.” Beefy, in-depth, good content becomes link bait for journalists, bloggers, and influencers on social media looking to point their audience to the “ultimate guide” on a key topic. Here’s a great example. PointBlank SEO has written the “definitive guide” to Link Building (which is, in and of itself, link bait) at <http://jmlinks.com/7b>.

Ego Bait

Have a customer of the month contest (if your customers have websites), have a supplier of the month award (if your suppliers have websites). Email, call, and even give gifts to blogs, portals, and other content sites that might be willing to cover you and your company. In link building, remember you are dealing with other people, so look at the situation from their perspective: what’s in it for them? If you “feature” them with an award, they’ll often spontaneously link to you – plus your “award contest” can get press, publicity, and links.

Product Sample Bait

Give away free samples of your product only to people who have a blog, and/or are willing to share your site on social media. Ask them to write honest product reviews, and require a link back in the blog article.

Scholarship Bait

Identify a noble cause (preferably relating to your keyword targets), and create a scholarship program for deserving students. Next, require an essay as part of the application (which will be great content for your blog, and ego bait). Then, identify relevant colleges and solicit them to link “out” to your scholarship. It’s win win: the student gets a scholarship, and you get links from quality .edu domains to your website.

Ultimate (Free) Guide Bait

An ultimate guide or free eBook can be excellent link-bait. Write the definitive eBook on “top ten new technologies” for your industry, write a provocative FAQ document with “how to” templates, or tell an emotional story. HubSpot has done a fantastic job of this. Check out their eBooks at <http://jmlinks.com/38p>.

Badge Bait

Consider creating **badges**: customer of the month, best tool for such-and-such, partner companies, verification of a certification test, and so on and so forth.

Have you ever noticed how many Yelp results show up high on Google search? Have you ever thought of how many companies have Yelp badges on their websites, with links up to their Yelp listings? Consider being the “Yelp” of your industry via badges. Here’s a screenshot giving an inside look at how Yelp promotes its link juice via badges:

The screenshot shows the Yelp for Business Owners interface. At the top, there's a red header bar with the Yelp logo and "for Business Owners". Below it, a white page has a title "How can I link to reviews of [REDACTED] on Yelp?". Underneath, there's a section titled "Permalink to [REDACTED] Repair: <http://www.yelp.com/biz-repair-new-york-2...>". It shows two examples of badge code snippets:

```
<div id="yelp-biz-badge-plain-VbXsUWCDtq6gJ8bkDKEmuQ">
<script type="text/javascript">
var js;
```

Below this, there's a "Plain Button Link" badge icon (a red button with the Yelp logo) and its corresponding HTML code:

```
<div id="yelp-biz-badge-fsc-VbXsUWCDtq6gJ8bkDKEmuQ">R...
<script type="text/javascript">
var js;
```

Further down, there's a "Five Stars Counter" badge icon (a yellow box with 5 stars and the text "We have 3 5-star reviews") and its corresponding HTML code:

```
<div id="yelp-biz-badge-fsc-VbXsUWCDtq6gJ8bkDKEmuQ">R...
<script type="text/javascript">
var js;
```

You can view the Yelp badge system at <http://jmlinks.com/7f>. Note: if you use “badge bait,” be Penguin-aware. Make sure to **vary the inbound link text** and structure across your badges so as to not trigger a Penguin penalty. For example, the ALT image attribute

for some badges would have keyword No. 1, others keyword No. 1, others just your company name, etc.

Widget Bait

If you have a programming budget, create **widgets** such as BMI calculator, the real-time price of gold, a reverse mortgage calculator. Any sort of free tool or widget that is relevant to your industry can be link bait to bring in links in a spontaneous way. Monex, a company that sells gold, silver, and platinum bullion, for example, has an example of “widget bait” at <http://jmlinks.com/7c>. **Infographics** are another way to get links: create an informative, humorous, outrageous or shocking infographic and let the links roll in!

Your fourth **TODO** is to have a company meeting and brainstorm possibilities for link bait. If you see opportunities, create a step-by-step plan to implement your link bait strategy. Notice as well that what constitutes “link bait” is also fabulous for social media sharing.

»» **CHECKLIST: LINK-BUILDING ACTION ITEMS**

Test your knowledge of link-building! Take the *link-building quiz* at <http://jmlinks.com/qzln>. Next, here are your link-building **Action Items**:

- **Understand** the **basics** of links and link-building, specifically - *quantity*, *quality* (optimized links), and *authority* (PageRank or Domain Authority).
- Be **link-aware** as a company or organization, constantly asking people to “link to you,” as for example when a journalist or blogger writes an article, you participate in a trade show, or you join an industry association, etc.
- Be also **Penguin-aware** and seek for a “natural footprint” of many links - *naked* (<http://>), *branded* (your company name), and *optimized* (your keywords).
- Create a **link-building system**, going from easy to most difficult -
 - **Ecosystem partners** - solicit links from suppliers, friends, colleagues, etc.
 - **Social media profiles** - set up, claim, and link from your social media profiles as on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.

- **Industry directories** - inventory and get listed in the “best” industry directories that provide outbound links. Don’t forget industry trade associations and other organizations key employees may be members of (e.g., “National Association of Women Small Business Owners,” etc.)
- Solicit links from **bloggers** - identify and solicit links from relevant bloggers in your industry; consider *guest blogging*.
- **Non-profits** - identify and sponsor relevant nonprofits with link-backs to your website.
- **Link-bait** - if possible, generate a “widget” or “badge” or even a long-form blog post as “content bait.” Perhaps a scholarship program. Create content that is “so good” bloggers and others will spontaneously link to it.

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Link-building* section for my favorite free tools for link-building. Just visit <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>.

>>> DELIVERABLE: A COMPLETED LINK-BUILDING WORKSHEET

The **DELIVERABLE** for this chapter is a completed link-building worksheet. For the worksheet, go to <https://www.jm-seo.org/workbook> (click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” and enter the code ‘2018seo’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “link-building worksheet.”



5.2

SOCIAL MEDIA

A topic unto itself, Social Media has many SEO implications. **Social mentions** - that is the sharing of your website links on sites like Twitter, Google+, Facebook and more - is a new kind of **link building**. Having robust **social profiles** (like an active *Twitter feed* or active *Google+ account*) signals Google and its search algorithm that your company is active and important. This is called **social authority**. Indeed, Google My Business presents unique SEO opportunities, particularly in the area of having a robust corporate profile with many local reviews, as we shall discuss in the next Chapter. In addition, Google's partnership with Twitter is a clear sign that having a robust Twitter profile and having your links "tweeted" is now a must-do.

SEO is going social, so in this Chapter, we explore the brave new world of **Social Media SEO**.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Understand Social Media SEO
- » Get Social Mentions!
- » Set up Robust Social Profiles
- » Get Google+: Google's Zombie Social Network
- »» Checklist: Social Media Action Items
- »» Deliverable: A Completed Social Media SEO Worksheet

» UNDERSTAND SOCIAL MEDIA SEO

Links, as we have seen, count as **votes** in SEO. Google clearly rewards sites that have many keyword-relevant links (especially those from high authority websites), with higher positions on Google search results. Social Media in a sense builds on this network of link authority. How so? While Google has not publicly clarified how it uses what are called *social signals* in SEO, we can postulate some logical patterns of how Google might interpret social signals.

If Website A has its URL “Tweeted” and Website B does not, then Website A must be more important.

If blog post A on trending topic #1 has 12 tweets of its URL, and blog post B on trending topic #1 has 35 tweets of its URL, then blog post B must be more relevant for the corresponding Google search query.

If Website A has 20,000 followers on Twitter, and Website B has only 100, then Website A must be more important.

In a nutshell, having your URL’s tweeted, shared on LinkedIn or Facebook, or mentioned on Google+ is a form of link-building.

Evidence that this occurs is visible in how Google quickly figures out trending news. It's common knowledge that the first place people go to for breaking news is Twitter, and accordingly, a quick Google search of a trending topic (try searching Google, for example, for “The Kardashians,” or “Donald Trump,” or “iPhone Games”) and you'll often find new and fresh content that is being shared heavily on Twitter. In addition, Google has a formal partnership of Twitter in which Google gets first crack at the Twitter “firehose” of breaking news. It stands to reason, therefore, that having your URLs shared on Twitter might help them for SEO purposes.

How does social media impact SEO?

First and foremost, sites that enjoy **inbound links via social mentions of URLs** from social sites like Twitter, Google+, or even Facebook are clearly topical and relevant to Google. A simple `site:twitter.com` search on Google reveals over 43 million indexed Tweets, and a simple `site:facebook.com` search on Google reveals over 146 million indexed Facebook posts.

Google clearly pays attention to the social sharing of links!

SOCIAL SHARES ARE THE NEW LINK-BUILDING!

Second, robust and active **social profiles** are another obvious clue to Google of your website's relevance. Many sites link out to their Yelp account, Google+ profile, Twitter account, Facebook page, LinkedIn page, etc., and those social sites can be indexed by Google. Google can clearly "see" how active your company is on social media, how many "followers" you have, and whether those followers, in turn are active and/or important. Most importantly, Google can "count" your "reviews" on Google My Business, Yelp, YellowPages and other local review sites.

(**Note:** we discuss the impact of reviews in the next Chapter, 5.3 on "Local SEO").

It stands to reason that having an active social media footprint, with active posts, many engaged followers, and many reviews is a new signal to Google about your website's relevance. Indeed, much of this is keyword centric, another reason why knowing your keywords is paramount to SEO success!

Third, social search has made the Web more **human**. Whereas in the past, the creators of Web content were relatively invisible, new ways of communicating "microdata" can tell Google how many reviews your site has, who the content author is, and whether this author has an active, engaged follower community or not. Realizing that SEO is now a **social game** positions your company for not just the present but the future of SEO success on Google.

Note: this Chapter focuses on using social media for SEO purposes. For social media marketing in its own right, please see my *Social Media Marketing Workbook* available on Amazon at <http://jmlinks.com/smm>.

To be clear, remember that "traditional links" remain far, far more important than social shares to this day: so if you have to choose between a "traditional link" (e.g., from a blog post) and a "social share" (e.g., the Tweeting of your URL), choose the former. **Links still remain the dominant currency of SEO, worth far more than social media shares.**

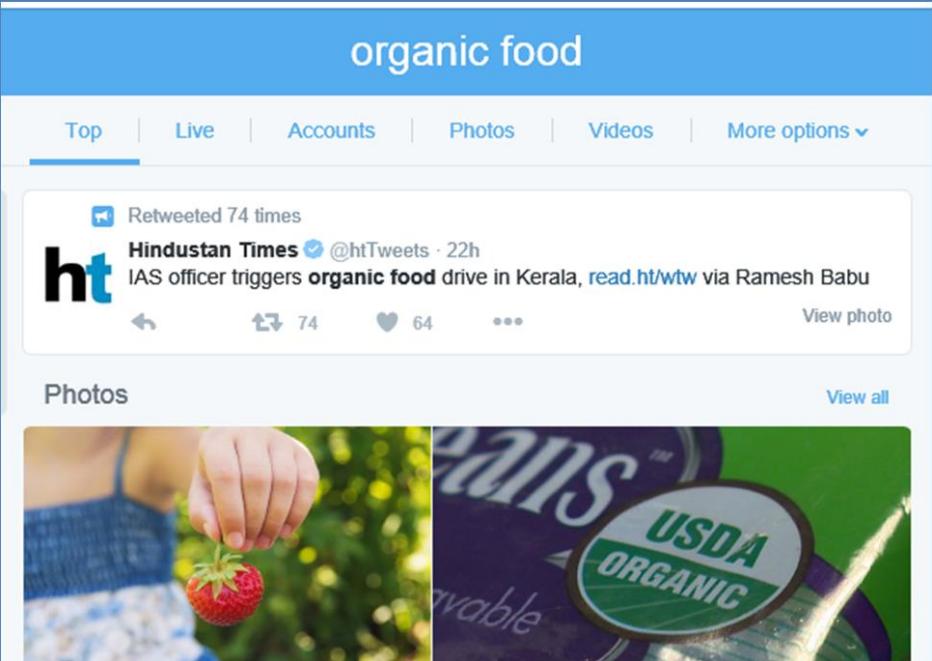
» **GET SOCIAL MENTIONS!**

Getting **social mentions** of your URLs is a lot like traditional link building. First, look for easy social mention targets. Ask customers, suppliers, and ecosystem partners to tweet your URLs, share your company's blog posts on Facebook, and to "+1" your URLs on Google and to "like" them on Facebook. Second, "reverse engineer" competitors or use common Google and social media searches to find social media sharers who might be interested in your content.

Get Tweeted

In this regard, Twitter is the most important network for SEO purposes. You want to not only set up your business Twitter account and tweet out your own URLs (e.g., a new blog post or new press release). You also want to get real people on Twitter to tweet those URL's, too.

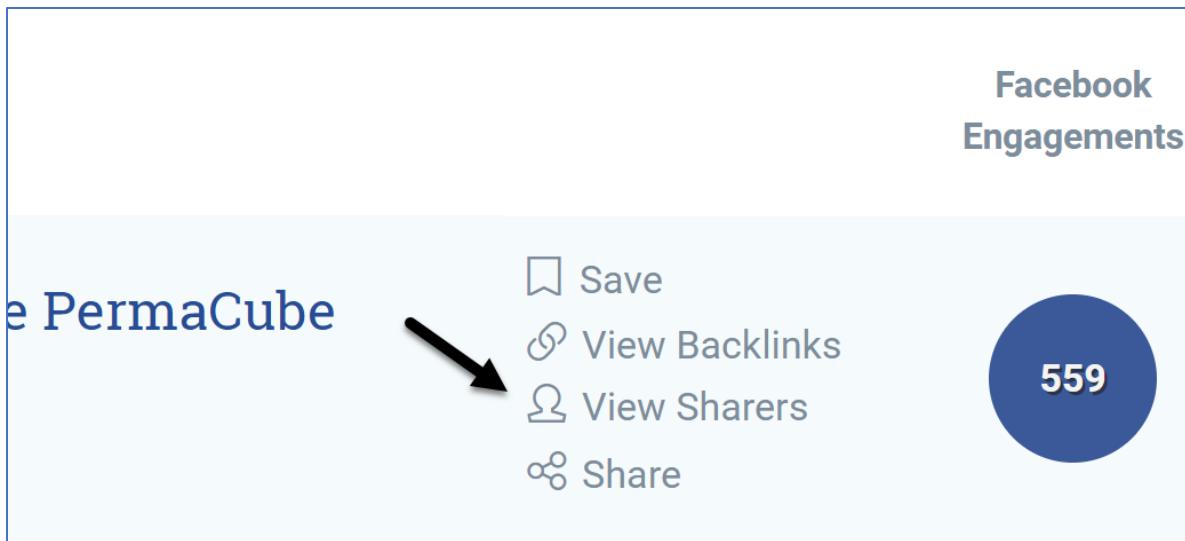
To find people Tweeting on your keywords, go to Twitter advanced search at <http://jmlinks.com/14w>, type in your competitor names or your keywords and look for Tweeters who have a) many followers, and b) tweet on your keyword themes. Then reach out to them and encourage them to tweet your latest blog post, press release, or informative new widget. Here's a screenshot showing a search for tweets on "organic food":



Second, you can use Buzzsumo (<http://www.buzzsumo.com>) to identify social shares of your keywords. Here's a screenshot:

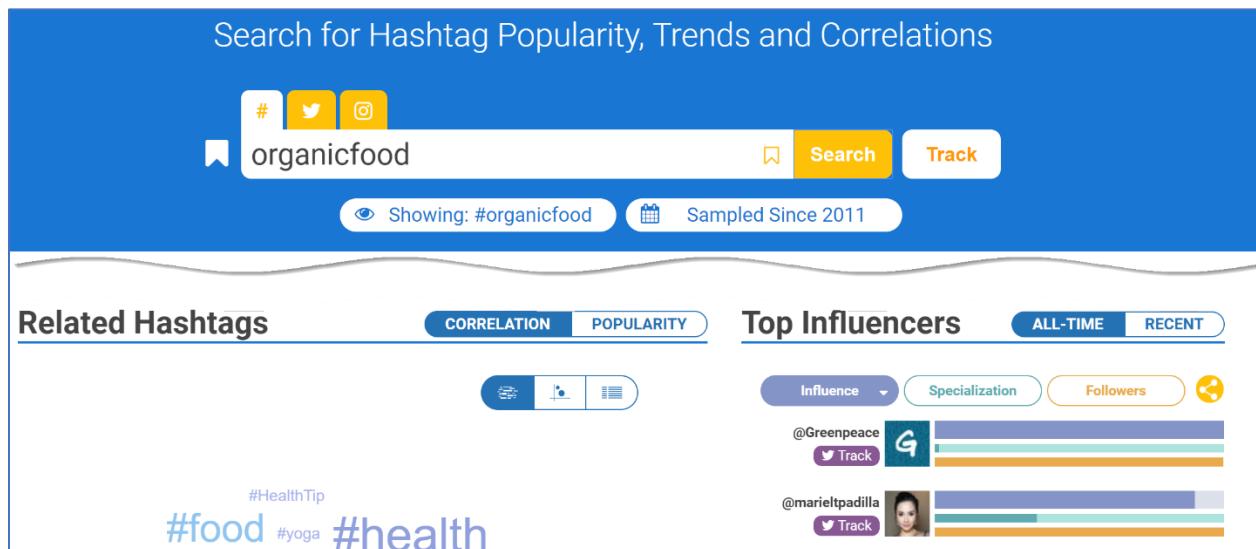
The screenshot shows the Buzzsumo Pro dashboard. At the top, there are navigation tabs: Content Research, Influencers, and Market. Below them are four main categories: Most Shared, Trending Now, Content Analysis, and Domain Comparison. The 'Most Shared' tab is selected. On the left, there are filtering options: 'Filter by Date' (Past Week is selected), 'Language' (e.g. French, Español), and 'Country (TLD)'. In the center, a search bar contains the query "organic food". Below the search bar, a snippet of a news article from hindustantimes.com is displayed, titled "IAS officer triggers organic food drive", dated Nov 1, 2015.

Inside of Buzzsumo, you can click on “View sharers” to find the Twitter accounts of people who shared a piece of news. Here’s a screenshot:



Buzzsumo, unfortunately, is a paid tool with only limited functionality for free.

So, third, an alternative is to use the website *Hashtagify.me* and look for #hashtags that are similar to your keywords. (Note do not use spacetags when researching hashtags, so its #organicfood not #organic food). You can then also look for the top Twitter accounts for those hashtags. Here's a screenshot of <http://hashtagify.me> for #organicfood:



Finally, if you've written a blog post on a trending topic, consider advertising on Twitter, Facebook and/or LinkedIn to get it "picked up" while still timely, thereby encouraging more "free" shares of your URL.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on how to get "social mentions" at <http://jmlinks.com/17v>.

Don't forget that Google is another great way to search other social media sites for heavy sharers. Try Google searches like *site:facebook.com {your keywords}*, *site:linkedin.com {your keywords}*, *site:pinterest.com {your keywords}*, etc. to identify site-specific individuals who are good targets to share your own content. You can try a sample search at <http://jmlinks.com/7h>.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on how to use the site: command to identify social sharers at <http://jmlinks.com/16g>.

Reach out to Bloggers

Don't forget blogs and bloggers! Go to Google, type in your keywords plus the word "blog" and look for relevant blogs. Social Mention (<http://www.socialmention.com>) is another search engine that focuses specifically on social media content.

As you reach out for links and social mentions, focus on win-win opportunities. For example, if you sell products send out product samples to key bloggers, Tweeters, and Google+'rs and ask them for honest product reviews, "tweets" of your URLs, and "shares" of your links on Facebook or Google+, in exchange for samples.

(Remember, however, that – technically speaking – any type of link-building outreach is a violation of Google terms of service so be judicious, and act at your own risk.)

Your first **TODO** is to open the "Social Media SEO worksheet," and complete the section entitled "social sharers." For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks/> (click on "SEO Fitness Workbook 2018," and enter the code '2018seo' to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the "Social Media SEO worksheet."

» SET UP ROBUST SOCIAL PROFILES

In addition to trying to get people to tweet or share out your URLs, it's a no-brainer that Google looks for companies with robust social pages. Given two companies competing for a top position on Google, one with thousands of people circling its Google+ corporate page, and another without a Google+ corporate page at all, to whom do you think Google is going to give top placement? This same fact probably goes for other social networks as well, especially ones like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, or Pinterest that are open to the Google crawler at least at the account level. (Facebook is closed to Google at the so-called "registration wall.")

For each social media network, be sure to fill out your company pages with relevant keywords and cross-link from each social profile to your website. Leaving aside Google+, here are the most important for most companies with links to their business help guides (if available):

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/business>)

Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/>)

Twitter (<https://business.twitter.com/>)

LinkedIn (<http://jmlinks.com/14x>)

YouTube (<http://jmlinks.com/7j>)

Pinterest (<http://business.pinterest.com/>)

Once you set up a business page, be sure to populate your company description with your relevant keywords and cross-link it back to your website. Be sure to also link from your home page to your social network pages to make it easy for Google to see which website corresponds to which social network. All of the networks have easy to use badges that enable these important **cross links**; just look for badges in the relevant business help center as listed above. Be sure to be consistent about your physical address, telephone number, and website address.

Posting SEO-friendly Content

Finally, as you post content to a social network, keep your keywords in mind, grow your fan base, and encourage interactivity between you and your fans. Social media is a two-for-one benefit: first, the *direct* benefit from the social media platform itself as you engage

with users, and second, the *indirect* benefit as Google “observes” how popular you are and feeds that data into its SEO algorithm.

Your second **TODO** is to open up the “Social Media SEO worksheet” and complete the section “Social Media Profiles.” For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” and enter the code ‘2018seo’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “Social Media SEO worksheet.”

» **GET GOOGLE+: GOOGLE’S ZOMBIE SOCIAL NETWORK**

Guess who owns Google+? **Google!** Guess who owns search: **Google!** Admittedly, Google+ is essentially dead as a social network. It’s the “Zombie network” of social media. That said, it doesn’t cost anything, and there is probably some residual SEO benefit in setting up a Google+ profile for your business (even if you are not a local business), and attempting to faux-use the network. You might as well set it up.

Like the Zombie parent of a Zombie child, Google still acts as if it wants Google+ to succeed, and it may still “reward” companies that participate in Google+ with better SEO performance. This is certainly true with Google+ local (since renamed Google My Business – which I will cover in the next Chapter), but it may also be true with Google+ (non-Local) business pages and Google+ personal profiles.

GET GOOGLE+!

Google+ is actually not one but two and a half different social networks:

Google+ Business Pages. These are the business pages on Google+, the Fords, Toyotas, and Whole Foods corporate accounts by which businesses promote their wares and connect with customers.

Google+ Local Pages. Now called “Google My Business,” these are business pages, similar to those on Yelp, that focus on local search.

Reviews on Google. Google has split off reviews from Google+, creating a strange situation in which reviews “live” on Google even though company pages “live” on Google My Business.

And finally there’s the Google +1 button (<http://jmlinks.com/18x>) (someone “votes” for your website as cool and shares it with his or her friends on Google+). With Google+ nearly dead as a social network, it’s not clear that this button has a huge impact on SEO, but it certainly won’t hurt!

Google+ Business Pages: Not Great Value, But Easy to Set Up

We’ll look at Google My Business in detail in the next Chapter, so let’s start our examination of Google+ with the **Google+ Business Page** first. This is essentially the same concept as business pages on Facebook. You set up a business page, people “like” you (“circle” you), and thereby when you share messages on Google+, they will see these messages in their news feed on the Google+ social network. From an SEO perspective, being active on Google+ at a business or corporate level probably helps your SEO. It also can impact your branded search terms.

Let’s face it. Google+ is pretty much a failure. But until Google pulls the plug on its embarrassingly pathetic social network, it may continue to have an impact on SEO. It’s free and easy, so why not use it? Use a program like Hootsuite (<http://hootsuite.com/>) and you can simultaneously post to Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, etc., so you might as well duplicate what you post to Facebook to Google+ and you’ve helped your SEO, if only a little bit.

Learn more about Google+ for business at <https://business.google.com/> and follow the instructions to set up a business page there. You can (and should) set up Google+ profiles for key employees as well, and again, share the same content you are sharing to Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook to Google+ at a business level.

»»» CHECKLIST: SOCIAL MEDIA ACTION ITEMS

Test your knowledge of social media for SEO! Take the *social media for SEO quiz* at <http://jmlinks.com/qzss>. Next, here are your social media **Action Items**:

- Identify **influencers** who can “share” your content, especially on Twitter. Create a list of “key influencers” such as bloggers, persons on Twitter, G+, LinkedIn, etc., and have an outreach strategy to alert them to key content.
 - Use “Advanced Search” on Twitter, Buzzsumo.com, and/or Hashtagify.me to build out your influencer list.
 - Use Google search for “blog” plus your keywords to identify influential bloggers.
- Set up robust **Social Profiles** on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc., and populate with links back to your website. Include G+ for your business.
- Set up Hootsuite.com to manage your social shares, and begin populating them - at a minimum - with content from your blog.
- Set up Google+ for your business and/or personal. Populate it via Hootsuite. *Don't be afraid of Zombies!*

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *Social Media Dashboard* for my favorite free tools on social media marketing. Just visit <http://jmlinks.com/smmdash>.

>>> DELIVERABLE: A COMPLETED SOCIAL MEDIA SEO WORKSHEET

The **DELIVERABLE** for this chapter is a completed “Social Media SEO worksheet.” For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks/> (enter the code ‘fitness’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “Social Media SEO worksheet.”



5.3

LOCAL SEO

Let's suppose you have a restaurant, or you're a local plumber, dentist, CPA, or divorce attorney or any of the thousands of local businesses that service customers in their day-to-day life. Before the advent of social media sites like Yelp, Google, YP.com, AirBnB, TripAdvisor and their kind, consumers might have gone to the physical yellow pages or perhaps visited your website after a Google search. You were in charge of your marketing message: *customers couldn't really "talk back."*

The “Review Revolution” led by Yelp and since followed by Google, YP.com, AirBnB, TripAdvisor, Angie’s list, Amazon, Facebook, and other sites has dramatically changed the local landscape. These “review sites” have made it possible for customers to “talk back,” sharing their positive and negative reviews about local business as well as businesses of all types across social media.

Using Yelp and Google as models, this chapter explores how the “Review Revolution” impacts SEO (and vice-versa).

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Identify Your Local Keywords
- » Review the Local Algorithm Factors
- » Understand the Review Revolution
- » Zero in on Yelp as a Review Site
- » Inventory Companies on Yelp, Google, or Other Relevant Sites
- » Claim and Optimize Your Listings on Yelp and Google
- » SEO Your Local Website

- » Cultivate Positive Reviews
- » Monitor and Improve Your Online Reputation
- » Measure your Results
- »» Checklist: Local Action Items
- »» Deliverable: A Local SEO Marketing Plan

» **IDENTIFY YOUR LOCAL KEYWORDS**

Congressman Tip O'Neill of Massachusetts once quipped, “All politics is local.” I can’t speak for politics, but I can speak for SEO and that is decidedly not so. Some search queries are very local, some are local, and some are not at all local – at least in the eyes of Google. As you’re researching your keywords, pay attention to the results that come back at you for Google. If a search is “very local” to Google, you’ll see what the SEO community calls the “local pack” or the “snack pack” – usually three listings in a box. Take, for example, the single search word, “pizza.” It’s very local. Here’s a screenshot:

Rating ▾ Pizza ▾ Hours ▾ Sort by ▾

Black Friday might affect these hours

Bronco Billy's Pizza Palace 4.6 ★★★★★ (276) · \$\$ · Pizza Cowboy-themed spot for pies & sandwiches 0.8 mi · 37651 Niles Blvd Late-night food · Comfort food · Quick bite	
Round Table Pizza 3.4 ★★★★★ (31) · \$\$ · Pizza Chain eatery with build-your-own pizzas 1.6 mi · 1744 Decoto Rd Comfort food · Quick bite · Casual	
Pizza Guys 4.1 ★★★★★ (28) · \$\$ · Pizza Chain pizzeria with large menu 1.7 mi · 3691 Thornton Ave Late-night food · Comfort food · Quick bite	

Try it yourself. Just type “pizza” into Google, and you’ll see not these results in the “local pack” but ones that are close to your physical location. Other single word searches or short tails searches that generate the local pack are ones like *plumber*, *barber*, *baker*, *coffee shop*, *divorce attorney*, etc. Any query that clearly indicates a local business will generate the “local pack.” And note that the search does NOT have to include a city. Yes, a search for “San Francisco Barbers” will generate the “local pack” but so will just the word “barber” for which Google will infer your city. (Google snoops your location on the mobile phone and even infers it for a desktop or tablet search).

Second, some searches are what I would call “local” but not “very local.” These are search queries that generate localized results, but not the “local pack.” Believe it or not, “SEO

consulting” is one such search. You’ll see one set of results in Fremont, California, and quite another in Tulsa, Oklahoma. You can use the SERPS.com local tool to vary your location at <http://jmlinks.com/26z>. Pay attention to whether you see the “local pack” and/or whether the results that appear at the top are local businesses near you. If either is true, you have either a “very local” or a “local” search query and the rules of local SEO apply.

Finally, we have search queries that are not local at all. These are queries that return the same results whether you are in Bixby, Oklahoma, or Brooklyn, New York. It doesn’t matter. Examples are “motorcycle insurance” or “elevator consulting” or even “President of the United States.” For these queries, only the general rules of SEO apply not the specific rules of local SEO.

For your first **TODO**, return to your keyword worksheet and make sure you have clearly indicated which queries are “local” in nature. Not all businesses have local keyword queries but you’d be surprised at how some queries such as “SEO consultant” or “WordPress designer” are localized by Google when, in fact, it’s rather illogical to do so. Make sure to do your homework as you may be surprised to find local SEO queries that do matter for your company.

» REVIEW THE LOCAL ALGORITHM FACTORS

With your list of local keyword queries in hand, and a detailed eye as to how the Google search results vary for local searches, let’s review the local SEO factors. Many of them such as On Page optimization and links are the same, but some are unique to local.

For a complete overview to the factors influencing local rank on Google, see the MOZ 2017 study at <http://jmlinks.com/38u>. Here are the top five factors that determine whether your business will rank on Google for a local search:

1. **Proximity** – namely is the searcher “near” your business on his mobile phone when he does the search? Or, for tablet or desktop searches are you near the business city center?
2. **Physical address in the city of search** – is your business listing (e.g. on Google and/or Yelp) in the city searched?
3. **Proper GMB categories** – have you selected the corresponding business category in Google My Business when you set up your listing?
4. **NAP Consistency** – do you have a consistent name, address, phone number across local review sites?
5. **Domain Authority** of your website – do you have a lot of inbound links.

In addition, whether your business has the city name in it as your Google My Business listing name is a big factor (e.g., *Jason's Tulsa Pizza* will outrank **Jason's Pizza** for the search query “Pizza” with location set to Tulsa, OK, all things being equal).

Reviews Matter (A Lot)

The other huge factor is your **review** count. All things being equal, a business with more reviews on Google will outrank a business with fewer. Take a search such as “Pizza NYC” on Google, for instance, and you’ll see that the results that rank high in the “local pack” are *Artichoke Pizza* (971 Google reviews), *Lombardi’s* (2391 reviews), and *Keste Pizz & Vino* (521 Google Reviews). Or take “DUI Attorney Tulsa,” and you’ll see *Tulsa DUI Guy* (40 Google reviews), *Tulsa DUI Defense* (zero Google Reviews), and *Edge Law Firm* (53 Google Reviews). So it’s not a straight line – but, in general, the more reviews a business has on Google, the higher it will rank on localized searches both in the “local pack” and in the organic results.

For your second **TODO**, retry some of your local search queries on Google. Look at the high ranking companies in the “local pack” and count how many reviews they have on Google. This gives you an idea of roughly how many reviews you need on Google to succeed. It’s more for a sushi restaurant, in general, than it is for a DUI attorney – so it’s always relative to your competition.

Google reviews, in short, function like links. Reviews are a highly influential factor to your rank on local. Let me repeat that:

Google reviews function like links. Reviews are a highly influential factor to your rank on local.

As we shall see, therefore, the #1 way to influence whether you rank for local search queries is to solicit reviews from customers on Google. For Bing, it’s not Google reviews but reviews on Yelp that matter. Like links, it’s more complicated than mere quantity, but like links, the sheer number of reviews matters a lot.

However, before you run off and start crazily soliciting reviews, please read this entire Chapter as technically you are NOT supposed to solicit reviews in any way, shape or form. It’s complicated. So be careful about soliciting links.

» UNDERSTAND THE REVIEW REVOLUTION

Local SEO sits at the juncture of search engine optimization and social media. It has aspects of SEO such as keywords, On Page optimization, and links. And it has aspects of **social media marketing** in that you need the active participation of real people on sites like Google and Yelp. So let's take a moment and look at local SEO from the perspective of reviews, specifically from the perspective of what I call the **Review Revolution**.

Imagine it's 1994, ten years prior to Yelp's founding, and you have a local Italian restaurant in Los Angeles, California. One day you are lucky enough to be visited by the review critic for the *Los Angeles Times*. You recognize her from her picture in the *LA Times*, and you realize that she can make – or break – your new Italian eatery. You do your best to not let her know you recognize who she is, and you do your utmost to ensure that she has a positive experience at your restaurant. One week later your hopes and prayers are answered: a positive restaurant review in the local newspaper. Business booms.

Enter the **Review Revolution**. In October, 2004, Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com>) was founded. Google reviews followed shortly thereafter. Consumers of all types could now review not just local restaurants but local plumbers, dentists, massage therapists and thousands of other types of local businesses. The Review Revolution was like any other mass revolution: the masses burst open the doors of the castle, executed the ruling class, and turned over the table and chairs. *It was a bit bloody. It was a bit noisy. And it was a bit unpleasant.* If, for example, you were the *Los Angeles Times* restaurant critic, your absolute power over restaurants was broken. The Review Revolution brought **democracy** to local reviews. Now anyone could review anything. No control: democracy arrived to reviews.

But here's the rub. Like the French Revolution, the Review Revolution brought the masses into the ecosystem. It has not been very organized or coherent; online reviews run the gamut from informative to ridiculous. Whereas the big reviewers of the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *New York Times* were educated and civilized (though they could be brutal in their reviews), the new review class can be rough and tumble. Anyone – and I do mean anyone – can write a review: good, bad, or ugly. And let's not forget: *just plain crazy*. To be frank, we are still living in this unsettled Review Revolution, and like the French Revolution, there is no going back: the old system is dead.

UNDERSTAND THE REVIEW REVOLUTION

If you're reading this Chapter, you've probably already grasped that online reviews can make or break your local business performance. Many, if not all, potential customers consult online review sites like TripAdvisor, AirBnB, Yelp, or Google before engaging with local businesses. If they see *positive* reviews, they are primed for a *positive* experience. If they see *negative* reviews, they are so *negatively* primed that they may avoid any contact whatsoever with your business. Reviews now impact all types of local businesses; nearly every local business is being reviewed online 24/7 365.

The Mechanics of Review Sites

How do review sites work? We'll concentrate on Google and Yelp, the two most important review sites that impact local SEO. Here's how both Google and Yelp work in terms of reviews:

1. **Local businesses have listings.** Business listings on both Google and Yelp are created *without the permission or participation of the business owner*, and exist whether or not the business owner has claimed, optimized, and participated in the review ecosystem. *You as the business owner do not have the right to “delete” your listing on Google or Yelp!* It's like a business Page on Facebook, to the extent that your business has an online “Page” on Google or Yelp. But unlike on Facebook, you are not in control!
2. **Customers write reviews.** Registered Google and/or Yelp users are able to write reviews about any local business they choose. *If your business is not listed, users can even create a listing for your business and then review it.* These reviews may be good or bad, extremely positive or so negatively scathing as to infuriate you as the business owner. The Yelpers and Google reviewers are basically in control.
3. **Customer reviewers also establish a reputation.** The more reviews a customer writes, the older his or her profile as a reviewer becomes, the more friends on Google or Yelp, the more thumbs up or thumbs down to their reviews, the stronger their profile gets. Yelp and Google both have filters to filter out “fake” or “weak” reviews from showing entirely. The stronger the customer profile, the higher their reviews rise on the pages of those businesses that they have reviewed. Your business and the review-writers are both simultaneously establishing a

reputation, and that reputation impacts whether your information (your listing, their review) shows prominently on Google or Yelp. (Remember: the same is true for other review sites like TripAdvisor, Airbnb, and even Amazon).

4. **Businesses establish a reputation.** As your business is reviewed on Yelp and/or Google, the more positive reviews it has, the more customers come to visit it (especially first time customers). But the more negative reviews you have, the fewer customers you get. This is called a “virtuous circle” or a “vicious circle.”
5. **Prospective customers read reviews.** Potential customers visit sites like Yelp, CitySearch, TripAdvisor, Google, and search for businesses via keywords. They find businesses of interest and read the reviews. Generally speaking, if they find positive reviews, they are primed to engage with that business. If they find negative reviews, they may not so much as even call or visit the business.
6. **Businesses claim their local listings.** Businesses have the right to claim, and optimize, their listings. By claiming their listing on a site like Google or Yelp, the business can “optimize” it by improving the business description with accurate keywords, uploading photos, responding to reviews, and in some cases like Google post updates. While businesses cannot delete their listings nor their negative reviews, they can participate in the new social media ecosystem of reviews.

LIFE IS NOT FAIR

NEITHER ARE REVIEWS

GET OVER IT

None of this is perfect, and I am not singling out Yelp. I am drawing your attention to the Review Revolution and the fact that it is not just real people spontaneously reviewing businesses but rather a mix of people writing spontaneous real reviews, people writing solicited (yet real) reviews, and even fake people writing fake reviews.

Users Believe Reviews

Users believe online reviews! According to a BrightLocal study, fully 92% of consumers now read online reviews (vs. 88% in 2014), and 68% say positive reviews make them trust a local business more (vs. 72% in 2014). You can read the full study at <http://jmlinks.com/5b>. Another excellent book on the social aspects of the Review Revolution is Bill Tancer's, *Everyone's a Critic*, at <http://jmlinks.com/37b>.

The reality is that users believe reviews, both good and bad, and both real and faked. The review ecosystem is a mess, yet as a business owner you have to realize (and accept) that reviews of all types impact your business. You can't change this fact; you can only work within the new "rules of the game."

That's the reality of the Review Revolution.

Is it fair that many consumers are not sufficiently skeptical about the reviews they read? No.

Is it fair that Yelp, Amazon, Google, TripAdvisor and other vendors are not doing as much as they could to filter out fake reviews as well as address the lopsided problem that the most likely unsolicited review is often a negative one? No.

Do any of these companies care about your business or the fact that you now live within the Review Revolution? No.

Is life fair? No. Is the Review Revolution fair? No.

Do both life and the review revolution offers fabulous opportunities despite their flaws? Yes, yes, yes!

Unhappy Small Business Owners

In my face-to-face classes on social media, review sites are among the most controversial. Yelp, in particular, is literally hated by many small businesspeople because a) they have received what they think are unfair negative reviews on Yelp, and b) Yelp has a reputation for strong-arming businesses into paid advertising. (Yelp disputes this charge, though rumors have dogged the company for years – see <http://jmlinks.com/37c>).

Here's why local businesses often get quite emotional about sites like Yelp:

1. Often times, the only reviews they have about their business are negative reviews, which they feel are inaccurate or unfair.

2. They do not understand how to claim or optimize their listings, nor how to respond to reviews.
3. They do not understand how reviews work, and how to influence reviews in their favor.

Moreover, many small business owners do not step back and compare 2016 with 1994. Then, only the rich, famous, connected, or lucky got reviews in the local papers. Getting reviewed was like winning the lottery: great if it happened in a positive way, but not something upon which you could build a marketing strategy. Today, however, any business can get reviews, and consumers can read those reviews online. The reality is that the Review Revolution created an enormous **positive marketing opportunity** for your business.

Let me repeat that:

The Review Revolution created an enormous positive marketing opportunity for your business!

If you know how to optimize your business listing and get reviews (more on this later).

Who Writes Reviews?

Let's talk about who writes reviews. Let's get real. Let's assume you are a local plumber. I have a clogged toilet. I go online and find your business. You come out, you fix my toilet, and you give me a bill for \$300. You did a good job, and I am happy about the service.

Will I go online to Yelp and write a review? It's doubtful. Unlike my relationship with a local French restaurant, I am not "proud" that I have a leaky toilet and I got it fixed. While I will likely go on Facebook and share a selfie of me and my wife at the local French restaurant, and likely go on Yelp and write a positive review to "showcase" how wealthy I am, and what a great husband I am, I am not "excited" that you provided me with excellent service with respect to my waste removal system in my bathroom, otherwise known as my toilet. No selfies to Facebook, hopefully no Snapchat of me on my newly fixed toilet, no positive review to Yelp.

As a happy customer, I am unlikely to leave a positive review.

My toilet has been fixed. I'm happy. Done. Over. End. Writing a review is the last thing on my mind.

Now, let's say you come out for my toilet repair, and you do NOT do what I consider a good job. Perhaps you crack my tile floor, or perhaps you get dirty water on my rug, or perhaps I just don't like you, or perhaps I find your fee of \$300 unreasonable.

I'm mad. I hate you. I pay the bill. I'm angry and I want revenge.

I think to myself, "I'll show you." I go online, and vent my anger in a Yelp review. I explain to fellow Yelpers (and the world) how terrible you are, how they should never use your business, etc. etc. I do this to "let off steam" as well as to "feel good about myself" that I am "doing the world a favor" by righting the wrong of your terrible business. I want you to go out of business. I want you to fail. That's justice to me, the unhappy customer.

(Don't believe this happens? To read reviews of the "worst food of my life" on Yelp, visit <http://jmlinks.com/4z>; to read reviews of the "best food of my life" on Yelp, visit <http://jmlinks.com/5a>.) You'll see both good, and bad, reviews on Yelp.

Two scenarios: a positive experience, and a negative experience.

Here are the **dirty little secrets** of the review ecosystem (with the possible exception of entertainment venues like restaurants, bars, museums, etc.):

- Consumers **believe** online reviews when making a purchase decision.
- However, outside of "fun" industries like restaurants and entertainment, the **most likely customer to leave an unsolicited review is the unhappy customer**. The very unhappy customer is very likely to spontaneously write a nasty review about your business!
- Outside of "fun" industries like restaurants and entertainment, **happy customers are NOT likely to write reviews**. They are not pre-motivated to share their experience with your plumbing company, your CPA firm, your DUI attorney services on Yelp without a nudge from you. (For restaurants, bars, and entertainment-type businesses, happy customers are much more likely to leave

reviews.) Outside of “fun” industries, you must solicit reviews from happy customers to succeed.

Two other customer segments are likely to leave reviews.

- **Review geeks / Extreme Yelpers** – which would be people like myself, digitally connected and participatory in the Yelp (or Google, TripAdvisor) ecosystems. Review geeks are not necessarily primed to leave positive, or negative reviews. They just tend to review frequently. As Yelp has evolved, more and more people ARE leaving reviews spontaneously about local services, which is a good thing.
- **The hostile minority** - these are unhappy campers who, because of sites like Yelp, now have a way to vent their rage at nearly everything. These “unhappy campers” tend to leave unhappy review after unhappy review: bitter and negative, they tend to hate everything and leave a destructive trail of negative reviews in their wake. Unfortunately, without any fault on its part, Yelp enabled the very unhappy, bitter people of the world to spread their negativity by venting against businesses. Don’t believe me? Try some Yelp searches, look for negative reviews, and click “up” to the profiles of the reviewers. In just a few minutes, I guarantee that you will find some very negative, pathetic sad little people.

UNHAPPY CUSTOMERS OFTEN WRITE REVIEWS

Yelp was built around restaurants, the one case in which satisfied customers are likely to leave reviews. Why? To show “to the world” that they have the disposable income and prestige to dine out – i.e., *social media narcissism*. Similar to what you see on Facebook, people like to “showcase” their positive achievements. *Look at me! I went to Disneyland, I went out to dinner, I went to this amazing museum, ate at this exclusive restaurant.*

Still, even in the entertainment sectors, unhappy customers are very likely to leave reviews.

The take-away here is to realize the following:

If you do nothing, the most likely reviews you will get will be negative reviews.

Let me repeat that because it is incredibly important to understand the dirty little secret of the Review Revolution:

If you do nothing, the most likely reviews you will get will be negative reviews.

Don't Shoot the Messenger

Now, don't shoot the messenger. Every business will get at least a few negative reviews, sooner or later. If you have just a couple, that's OK and normal (compare yourself to other, similar businesses to establish a baseline). But if you're getting negative review after negative review after negative review, you don't have a Yelp or online review problem, you have a business problem. Don't shoot the messenger; the Review Revolution gives you a new window on how actual customers feel about your product, service, or front-line, customer-facing employees.

Official Policy

Now, let's return to the Review Revolution, and look at the problem from the perspective of a business owner in some "non-fun" line of business such as plumbers, CPAs or accountants, divorce attorneys, or hair salons. You're unlikely to get positive reviews, unless you do something pro-active. But what's the official policy on reviews?

The official policies of Yelp, Google, TripAdvisor and the like is that you – as the business owner – are not allowed to solicit reviews in any way shape or fashion. Yelp, for example, advises business owners:

Don't ask your customers to review your business on Yelp. Over time, solicited reviews create bias in your business listing — a bias that savvy consumers can smell from a mile away. (Source: <http://jmlinks.com/4g>).

TripAdvisor states as follows:

The following actions may be considered fraudulent:

– Attempts by an owner to boost his/her own property's reputation by:

- *Writing a review for his/her own property*
- *Asking friends or relatives to write positive reviews*
- *Submitting a review on behalf of a guest*
- *Copying comment cards and submitting them as reviews*
- *Pressuring a TripAdvisor member to remove a negative review*
- *Offering incentives such as discounts, upgrades, or any special treatment in exchange for reviews*
- *Hiring an optimization company, third party marketing organization, or anyone to submit false reviews*
- *Impersonating a competitor or a guest in any way*

– Attempts by an owner to damage his/her competitors by submitting a negative review.

Bottom line: Any attempt to mislead, influence or impersonate a traveler is considered fraudulent and will be subject to penalty. (Source: <http://jmlinks.com/4h>).

Even Amazon has changed its once more lenient policy to one in which it is now taboo to give away free products in exchange for a review (<http://jmlinks.com/37d>). Amazon states, “In order to preserve the integrity of Community content, content and activities consisting of advertising, promotion, or solicitation (whether direct or indirect) is not allowed, including... Offering compensation or requesting compensation (including free or discounted products) in exchange for creating, modifying, or posting content.”

The Review Dilemma

So here's the **review dilemma**:

- *On the one hand*, if you do nothing, you are very likely to receive negative reviews from unhappy customers and not so likely to receive positive reviews from happy customers (true in all cases, except perhaps entertainment-type industries), but

- *On the other hand*, the official terms of service forbid you from soliciting reviews from customers.

Damned if you do, damned if you don't.

The reality of the Review Revolution is that in most cases and certainly in competitive industries like divorce law, DUI cases, plumbers, roofers, etc., most successful companies are pro-actively soliciting reviews. This does not mean that they are faking or buying reviews; it only means that they are nudging, cajoling, begging, emotionally incentivizing, and otherwise motivating happy customers to go online and take the time to write positive reviews around their business.

Is this fair? No.

Is this in accord with the terms of service? No.

Is it the reality? Yes.

Is it the public reality? No. Yelp, Google, TripAdvisor, Amazon, and all the other companies do their best to police reviews, but the reality is that the fact that reviews are heavily manipulated by vendors is an open secret.

But wait a second.

Is life fair? No.

Was it likely that your plumbing company would have been reviewed in the paper in 1995? No. Your small restaurant? No.

Even though the posted speed limit on the highway is 60 mph, do most cars actually go 60 mph? No.

The Review Revolution has given you an enormous, positive opportunity to reach new customers, just like the Interstate Highway System gives you the opportunity to travel

cross-country at 65 to 80 mph even though the posted speed limit may by 75 mph (in the West) and 60 mph (in the East).

Don't be the fastest car on the road. Don't be the red Mazda Miata going 95 mph in front of the cop. Just be in the fast car group, just not the fastest, most egregious car.

For now, just understand that **positive reviews are the key to success**, that soliciting reviews is technically against the terms of service, and begin to realize that you are going to have to create a strategy to solicit positive reviews, despite the posted terms of service.

» **ZERO IN ON YELP AS A REVIEW SITE**

Next, let's zero into Yelp as it's more organized than Google is from the perspective of a business. We'll turn to Google after we look at Yelp.

For an overview to Yelp by Yelp, visit <http://www.yelp-support.com/>. For your next **TODO**, sign up for a Yelp account (as a consumer not a business) if you do not already have one. Next, go to Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com/>) to explore some of the following categories in your local city by typing these keywords into the Yelp search box:

Sushi Restaurants

Jazz

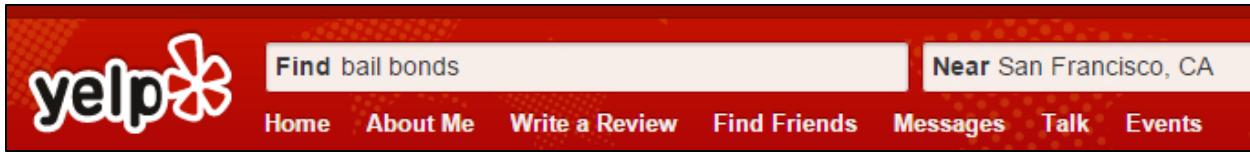
Plumbers

Divorce Attorneys

DUI Attorneys

Bail Bonds

Let's take Bail Bonds, for example. Here's a screenshot of how to search for "bail bonds" near San Francisco, CA:



Use the clickable links below to do the search:

- Here's a search for "Bail Bonds" near San Francisco, CA at <http://jmlinks.com/4i>.
- And here's one of the top search results: *Le Bail Bonds* at <http://jmlinks.com/32k>. (There's something so classy about being bailed out of jail by the French).

Notice how generally speaking, the sites that appear first on Yelp (as on Google) are those that have "Bail Bonds" in their name, are physically in San Francisco, and have many reviews.

Focusing in on the *Le Bail Bonds* listing, let's make some observations. First, scroll down about half way and look for "**From the business**" in red. It starts with "We have multiple offices." This is the **business listing**, as edited and submitted by the business. This indicates that this business has claimed their listing. (You'll also see a blue "Claimed" check mark next to the business name). Note the inclusion of relevant keywords, the types of search queries users might type into Yelp. Here's a screenshot:

From the business

Specialties

We have multiple offices located throughout the Bay Area!

The #1 **Bail** Bonds Company in the Bay Area

Has your loved one found out the hard way about the law? Let our **bail** bonds office help! Our mission is to provide professional , informative , and dedicated service. We're here to answer any questions or concerns you may have about **bail** anywhere in California .

Le **Bail** Bonds offers fast efficient service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We specialize in short term payment plans on your **bail** fees . We have specially trained **bail** agents to help get your loved ones out of jail quickly.

We service anywhere in California!

History

Established in 2007.

Second, notice the **photos** at the top of the listing at <http://jmlinks.com/32m>. Click on the photos, and notice how they are “keyword heavy” including the phrase “bail bonds” and the location of “San Francisco.” These can be submitted either by the business, or by users. So, if you don’t submit some, your users might (and they might be favorable, or unfavorable, to your business).

Third, read some of the **reviews**. Notice that for any individual reviewer, Yelp indicates how many friends they have on Yelp and how many reviews they have written. For example, here is a screenshot a review of a bail bond competitor (*Bail Now Bail Bonds*), showing two friends and two reviews:



Tonya T.
San Leandro, CA

2 friends
2 reviews

★★★★★ 12/23/2013

Would like to take a moment to send a HUGE THANK YOU to Tiki Maxwell and her team at Bail Now Bail Bonds for doing an excellent job with my brother's bond.

Tiki did a fantastic job of being very clear and precise with regards to the details of my brothers charges as well as keeping us up to date regarding the status of his case, as well as upcoming court dates. She remained professional, however was extremely compassionate and sympathetic regarding my family's situation.

Fourth, click on a **reviewer photo**, and you'll go up to their **Yelp profile**. For example, click on Tonya T (<http://jmlinks.com/4l>) and you'll go up to her profile. Read her reviews and make a guess as to how "real" and how "unsolicited" her reviews are. Some reviewers will look very legitimate, and others might look solicited, paid, or even faked. You'll soon realize that Yelp, like all the review-based sites, is a hodgepodge of unsolicited and solicited reviews, real and fake reviews, and so on and so forth.

For example, here's a screen shot of a suspicious review:



Chloe D.
Midtown West, Manhattan, NY

0 friends
1 review

★★★★☆ 9/11/2013

First to Review

My first time being arrested and I was terrified. Got in touch with my mom and a friend, and they got in touch with bail now. So beyond helpful!!!! They went above and beyond letting us know step by step what's happening.

Was this review ...?

Useful 3 Funny Cool Flag

Notice how Chloe D, has zero friends, has written only *one* review, lives in *Manhattan* and yet reviewed a *San Francisco* Bail Bonds. Is this a real review? A solicited review? Or a faked review?

Fifth, scroll to the very bottom and click on “review that are not currently recommended.” Yelp has a filter that attempts to filter out “fake” reviews and filter in “real reviews.” Here’s a screenshot:



Read some of these “non-recommended” reviews and attempt to guess which ones are truly real and which ones might be fake. Do you think Yelp is doing a good, or bad job, with its filter? How do the reviews shown prominently compare or contrast with the reviews at the bottom, or the reviews that are hidden?

» INVENTORY COMPANIES ON YELP, GOOGLE, OR OTHER RELEVANT SITES

If you are a local business, it will be pretty obvious that reviews matter. Even if you are a national business, you may realize that reviews matter. Your first step therefore is to identify the review sites that matter to your business. Your second step is to then browse similar businesses on those sites and conduct an inventory of what you like and dislike about their listings, realizing that unlike on Facebook, listings on review sites generally occur with or without the permission of the business. Actual control is much more limited.

Among the most important review sites are:

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com/>) – the largest local review site with great strength in restaurants, more popular in “Blue” states like New York or California than in “Red” states like Florida or Texas.

Google (<http://www.google.com/>). Accessible by doing Google searches on relevant keywords. In some cases, you’ll need to first find a company, and then Google its name to find its Google page (more below).

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com>). Rather new to the review ecosystem, Facebook is beefing up its reviews of local businesses. See <http://jmlinks.com/37e> for Facebook’s help file on business reviews.

TripAdvisor (<http://www.tripadvisor.com>). The leading travel review site.

YP (<http://www.yp.com/>). The traditional yellow pages gone digital.

VRBO (<http://www.vrbo.com/>) – a site for identifying short term vacation rentals.

Airbnb (<http://www.airbnb.com/>) – the leading site for vacation rentals.

Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com/>) – earth's largest retailer, with reviews on billions of products.

GlassDoor (<http://www.glassdoor.com/>) – reviews about businesses from the perspective of employees.

Facebook is a special, and growing case of reviews. Consumers don't pro-actively search Facebook (yet) for reviews, but they are beginning to leave them. So Facebook reviews function generally only as "trust" indicators, and/or encourage eWOM (electronic word of mouth). To enable Facebook reviews for your business, see <http://jmlinks.com/32p>.

IDENTIFY COMPANIES WHO DO REVIEW MARKETING WELL, AND REVERSE ENGINEER THEM

The easiest way to find logical review sites for your company is as follows:

1. Identify the **keywords** by which prospective customers might search for you. For example, if you are a Sushi restaurant in San Francisco, those keywords might be words such as "Sushi," "Sushi Bar," "Japanese Restaurant," "Japanese Caterers," etc.
2. **Google** those keywords and note which review sites come up.
3. Click over to the listing sites, and **make a list** of them.

4. Go over to each review site, re-input your search query keywords, and begin to browse company listings on the review site(s) you have identified.

For example, take “vacation rentals Lake Tahoe” and search it on Google (<http://jmlinks.com/4p>). Then, browse the search results and you’ll see:

<https://www.flipkey.com/>

<http://www.homeaway.com/>

<http://www.vrbo.com/>

<http://www.tripadvisor.com/>

<https://www.tahoeaccommodations.com/>

<http://www.vacationrentals.com/>

<https://www.airbnb.com/>

Obviously, the sites returned will vary with your keywords. By using this technique, however, you can use Google to identify the most important review sites and directories in your industry. Your **TODOS** here are

1. Take out a piece of paper, or set up a Word or Google document. Title this “keyword list.”
2. Using tools like the Google *keyword planner*, Google *suggest* (the terms suggested by Google when you type), or Google *related searches* (the terms that appear at the very bottom of the page) as well as just brainstorming “how customers might search for you,” create a keyword list of relevant terms. (To watch a video on how to use the Keyword Planner, visit <http://jmlinks.com/5c>, and to watch a video on how to build a Keyword Worksheet, visit <http://jmlinks.com/5d>). For a full list of keyword discovery tools, visit my SEO dashboard at <http://jmlinks.com/seodash> and scroll down to the “Keywords” section.
3. Conduct these searches on Google, and create an organized list of relevant search queries customers might use on Google, Yelp, etc.
4. As you search, write down the top review / directory sites that come up. Build a list of relevant review sites in your industry.

You now have an organized list of which reviews sites matter to you and your business. This list will, of course, be different for a *Bed and Breakfast* vs. a *CPA* vs. a *divorce attorney* vs. a *sushi restaurant*, but the review marketing game has the same rules across all review sites.

Google is Special

Next, let's zero in on Google. Structurally, Google reviews aren't that different from Yelp. The difference is that Google reviews have a disproportionate impact on whether you rank on Google and, especially where Yelp is weak as in the "Red" states vs. the "Blue" states, Google can be nearly the "only game in town."

You need to focus intensely on your Google My Business listing and understand the dynamics of Google. Let's look first at how Google reviews work, which is really a recap of how they work on Yelp.

As of December, 2017, here's the current set up:

Consumers simply browse Google. Consumers simply go to Google, type in keywords such as "Pizza," "Italian restaurants," or "Family Law Attorneys" and see companies show up in the "snack pack," which is the three listings showing (usually but not always with stars).

Consumers need a Google account to post reviews. Consumers can post reviews to Google / Google with either a Google+ account or just a Google account. But, they must have one type of Google account to be able to post a review. Anyone, however, can read a review.

Consumers rate businesses. Consumers rate businesses on a five star system, and can leave detailed reviews (good, bad, ugly) on the system, whether or not the business likes it.

Businesses can "claim" their Google listings at Google My Businesses. To "claim" their listings, businesses go to Google My Business at <https://www.google.com/business> which is the moribund Google+ system, and they can add a description (now invisible to consumers), photos (visible on Google), and respond to reviews. If so desired, businesses can post to Google as a social network (like Facebook) via this system, but the reality is that Google is

essentially dead as a social network (but very alive as a review system). Its only real value is in the review ecosystem.

Businesses can post announcements to their Google My Business Listing. Google now allows a local business to make a post to its business which will show up when someone Google's the business name as well as often (but not always) when someone does a relevant search on Google and your business wins a placement on Google Maps. See <http://jmlinks.com/37f> for information on this new opportunity.

However it evolves, if local matters to you, you must master Google / Google+ reviews. Here's why:

1. **Reviews drive your company to the top of Google.** The *more* reviews you have on the Google system, the *higher* you show on Google searches for local keywords.
2. **Consumers read and rely on Google reviews,** even if they don't understand where they came from or how to write them. The reality is that while *few* consumers *write* reviews, *many* if not most people *believe* them.

For your fourth **TODO**, download the **Review Research Worksheet**. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on *SEO Fitness Workbook 2018*, enter the code '**2018seo**' to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the "Reviews Research Worksheet." You'll answer questions as to whether your potential customers are using reviews, which review sites are important, and inventory what you like and dislike about their review marketing set up and marketing strategy.

» CLAIM AND OPTIMIZE YOUR LISTINGS ON YELP AND GOOGLE

Now that you've identified which local review sites matter (in addition to Google and Yelp), it's time to claim and optimize your listings. All of the sites work in essentially the same way, although there are differences in the details. The basic steps are:

1. Identify the local review site for which you want to "claim" your company listing.
2. Find your listing on the site.
3. Follow the instructions to "claim" it, usually by phone or postcard verification.

4. Optimize your listing description by writing keyword-heavy text, uploading photographs, and populating your listing with your hours of operation and other details.
5. Make sure that your website links back to your listing, and your listing links to your website.
6. Make sure that the business name, address, and phone number are the same on both the listing site and your website (be consistent).

To do this for Yelp:

1. Go to **<http://biz.yelp.com/>**
2. Enter your business name, and address and hit **Get Started** in red.
3. Follow the instructions to claim your business, usually by phone verification.
4. Once you have claimed your listing:
 - a. Click on Business Information on the left; re-write your description to contain logical keywords that potential customers might search for, including synonyms (*pizza, Italian restaurant, catering*, for example).
 - b. Choose relevant categories from the list provided.
 - c. Enter your basic information, hours, specialties (business information), history, and “meet the business owner” with an eye to logical keywords.
 - d. Click on photos on the left, and upload nice photos.
5. Make sure that the address and phone on Yelp are the SAME as the address and phone on your website.
6. Make sure that your website links to your Yelp listing (usually in the footer), and that your Yelp listing links to your website.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on how to claim and optimize your business on Yelp at <http://jmlinks.com/16x>.

To do this for Google:

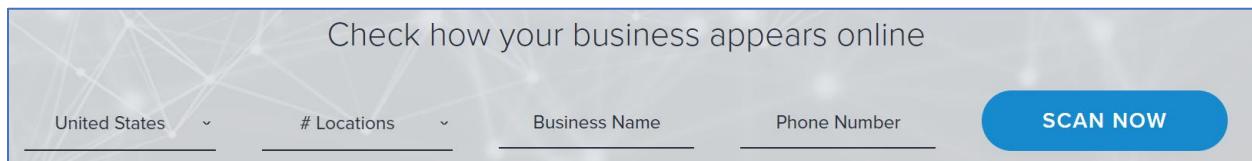
1. Sign in to your Google account or Gmail (if you use Gmail).
2. Go to **<https://www.google.com/business>**
3. Click on the green “Start Now” link on the top right. Or, if you don’t see that, click on the blue Circle / + at the bottom right.
4. Be sure to select “Add a location” or “Local Business”

5. Enter your business name and address.
6. Follow the instructions to claim your business, usually by postcard verification.
7. When you get the postcard, enter the PIN as indicated in the instructions.
8. Optimize your business description by clicking on the red “edit” button.’
9. Choose relevant categories.
10. Click on “manage photos” to change your profile picture, and cover photos, as well as add interior and/or exterior photos.
11. Make sure that the address and phone on Google are the SAME as the address and phone on your website.
12. Make sure that your website links to your Google listing (usually in the footer), and that your Yelp listing links to your website.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on how to claim and optimize your business on Google at <http://jmlinks.com/17d>.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on why Yelp matters for both SEO and social media marketing at <http://jmlinks.com/17e>. Note that Yelp drives reviews on the Bing Search Engine. For example, check out this Bing search for *Pizza* at <http://jmlinks.com/37h>.

Other local listings like YP.com or Citysearch follow similar procedures. To find all of your “second tier” listings, you can go to Yext (<http://www.yext.com/>) and enter your business name and phone number in the box on the right. Then click on the “scan now” blue button on the right. Here’s a screenshot:



For free, Yext will identify all your local listings. You can then click over to each and claim and optimize each. Or, if you have budget, you can subscribe to Yext and they will do this for all local listings including Yelp but **excluding** Google. A competitive service to Yext is MOZ Local at <http://jmlinks.com/37g>. Whitespark at <https://whitespark.ca> is yet another one.

NAP Consistency: Name, Address, Phone Number

To show up on Google search, it is important that ALL review sites and your website have the SAME company name, the SAME phone number, and SAME physical address. Make sure that your company name, phone number, and physical address appear on your website, usually in the footer. (This is called your *NAP (Name, Address, Phone)*).

“Citation” refers to the external listings on review websites that confirm (to Google and Bing) that your business has a certain phone number and physical address. This is used by the search engines to filter local search results by their proximity to the searcher or the geographic terms used in the search query.

Using a service like Yext allows you to claim, optimize, and make consistent this information across hundreds of review sites. This consistency is a big help to showing at the top of local searches on Google or Bing / Yahoo. Alternatives to Yext are Moz Local and Whitespark (<https://whitespark.ca/>); Yext tends to be the easiest, fastest, and most expensive. Whitespark is cheaper and slower. Moz is the most nuanced but hardest to use. All of these are excellent ways to claim your 2nd-tier listings, after Google and Yelp (the two most important local review sites).

Organize and Claim Your Local Listings

For your next **TODO**, make a spreadsheet of ALL relevant local review sites. Go to each, and claim / optimize your local listings. Be sure to note your login and password!

- CLAIM YOUR GOOGLE AND YELP WITH A PERMANENT CORPORATE EMAIL (NOT AN EMPLOYEE EMAIL)
- **DO NOT LOSE YOUR GOOGLE AND YELP LOGIN AND PASSWORDS!**

Lost password retrieval on Yelp and Google is a **disaster!** Neither system has a good password retrieval function; on Yelp in particular, if your password is lost, God help you. Do not lose your passwords! Write them down somewhere where you will be able to find them in a few years.

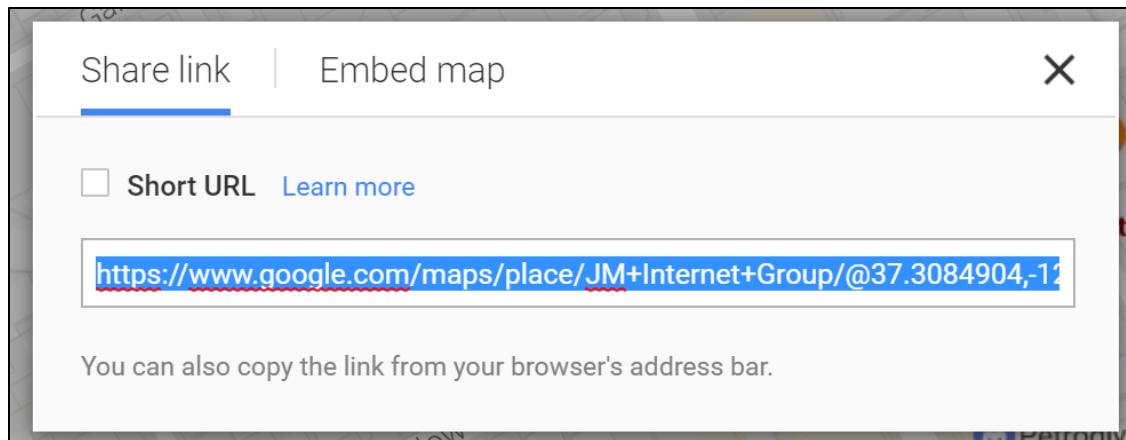
» SEO YOUR LOCAL WEBSITE

Local is an area that crosses both SEO and social media marketing. While you are working on your review marketing efforts from the perspective of social media, be sure that your local-oriented website follows the rules of On Page SEO as explained in Chapters 3.1 and 3.2, specifically -

- **Optimize Your Home Page.** Make sure that your Home Page, especially the TITLE tag contains your keywords and your city. If you are a Miami plumber, make sure that both the word “Miami” and the word “plumber” appears in the visible text of your home page.
- **Localized Landing Pages.** Make sure that you have at least one localized landing page that clearly states your business name, telephone number, and physical address. On each localized landing page for which you have a “real” physical address, use the JSON-LD markup to communicate your physical location to Google. (See <http://jmlinks.com/38s> for a tool to help you create this code; use <http://jmlinks.com/38t> for an overview to Schema markup for local businesses).
- **Create a Consistent NAP.** Include a consistent NAP (Name / Address / Phone Number) on your website that matches the NAP on your Yelp, Google, and other local review sites. Make sure that all your listings, especially Google and Yelp, link directly to your website.
 - **Cross-link** your website to/from your NAP listing, especially your Google My Business and Yelp listings. Use a service like Whitespark, Moz, or Yext to claim and optimize your 2nd tier listings (See the Dashboard at <http://jmlinks.com/seodash> > Local SEO tools for links).

Optimize Your Contact Us Page

Be sure to have an “about us” or “contact us” page on your website. Optimize that page for your target home city by including the city name and keywords in your TITLE tag, plus visible content. Also, on that page, include an embedded Google map, which you can generate by searching for your company on Google, clicking up to the maps tab, and then click the share tab. Next, click on “embed map” to get the HTML code to embed a Google map on your website. Here’s a screenshot:



Finally, use the microdata / schema.org system to embed the appropriate JSON-LD schema markup on your website. J.D. Flynn has created an online tool that will guide you through creating Schema data for you at <http://jmlinks.com/32q>. This is not required but is helpful. Just remember that reviews matter far, far more than having JSON-LD data.

In summary, for two quick guides to local SEO, see <http://jmlinks.com/32r> (short and simple) and <http://jmlinks.com/32s> (long and detailed).

» CULTIVATE POSITIVE REVIEWS

Returning to the social media and review aspects of local, we'll assume you've claimed and optimized the relevant listing services for your local business. Most often this will be at least Google and Yelp, and in specific industries it might include TripAdvisor, VRBO, or Airbnb. If you sell products, it might be your product listings and uploads on Amazon. Or it might be on Glassdoor.com.

At this point, you have two options:

1. Wait **passively** for positive customer reviews, and hope that the positive reviews will outpace the negative reviews (according to the official policy of Yelp, Google, etc.).
2. Be **pro-active** and try to encourage your happy customers to post reviews.

Which do you think the winners in local search and social media are doing?

Legal Disclaimer

You are responsible for everything you do in terms of your Internet marketing. Nothing I am writing here should be construed as required or recommended advice. Legally, I am recommending that you do nothing (option #1).

Take responsibility for your own actions as a marketer, and act on your own risk!

Soliciting Reviews

That said, here is the reality. If you wait passively for reviews (unless you are in the entertainment industry like a restaurant or bar), the most likely scenarios will be a) no reviews, or b) bad reviews, or at least a preponderance of bad reviews. The reason for this is if a customer's plumbing experience is good, she's happy and she goes on with her life. If her plumbing experience is bad, however, she might get angry and be motivated to go on Yelp, Google, CitySearch, etc., and "tell the world" about how much she hates the company that did her wrong.

This dynamic is the dirty little secret of review marketing: unhappy customers are the ones most likely to leave unsolicited reviews.

You the business owner or marketer can, however, fight back against this dynamic. Here are some strategies to solicit positive reviews about your business:

Face to Face. This is the most powerful way to get positive reviews. The employee who is "face to face" with the customer builds rapport with customer. A scenario might be:

Technician: "OK, I've fixed your toilet. Let's run through it together, and verify it's in working order.

Client: Yes, it's great. Thank you so much!

Technician: You're welcome. Hey, if you have a moment, could you do us a HUGE FAVOR and write a review on Google or Yelp about your experience?

Client: Yes.

- If client knows how to do this, just give him or her a card with a direct link to the review site location.
- If client does not know how to do this, give him or her a card with step-by-step instructions.

Phone Reminders. Either at the time of service, or shortly thereafter, call the customer to see “how it went,” and if they’re happy, ask them to write a review online.

Paper Reminders. Either at the time of service, or shortly thereafter, mail a physical postcard thanking the client for their business, and asking them to write a review on Yelp, Google, etc.

Email Reminders. Either at the time of service, or shortly thereafter, send an email thanking the client for their business, and asking them to write a review online.

The reality is that face-to-face is, by far, the strongest way to motivate customers to write reviews, phone contact the next strongest, and so on and so forth.

Help Customers Write Reviews

Many customers may not understand how to write a review, so a step-by-step instruction sheet would be helpful. Use a URL shortener like <http://bit.ly>, or <http://tinyurl.com> to shorten the link to your local review listing page.

Google: Generate a REVIEW US URL on Google

Google, as I have explained earlier, is really a mess. To find a short, easy link to your customer reviews on Google follow these steps.

1. Go to the GradeUS Google review generator tool at <http://jmlinks.com/13j>.
2. Enter your business name and city or postal code, and press the blue “Get Google Review Links.”
3. Select your company from the list it provides, and hit “Continue.”

4. Click on the link for “Open in Search Results” and highlight the huge URL string it gives you from Google.
5. Copy this URL string.
6. Go to **http://tinyurl.com/** and past this URL into the box “Enter a long URL to make it tiny.”
 - a. If you like “customize” your URL to make it easy to remember / or just cool.
 - b. Here’s an example: **http://tinyurl.com/revjasonseo.**

Alternatively –

1. Go to Google at **https://www.google.com/** and enter your company name plus a keyword and/or your city.
2. Click on the “blue” Google reviews link (you MUST have at least ONE Google Review to use this method!).
3. Highlight the huge URL Google gives you in the top of the browser.
4. Copy this URL string.
5. Go to **http://tinyurl.com/** and past this URL into the box “Enter a long URL to make it tiny.”
 - a. If you like “customize” your URL to make it easy to remember / or just cool.
 - b. Here’s an example: **http://tinyurl.com/revjasonseo.**

You can write this in an email or on a printed sheet of paper. Here’s an example of an email I might send to my clients:

Greetings!

Thank you so much for the opportunity to serve your Internet marketing and consulting needs. As the owner of the *Jason McDonald SEO Consulting Agency*, I truly appreciate your business!

If you have a moment, I would REALLY appreciate an honest review on one of the local listing sites. Here are the instructions:

Google.

1. Sign in to your Google and/or Gmail account at **https://www.google.com/**.
2. Go to **http://tinyurl.com/revjasonseo.**

3. Click on the white “Write a review”
4. Write your review

Yelp:

1. Sign into your Yelp account at <http://www.yelp.com/>.
2. Go to <http://bit.ly/jason-yelp>.
3. Click on the red “write a review” button
4. Write your review

Thank you,

Jason McDonald

To GET POSITIVE REVIEWS, ASK HAPPY CUSTOMERS TO REVIEW YOU

A few free services have tools to help you create nice-looking Web pages and handouts to encourage reviews:

Bright Local at <http://jmlinks.com/4s>.

WhiteSpark at <http://jmlinks.com/4t>.

A few paid services are emerging that “pre-survey” your customers. Essentially, they first ask your customer if they liked your company and its product or service. If yes, then that

customer is prompted to write a review. If no, then the customer is given a longer detailed survey and that that survey is sent to you the business owner; the customer is NOT prompted to write a review. One such service is ReviewBuzz (<http://www.reviewbuzz.com>). Others are ReviewInc (<http://www.reviewinc.com>) and YotPo (<https://www.yotpo.com/>).

Be Judicious. Understand “Plausible Deniability”

Understand that according to the official policy, even a mild handout asking for an “honest review” is a violation of the terms of service of most of the review providers! Therefore, I do NOT recommend that you post these publicly on your website. Be judicious: give them out in printed or email format, and only to those happy customers who have been pre-selected by your staff.

Obviously, if a client is unhappy and you cannot fix it to make them happy: DO NOT ASK THEM FOR A REVIEW.

In fact, a really smart strategy is as follows:

- **Conduct a survey** of customers after they use your service asking them a) if they are happy, b) if they would write a review, and c) if they know how. This could be done formally (an email survey on a site like SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>)) or informally just be pre-asking the customer face-to-face, over the phone, or via email. You can also use Jotform and “conditional logic” to set up this type of pre-survey on your website (See <http://jmlinks.com/37j>).
- **If they ARE happy**, then ask them nicely to **write a review**.
- **If they are NOT happy**, either a) make them happy, or b) do **NOT** ask them for a review.

In this way, you avoid motivating unhappy customers to review you online. Indeed, if you are in a sensitive industry (e.g., Bail Bonds, apartment rentals) in which many customers are not happy, I do not recommend you even publicize to your clients face-to-face or in the real world that you are on the review sites. If many of your customers will be negative, then do not make it “easy” for them to give you a negative review!

Paying for Reviews

Let's face it. Review marketing is the "contact sport" of social media marketing. In certain industries (e.g., DUI attorneys, private detectives, breast augmentation services), many reviews are solicited if not faked, and sometimes incentivized with monetary incentives.

Should you pay for reviews? Generally speaking, I would not pay for reviews. (I am talking about real clients not completely faked reviews). Some companies do incentivize by giving \$25 Starbucks or Amazon gift cards once a review is published; however, if this becomes known to a Yelp or a Google you wrong a very strong risk of being severely penalized.

Offering monetary incentives to get reviews is a dangerous strategy, so be forewarned.

Yelp will even mark your listing with an aggressive naughty notice if you are busted paying for reviews. You can browse real examples of this on Yelp at <http://jmlinks.com/4u>. First and foremost, therefore, if you choose to "go to the dark side" and offer payments, I would not publicize it! And: **I AM NOT RECOMMENDING THAT YOU DO THIS.** I am just pointing out that it is done.

Also, note that not only is "paying for reviews" likely to bring down the wrath of Yelp, you can also bring down the wrath of Yelp by offering to pay a negative reviewer to take down their review. Anytime you are offering money in exchange for a Yelp behavior then you run that risk – so be forewarned about just how uptight Yelp is about reviews and payments! (Google and other sites have similar policies).

Incentivize Employees

A better way to incentivize is to offer your employees an incentive, rather than the customer, for reviews published online. Assume for example you are a local pizza joint. Offer your employees a \$25.00 bonus EACH after each positive review on Yelp. Or if you are a roofing company, give the technician a handout explaining how to write a review online, and give him a \$25.00 bonus EACH TIME a customer posts a review. In that way, you motivate your front-line employees to be customer-friendly, and when there is a positive customer experience, to politely ask the customer to write an honest review on Yelp, Google, etc.

Motivate your employees to ask for reviews!

I would not put any pro-active review solicitation strategy in writing on the Internet, just as I would not call the California Highway Patrol and inform them that, in general, I go five miles faster than the posted speed limit while driving the highways and byways of the Golden State.

Let sleeping dogs lie.

But just as going 65 mph in a 60 mph zone is unlikely to cause a police action, polite nudges to encourage real reviews from real customers are unlikely to be a big problem. If you do it, just keep it private.

Don't Overthink It. Just Ask for Reviews from Real Customers

In my experience, if most businesses would simply *ask* a few clients for reviews, they would get them. Yes, you'll ask ten clients to get one review. But you'll get that one review. The real problem is to motivate employees to ask and ask and ask and ask to get that one review to go live on Yelp, Google, or other review sites.

Recognize, understand, and accept that you will ask ten people to get just one review. That's just how it is: customers are self-centered and lazy (but we love them).

Why Reviews Matter (a Lot)

Getting positive reviews is hard work. It's not done in a day. Slow and steady will win the race. Just create a culture at your business of great customer service and an awareness of that "special moment" when a customer is happy to ask for a positive honest review.

Reviews, however, are worth their weight in **gold**. No, in **platinum**. Here's why:

1. **Reviews are a "trust indicator."** For better or worse, consumers tend to believe reviews and use them as trust indicators about your business. A company that has many positive reviews will crush a company that has negative reviews, and outperform a company that has just a few or zero reviews.

2. **Reviews help you in search.** The MORE reviews you have the HIGHER you will show at the top of Google, Yelp, CitySearch, AirBnB, TripAdvisor, Amazon, and even iTunes!

REVIEWS ARE WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN PLATINUM

Do anything and everything honestly and ethically possible to encourage your best customers to “spread the word” by writing reviews about your business online. After just a few positive reviews, you will be amazed at what they do for your business.

Responding to Negative Reviews

Negative reviews will happen. As the business owner, you may feel as if someone walked up to your newborn baby sleeping calmly in her stroller and said to you:

Your baby is ugly. Your baby stinks. I hate your baby. I had a bad experience with your baby, and I am going to tell the world how much the baby that you are working for blood, sweat, and tears is terrible.

Here's an example:

Lupita L.
Los Angeles, CA
75 friends
95 reviews

3/22/2016
 1 check-in

If I could, I would give this truck a 00!!! Worst tacos in the world! Do yourself a favor don't come. Meat was awful. Multas had no cheese. To top it off, a large group arrived after me and their food was served b4 my tacos so I had to wait forever. I don't understand how some people give them 4 & 5 stars.

You're human. You're close to your business. It is like your baby. Your first reaction will be **ANGER**.

Resist the temptation to respond in kind. Do not go online and argue with the negative consumer. Do not insult them. Do not use unprofessional language. *When you wrestle with a pig, the pig gets dirty and the pig likes it.*

Instead:

- **Calm down.** Wait at least 24 hours before doing anything. Sleep on it.
- **Have someone else deal with negative reviews:** an outside consultant or employee who is not emotionally involved. Let a calm head prevail, and it probably will not be the head of the business owner.
- **Try to fix the problem.** If at all possible, reason with the person (you can usually contact them via Yelp, Google, etc.), and see if you can fix the problem. In some cases, you can, and then you can politely ask them to change the review.
- **Respond.** State your side of the situation in a positive, professional manner while acknowledging the right of the reviewer to her own opinion.

Remember: every business will get a few negative reviews, but if your business has more than the average... you may have a “business” problem and not a “review” problem.

Don't shoot the (review) messenger.

Do Not Validate the Bad Review

Please note that if you have a negative review on a site like Yelp, Google, Amazon, etc., and the reviewer has a **weak profile** (e.g., *this is their first review, few friends, etc.*), if you respond to it, you are *validating* that review and making it *more likely* to appear high in your profile. Generally speaking, therefore, I recommend waiting at least a month before responding to a negative review by someone with a weak profile. There is a chance it will be filtered out as fake (especially on Yelp). But if after a month, it is still there, then consider a response.

Responding to Reviews

To **respond to a negative review**, do as follows. First and foremost, take the high ground. You can log into your business account / profile and respond to negative reviews. This is one of the benefits of “claiming” your business profile. But be positive and professional: acknowledge their right to their opinion, but be firm as to your right to state your opinion as well. Second, state your side of the situation but realize you are NOT talking to the unhappy customer. You are talking to the person reading your reviews and deciding whether to reach out to you for a possible business engagement. Explain your side of the story. Often times, the negative reviews come from nasty, unhappy people (which you can politely point out as for example, by asking the reader to click on the reviewer’s name and see all their other negative reviews to realize that this is just a negative person). Or, the person wasn’t a good fit for your business (so explain why). Or the person is being plain crazy. For example, I have had plastic surgeons condemned on Yelp because their waiting room was too hot, or other clients condemned because they didn’t respond to an email. Finally, if the review is fake (i.e., by a competitor) or obscene or racist, you can complain to Yelp, Google, etc., and in some cases they will remove the reviews. (To do this, log in to a personal account on Yelp, and right click on the offensive review. You can then flag it and complain).

To read Yelp’s official guide to responding to reviews, visit <http://jmlinks.com/5e>. To read Google’s, visit <http://jmlinks.com/5f>. To read TripAdvisor’s, visit <http://jmlinks.com/5g>. For whatever review site matters to your business, you can usually search their help files for advice on how to respond to reviews. However, remember that the official policies are often very naive about how the game is truly played.

SWAMP NEGATIVE REVIEWS WITH POSITIVE REVIEWS

A better strategy is to ignore the bad reviews, and focus on soliciting positive reviews to “swamp” the negative reviews in an ocean of positivity. Again, in no way shape or form, am I advising you to be dishonest or solicit fake reviews. I am simply advising you to ask happy customers to just take a few minutes and tell their happy stories. If you pro-actively solicit positive, real reviews you can drown out or swamp the negative reviews with a preponderance of positive reviews. In short, getting positive real reviews is the best way to respond to negative reviews.

You don't ask, you don't get.

For your next **TODO**, download the **Review Solicitation Worksheet**. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on *SEO Fitness Workbook 2018*, enter the code ‘**2018seo**’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “Reviews Solicitation Worksheet.” You’ll create a strategy to encourage positive reviews about your company.

» MONITOR AND IMPROVE YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Reputation management is a new buzzword about protecting one’s online reputation, whether for an individual or a business. To understand reputation management, first back up and consider the sales funnel, often explained as *AIDA: Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action*. Prospective customers go through distinct phases as they consider solutions for their problems, needs, or desires:

Awareness. An **awareness** of the problem and the beginning of Internet searches and social media outreach to friends, family, and colleagues about the problem, need, or desire and possible solutions. In this phase, searches are often “educational” in nature as in “how to cater a wedding” or “wedding ideas.”

Interest. As a customer becomes aware of available market solutions, they develop an **interest** in vendor offerings, and even may make a shortlist. At this stage, and the next, they move closer to an “action,” i.e. a purchase or engagement with a vendor solution. Searches at this point become “best wedding caterers” or “Boston catering companies,” etc.

Desire. Interest shifts towards **desire**, and the customer begins to narrow down his or her shortlist. At this point, searches become *reputational* in nature. They may search a business name PLUS words like *reviews* or *complaints*. If your business were named Gina’s Italian Kitchen, for example. They might search Google for “Gina’s Italian Kitchen Reviews” or “Complaints against Gina’s Italian Kitchen,” or “Gina’s Italian Kitchen Wedding Catering Reviews.” **Reviews** is the operative word; if he or she finds *positive* reviews, that confirms your business is a good choice, whereas if he or she finds *negative* reviews, they may take you out of the consideration set entirely.

Action. A choice is made to purchase the service or engage with your business. Upon completion, the customer may decide to leave her own review about your business for others.

Reputation management, in short, is monitoring and protecting your online **branded** and **reputational** searches. To be frank, it is also about attempting to upgrade positive reviews and positive brand mentions so that your online brand image shines.

To understand the search patterns, you can use the example of my company, The JM Internet Group. For example –

a “branded” search is: “JM Internet Group”

a “reputational” search is “JM Internet Group Reviews”

Review sites such as Yelp, CitySearch, Google, etc., as well as ones specific to your industry can have an extremely positive – or extremely negative – impact on your online reputation. Indeed, branded searches on Google (searches for your company name, or your company name plus ‘reviews’) often return Google profiles and reviews directly on the right side of the page. For example, here’s a screenshot for the search “Mecca Coffee Company” on Google:

The screenshot shows a Google search results page for the query "mecca coffee company". At the top, there's a search bar with the query, followed by a microphone and search icon. Below the search bar are navigation links for All, Maps, News, Images, Shopping, More, Settings, and Tools. The search results section starts with a snippet for "Mecca Coffee Co" from <https://www.meccacoffeeco.com/>, which includes a brief description of their products and services. The second result is "meccacoffee | ABOUT - Mecca Coffee Co" from <https://www.meccacoffeeco.com/about>, with a similar description. The third result is "Mecca Coffee Company - Home | Facebook" from <https://www.facebook.com/Places/Tulsa,Oklahoma/Grocery%20Store>, which includes a star rating of 4.8 and 76 votes. To the right of these results is a local pack for "Mecca Coffee Company". It features a thumbnail image of the interior, a map pin on a map of Tulsa, and a "See photos" link. Below the image is the business name "Mecca Coffee Company" and its address "1330 E 41st St, Tulsa, OK 74105". It also shows a 4.7 rating with 17 reviews, a "Closed now" status, and a note about Memorial Day. There are "Website" and "Directions" buttons.

You can try the search at <http://jmlinks.com/32n>. Notice the primacy of reviews and the highlighted Google listing information plus review count on the far right. Someone interested in going to the Mecca Coffee Company in Tulsa is likely to search for this, or for “Mecca Coffee Company Reviews.” This is even more true for high value searches like probate attorneys, roofing companies, or kitchen remodeling contractors.

GOOGLE YOUR COMPANY NAME PLUS REVIEWS AND MONITOR YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

In addition to identifying, claiming, and optimizing your business listings on relevant review sites, you should also monitor your business on these sites. Usually the act of claiming your listing in and of itself will generate an email any time someone reviews your company. Paid services such as ReviewPush (<https://www.reviewpush.com/>), Free Review Monitoring (<https://freereviewmonitoring.com/>), and ReviewTrackers (<http://www.reviewtrackers.com/>) are sophisticated alert systems so that you always know whenever a new review is published about your business.

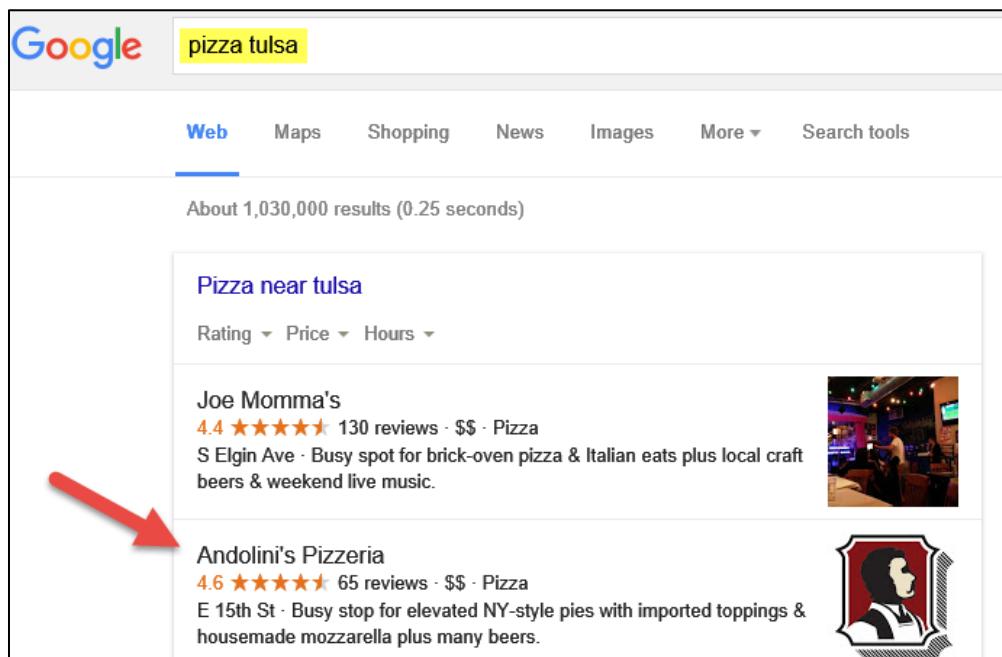
For your next **TODO**, at a minimum set up a monthly checkup of your listings on the major review sites you have identified. Note in a spreadsheet how many reviews you have, how many are 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1 stars. If you have budget, consider using a paid monitoring service.

» MEASURE YOUR RESULTS

Measurement of reviews focuses on a) how many reviews you have on sites like Google or Yelp, b) your numeric “star” rating average, and c) whether you rank on various local search queries on Google, Bing, Yelp, AirBnB, etc. On your keyword worksheet, I recommend that you create a tab called “local.” Then every month, create a line item (for example, June, 2018), and note down for your business:

The review site, number of reviews you have, and cumulative star rating.

Secondly, try searches for your strategic keywords on Yelp, Google and/or on other relevant review sites (e.g., Airbnb, TripAdvisor, etc.), create a line item for each month, and indicate your position on those searches. For example, Andolini's Pizzeria was measured as No. 2 for the Google Search “pizza Tulsa” as seen in this screenshot on September 12, 2015.



On Yelp, Andolini's is listed as No. 1. In other words, the restaurant is in good shape on both review sites. If it had dipped to a lower position on Yelp, for instance, then a Todo would be to encourage more Yelp reviews.

The two major aspects of monitoring your reviews, therefore are 1) your review count on each review site, and 2) your position on keyword searches on those sites. To the extent possible, you can then accelerate your efforts for a lagging site and relax a bit for a site for which you rank well and have positive reviews. (Note to monitor your rank, you can use the Fat Rank plugin for Chrome to monitor your rank on Google searches at <http://jmlinks.com/25w> or graduate to a paid rank measurement service such as AHREFS.com, MOZ.com, or SERPS.com. A good free tool to vary your location on Google search can be found at <http://jmlinks.com/26z>.)

»» CHECKLIST: LOCAL ACTION ITEMS

Test your knowledge of the Review Revolution! Take the *Review marketing quiz* at <http://jmlinks.com/qzrv>. Next, here are your local SEO Action Items:

- **Identify** those search queries that are relevant to your business and generate either the “local pack” and/or localized search results on Google or Bing.
- **Research** whether your customers (and competitors) utilize reviews. Which sites seem to matter for reviews, and why?
 - Identify a few **customer profiles** that match your *buyer personas*, and determine how active they are as reviewers.
 - Identify **companies** or **products** to “reverse engineer” who is doing a good job on various review sites both in terms of their search rank and their review volume and aggregate star ratings.
- Set up or claim **business listings** (e.g., claim your Google My Business account, Yelp account, AirBnB listings, etc.). Be sure to write down the passwords and keep them safe!
- **Optimize** your **business listings** by writing keyword-heavy copy into the business or product description, and uploading relevant photos.
- **Optimize** your **NAP consistency** by having a consistent name, address, and phone on your website and on all relevant listing sites. Consider using a service like Moz Local, Yext, or Whitespark to claim and optimize your secondary listings.

- Create a **review solicitation strategy** that you are comfortable with. This may be as simple as simply requiring employees to “ask” for a review after each job, or as complex as a pre-survey that has a review follow up.
- Pay attention to your company’s branded searches on Google and whether review sites are showing up as part of a **reputation management** strategy.
- Respond to negative reviews**, but be polite and take the high ground.
- Measure your **KPIs** (Key Performance Indicators) such as total reviews and aggregate star ratings each month as well as your rank on relevant local search queries.

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Local SEO Tools* for my favorite free tools on local and review marketing. Just visit <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>.

»»» DELIVERABLE: A LOCAL SEO MARKETING PLAN

Now that we’ve come to the end of our chapter on local reviews, your **DELIVERABLE** has arrived. For your final **TODO**, download the **Yelp / Local Marketing Plan Worksheet**. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on *SEO Fitness Workbook 2018*, enter the code ‘**2018seo**’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “Yelp / Local Review Marketing Worksheet.” By filling out this plan, you and your team will establish a vision of what you want to achieve via local reviews.



6.1

METRICS

Google Analytics is the best free Web metrics tool available today. It is, however, only a tool: it doesn't tell you what to measure, nor what to do with the information you acquire. Before you even start with Analytics, your first step is to think through *what* you want to measure, and *why* you want to measure it. Common metrics are your *rank* on Google for target keyword queries, *traffic sources* or how people find your website, your top *landing pages*, your *bounce rate*, and whether landings on your website convert into *goals*, such as registrations or sales. Second, after you've identified what you want to measure, you need to turn to not just Google Analytics but other metrics tools and understand how to use them. Third, there are even more advanced techniques that can "slice and dice" your data so that you truly know what's going on with your website. Finally, there's no point in getting all this data unless you do something with it, so you need to take the knowledge gained from Analytics and turn it into actionable todos.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Define What to Measure
- » Measure Your SERP Rank
- » Measure Your Domain Authority and Social Metrics
- » Use Google Search Console (Webmaster Tools)
- » Use Google Analytics Basic Features
- » Use Advanced Features in Google Analytics
- »»» Checklist: Metrics Action Items
- »»» Deliverable: Google Analytics Worksheet

» DEFINE WHAT TO MEASURE

Metrics, especially as seen through the prism of Google Analytics, can seem overwhelming. Most marketers and small business owners want to measure whether they are ranking on Google, whether they're getting traffic, and whether that traffic is converting (or not) into sales or sales leads as indicated by feedback forms. In terms of more specific items, here is a breakdown of things you should commonly measure or record every month on the 1st of the month:

1. **Your Rank on Google Searches.** SEO starts with whether your website is in position 1, 2, or 3 on Google or at least page one. Using your keywords as identified on your keyword worksheet, you want to measure your rank on Google and its improvement over time. By knowing which keywords you rank well for, and which you rank poorly for, you'll know where you need to concentrate your efforts.
2. **Your Domain Authority and Links.** Off Page SEO is all about links, so you want to use a tool like MOZ.com or AHREFS.com and measure the domain authority of your website, and the number of inbound links. With your link-building efforts, this should improve over time.
3. **Social Media & Reviews.** Social media is increasingly important for Off Page SEO, so you want to measure your "followers" on Twitter, your "likes" on Facebook, and your "followers" on LinkedIn for your company page. In addition, if local matters to you, you want to keep track of your **review count** on Google and Yelp. Through your promotion efforts, you want to see an increase in **followers** and **reviews** over time.
4. **Traffic Sources.** Turning to Google Search Console and Google Analytics, you want to measure your "traffic sources" to learn how people *find* your website, especially your best performing keywords and referrer websites.
5. **User Behavior.** Once they land on your website, do they convert to a sale or sales lead, or do they just browse around and leave? Learn what people *do* once they land on your website, especially marketing goals such as registrations or completed sales. Understand *successes* and *failures* and investigate ways to improve your conversion rate.

For your first **TODO**, call a marketing meeting, sit down with a blank piece of paper or a Word / Google doc, and brainstorm what metrics are most important to you as a marketer. How do people find you? What do they do once they land on your website? Many marketers speak also of **KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)**, which can be

something as specific as inbound calls from customers or something as conceptual as your brand equity. In terms of SEO, what background metrics, such as rank on Google and reviews on Google or Yelp, turbocharge your success on Google? Identify these and other KPIs that can be translated into something concrete to measure.

It's also important to keep the general "flow" of the "sales ladder" or "sales funnel" in mind:

Awareness / need > keyword search query > your website ranking on Google > click from Google > landing on your website > user behavior > sales lead or sale

Your KPIs should take measurements at any point along this process, with an eye to what can go "right" or what can go "wrong" at any step. For example, you might not rank on Google at all. Or you might rank, but not get the click because your TITLE and META DESCRIPTION are not enticing. Or you might get the click, but not the sale or conversion because your landing page experience isn't very compelling, etc.

» **MEASURE YOUR SERP RANK**

Your **SERP rank** (Search Engine Results Page) measures your website's position on a target search query. Once you know your keywords, then the first KPI is whether you rank or not for various related search queries on Google. (You may read on the blogosphere that rank doesn't matter, but that's just silly. That rank is getting harder to measure because of localization and personalization is true, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't pay attention to your rank on Google vis-à-vis your keyword targets! *No rank, no click, no click no sale.*)

Measuring your rank on Google isn't easy, and it's getting harder. One way to measure rank is to pay for a tool such as the MOZ.com tools, AHREFS.com, or SERPS.com. These companies play "cat and mouse" with Google to allow for rank-checking because Google does not want anyone to systematically measure their rank. They want you to advertise.

Short of using a paid tool, here are some free strategies.

#1 Measure Your Rank Manually

Simply go to Google and use an "incognito" mode. In Chrome, that's hidden in the top right under the "three dots." You can also login to your Google account (top right when

you are on Google.com) under your picture. Alternatively, you can go to Google.com (<https://www.google.com/>) and make sure you are “signed in.” Then, go to <https://www.google.com/preferences> and find “Private results.” Click “Do not use private results.” Here’s a screenshot:

Private results

[Private results](#) help find more relevant content for you, see.

- Use private results
- Do not use private results

Either browsing in “incognito mode” or with “private results” off, next do your searches by entering your various keyword phrases. Then find your domain on the Google results page and count your position from the top, only counting the organic results (i.e., ignoring ads and ignoring the “local pack”). Record them as 1,2,3, etc. up to 10 on an Excel spreadsheet or on a tab on your keyword worksheet.

#1b Measure Your Rank Manually for Local Search Queries

As we discussed in the previous Chapter, Google varies the results for certain “local” searches based on your user location. For example, a searcher in Tulsa, Oklahoma, sees different search results for “Pizza” than a searcher in Portland, Maine. You can check your localized search results via the AdWords Preview Tools at <http://jmlinks.com/15g> or via the SERPS.com location tool at <http://jmlinks.com/26z>. Record your rank on Google for location searches in the “local pack” as A, B, or C, or if there are variations in organic, then track those as well location by location. Here’s a screenshot of the AdWords Preview tool for “pizza” with location set to Tulsa, OK:

 Google AdWords

Ad Preview Tool

Search for your ad on Google

Enter search terms
pizza

Preview your search results page using the options below

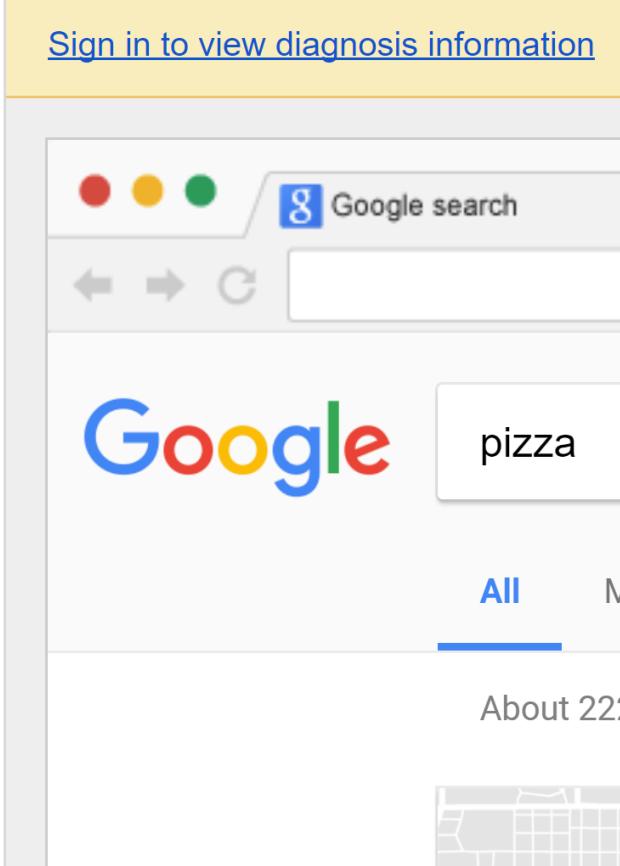
Location
Tulsa

Language
English

Device
Desktop or laptop computer

Domain
www.google.com ▾

[Sign in to view diagnosis information](#)



And here's a screenshot of the "local snack pack:"

Andolini's Sliced

4.4 ★★★★★ (219) · Pizza

Hip locale for wood-fired pizza & gelato

114 S Detroit Ave

Comfort food · Quick bite · Hip

Hideaway Pizza

4.5 ★★★★★ (268) · Pizza

Kid-friendly spot with customized pizza

1419 E 15th St

Late-night food · Comfort food · Quick bite

Pizza Hut

2.5 ★★★★☆ (4) · \$ · Restaurant

Casual pizza chain with wide selection

440 S Gary Ave

Comfort food · Quick bite · Casual

Andolini's would thus be position "A," Hideaway Pizza position "B," and Pizza Hut position "C." *Don't go to Pizza Hut, however, because despite what Google says it isn't the third-ranked pizza restaurant in Tulsa!* At any rate, you can see that you need to manually:

- Check your rank on Google vs. your target keywords in the organic positions; and, if necessary,
- Check your rank on Google in the "local pack" vs. your target keyword city-by-city; and, if necessary,

- Check / recheck your rank on Google in organic positions if those also vary by city in addition to the “local pack.”

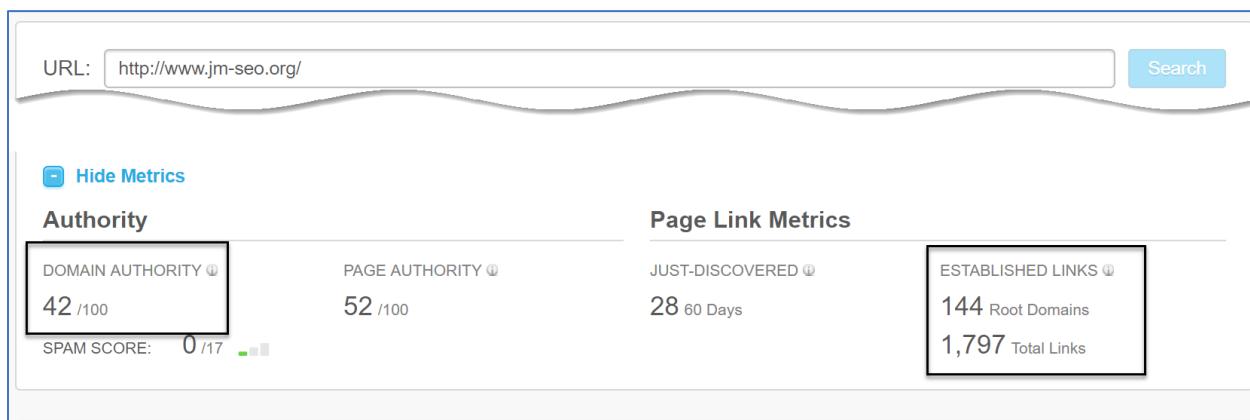
VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on how to check local rank at <http://jmlinks.com/17s>.

It's time consuming to do this, so if at all possible, I recommend paying for a paid tool such as SERPS.com, (<https://serps.com/>) which will automatically record your rank by keyword, ignore personalization, and allow for localization city-by-city for approximately \$49 / month. Moz.com, AHREFS.com and other vendors also offer paid tools. Time is money so I recommend a paid tool for this measurement.

» MEASURE YOUR DOMAIN AUTHORITY AND SOCIAL METRICS

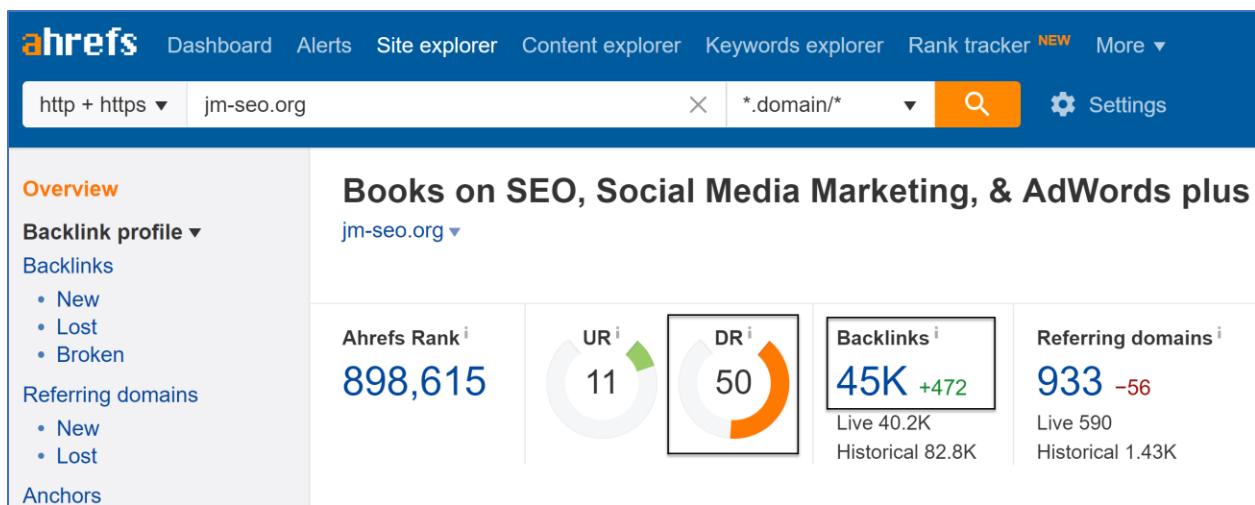
Your **PageRank** or **Domain Authority** is a measurement of your authority on the Web. It is not really publicly released, so use third-party tools such as MOZ.com or AHREFS.com that will give you your **domain authority**. As we learned in link building, think of your **Web Authority** as a measurement of how important your site is on the Web.

I recommend you measure your **domain authority** as a surrogate for Google PageRank on a monthly basis. Go to Open Site Explorer at <http://jmlinks.com/7y>, input your website home page URL, and note the three metrics at the top of the page: domain authority, root domains, and spam score. Record each of these on your keyword worksheet each month. Here's a screenshot for jm-seo.org:



Domain authority is a surrogate for Google PageRank, or a metric that measures how important Google thinks your website is. A site like *nytimes.com* might be 100, whereas *jm-seo.org* is a 42, and a tiny, unimportant site might be a 7. What's important is your domain authority relative to competitors, and whether this improves over time. **Root domains** is the number of websites that link to you; again, you want this to grow over time. You can see here it's a 144, meaning 144 websites link to the domain. Total links at 1,797 indicates the total number of links to the site. The **Spam score** (located underneath the Domain Authority metric) is an attempt, after Google's Penguin update, to measure whether your site is on the "naughty list" or not. You can see that the Spam Score for *jm-seo.org* is 0. *Good job!*

Another good site to use for this purpose is AHREFS.com. Here's a screenshot from their tool:



They're both good tools. Choose one to be consistent and record at least your domain authority, and linking root domains each month. This gives you an indication as to whether your link-building is working or not.

Social Media Metrics

Next, measure your followers on Google+ and Twitter, your page views, and your review count on Yelp and Google+. You want these all to move in a positive direction, over time.

Increasingly, SEO is “going social,” so it’s a good time to be aware of how your social authority is improving over time.

Record your follower count on Google+, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. each month by logging into each account and recording the number. That's easy enough. To track your review count as a local business on Google, simply Google your company name and record the review number. Here is a screenshot of "Mecca Coffee Company" showing thirty reviews on Google:

Google

mecca coffee company

All Maps News Images

About 1,740,000 results (0.66 seconds)

Mecca Coffee Company
<https://www.meccacoffeeco.com/> ▾
Here at Mecca Coffee Company we make your coffees, teas, spices, oils, vinegars and more. Culbreath. -Owner. Facebook Grunge · Twitter · About · MENU · SHOP · Balsamic vinegar

meccacoffee | ABOUT - Mecca
<https://www.meccacoffeeco.com/about>
If you are not a gourmet, when you enter Mecca Coffee Company, the coffee beans, teas, and bulk spices envelop you. You will want to sample and purchase a bottle of our vinegars, ...

Mecca Coffee Company - Home
<https://www.facebook.com/Places/Tulsa/Mecca-Coffee-Company-100000000000000>
★★★★★ Rating: 4.8 - 79 votes
Mecca Coffee Company, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 1.1 miles away. Mecca Coffee Company is located in Tulsa on Brookside and offers clients a wide variety of coffee, tea, and spice products.

Whole Foods Market

See photos See outside

Mecca Coffee Company

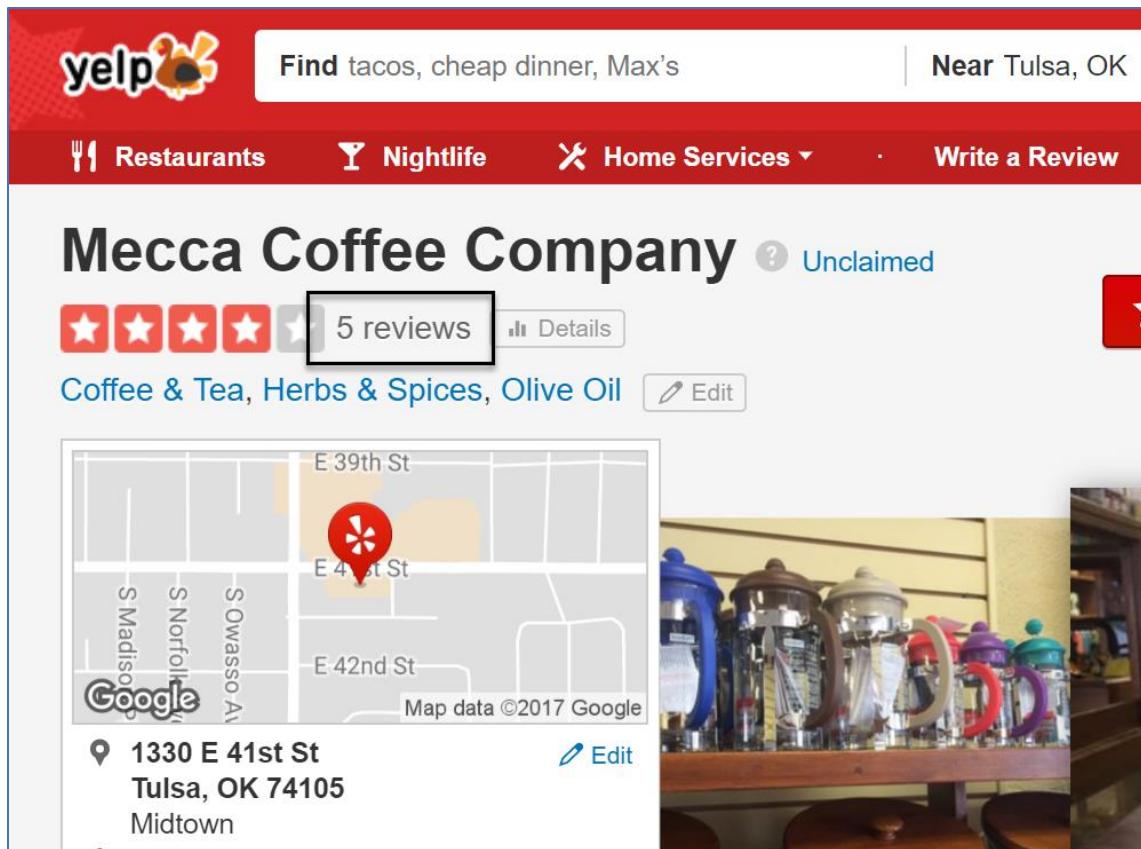
Website Directions

4.5 ★★★★★ 30 Google reviews

Coffee Shop

Address: 1330 E 41st St, Tulsa, OK 74105
Hours: Open today · 9:30AM–5:30PM ▾
Menu: [meccacoffeeco.com](https://www.meccacoffeeco.com)
Phone: (918) 749-3509

Yelp is the No. 2 review site, so I also recommend tracking your Yelp reviews as those feed Yelp as well as Bing. Just go to <https://www.yelp.com> and search for your company by name and city. Here's a screenshot for Mecca Coffee Company:



If you are a local business, **reviews** are incredibly important. So on your keyword worksheet, create a tab called “social” and add in your social media sites such as Google or Yelp that have customer reviews. Chart the number and the average star score each month. Mecca Coffee would thus record 30 Google reviews with a 5 star average, and 5 Yelp reviews with a 4 star average. Do this each month.

» USE GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE (WEBMASTER TOOLS)

I'll assume you've claimed your **Google Search Console** (Webmaster Tools) account as well as the corresponding **Webmaster Tools** account on Bing. These give you some unique items that are not available in Google Analytics. First and foremost, Google Search Console will give you a rough idea of your **inbound keyword queries**. On the left hand menu, click *Search Traffic > Search Analytics*. Next, check all the boxes (clicks, impressions, CTR, and position). Now you'll have a list of keywords that people are searching for by impressions, and the number of clicks to your website. You can sort the data by impressions, clicks, etc. Take this data with a grain of salt, as it's not clear that it's

entirely accurate but it gives you some data on the keywords people are entering, for which you rank on Google, and the clicks from Google to your website.

Next, in the same section, click on **Links to Your Site**. Then click on the MORE button on the bottom under “who links the most.” Then click on “download latest links.” Here’s a screenshot:

The screenshot shows the Google Search Console interface. On the left, there's a sidebar with navigation options: Dashboard, Messages (2), Search Appearance (with an info icon), Search Traffic, Search Analytics (with a link icon), **Links to Your Site** (which is highlighted in red), Internal Links, Manual Actions, International Targeting, and Mobile Usability. The main content area has a title "Overview » All domains" and a subtitle "Top 716 domains that have links to pages on your site". It includes three buttons: "Download this table", "Download more sample links", and "Download latest links". Below these buttons is a section titled "Domains" with a list of five domains: jm-seotips.org, jm-trending.org, treehousegreengifts.com, 1080.plus, and jmlinks.com. Three black arrows point to the "Links to Your Site" link in the sidebar, the "Download latest links" button, and the "jmlinks.com" domain in the list.

Here, you can view and download links to your site as discovered by Google. With an active link-building effort, you should see an improvement over time and you can monitor the exact, new sites that are linking to you. You can also link Google Search Console into Google Analytics, so you can see this data in one place. For information on how to link them, visit <http://jmlinks.com/15b>.

As for Bing Webmaster Tools, similar data is available.

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on how to use Google Webmaster Tools (Search Console) at <http://jmlinks.com/17u>.

» USE GOOGLE ANALYTICS BASIC FEATURES

Now that you have these measurements, it's time to dive into Google Analytics (<https://www.google.com/analytics>). If you haven't already, install the required tracking code on all pages of your website. If you're using WordPress you can use Google Analytics for WordPress by MonsterInsights at <http://jmlinks.com/8e>. Alternatively, the latest and greatest way to install Google Analytics is to install Google Tag Manager (<https://tagmanager.google.com/>) and then follow the instructions to install Google Analytics "on top of" tag manager. Learn more at <http://jmlinks.com/15c>.

Once you have installed the Javascript code on your site and allowed enough time to elapse for data to accumulate, it's time for some basic Analytics. Log in to Analytics, and scroll down the left hand menu. Here's a run-down:

- Click on **Audience**, to see basic data about how many visitors are coming to your website daily, where they are coming from, and basic traffic sources such as search engines vs. referring sites.
 - Click on **Geo** to see where your website visitors come from by country, state, and even city.
 - Click on **Technology** to see browsers that they use (e.g., Chrome, Firefox, Edge, Safari).
 - Click on **Mobile** to see your web traffic: desktop vs. tablet vs. phones, and even phone types.
 - Click on **User Flow** for a nice, pictorial map of how people "flow" through your website.
- Click on **Acquisition** and browse "referring" sites such as blogs, portals, news releases, etc., that are sending users from their website to yours via clicks.
 - Click on **All Traffic > Channels** to see how people get to your website, by *direct* (URLs and bookmarks), *organic search* (Search Engines), *referral* (links from other sites) and *social* (social media sites like Facebook or Twitter).
 - Click on **Source / Medium** and **Referrals** for another view of the above data.
 - Click on **AdWords** if you are running advertisements on Google; here, you can get data down to the keyword level.
 - Click on **Search Console, Queries** to see which keywords and key phrases are performing well for you in generating incoming web traffic. (Link your Google Analytics to your Google Webmaster Tools or Search Console for this feature).

- Click on **Social** for detail on social media networks; click on Users Flow here for a pictorial representation.
 - Click on **Campaigns** to see activity you have “tagged” as a campaign or UTM string. (To “tag” inbound links as from a Bing advertising campaign, a Facebook or Twitter campaign, etc., see <http://jmlinks.com/15d>.)
- Click on **Behavior** to see what people do on your website.
 - Click on **Behavior Flow** for a nice, pictorial map of how people “flow” through your website.
 - Click on **Site Content** and then drill down to **All Pages** (your most trafficked pages), **Landing Pages** (first page they touch), and **Exit Pages** (last page they touch).
 - Click on **Site Speed** for information on how fast your website is, including **Speed Suggestions**.
- Click on **Conversions** to see whether traffic is “converting,” usually buying stuff on eCommerce and/or filling out feedback forms as sales leads.
 - Click on **Goals** (if you have defined goals, see below) to see what goals exist and whether they are converting.
 - Click on **Overview, Reverse Goal Path, and Funnel Visualization** (if you have defined these elements to see the paths taken to/from a goal).
 - Click on **eCommerce** (if you are running an eCommerce site) for information on purchases.

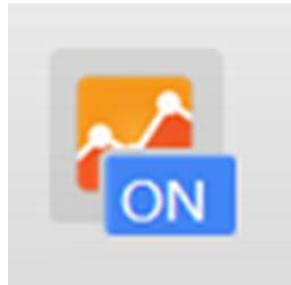
VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on basic Google Analytics at <http://jmlinks.com/17y>.

Basic Google Analytics provides you a lot of key information on incoming web traffic such as geographic location, mobile platform, and browser version. Finally, you can click on the date field at the top far right of Analytics to change the date filter for data or to compare two time periods.

» USE ADVANCED FEATURES IN GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Beyond Basic Analytics, there are advanced features in Google Analytics that you do not want to miss. One feature is called **Page Analytics**. To activate it, first install the Install the Page Analytics Plugin for Chrome (<http://jmlinks.com/18z>). Next, make sure you are logged into Google Analytics and then visit your website. On the top right of the

Chrome browser, you'll see a little orange icon with a squiggly line in it. Make sure this says enabled. Here's a screenshot:



It's very easy to miss! It's very small and in the top right of the Chrome browser. With that turned on, then visit your website. If the Force is with you, Google Analytics will populate your website with little orange percentage icons that tell you what percent of people are clicking where on any page on your website. Here's a screenshot from JasonMcDonald.org:

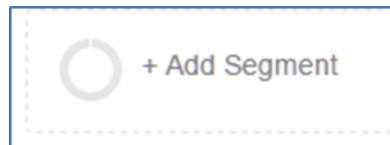


This tells you that on my home page 9.5% of the people click on the link for “SEO Consultant” and 5.1% click on “Social Media Expert.” I highly recommend that you enable

this add on to Chrome and browse your site to see how users flow through your website. It's amazing!

Segments in Google Analytics

Next, return to Google Analytics proper and let's explore **segments**. Segments allow you to "slice" and "dice" your data based on criteria such as "new visitors" vs. "repeat visitors" or the geographic locations from which visitors come. Google hides this feature behind the "Add Segment" area when you first login. Simply click on that to bring forth Advanced Segments:



Segments offers "pre-built segments," available on the left hand side under *View Segments > System*. Here you'll find segments such as "Mobile and Tablet Traffic." Click this to "filter" your data to see ONLY people coming from mobile phones and tablets, for example. Others of note are:

Organic Traffic. Click here to filter and see ONLY traffic from search engines.

Paid Traffic. Click here to filter and see ONLY traffic from AdWords and other forms of paid advertising as on Bing or Yahoo.

Referral Traffic. Click here to filter and see ONLY traffic from links on other websites.

Sessions with Conversions. Click here to filter and see ONLY traffic that actually converted (completed a goal or made a purchase).

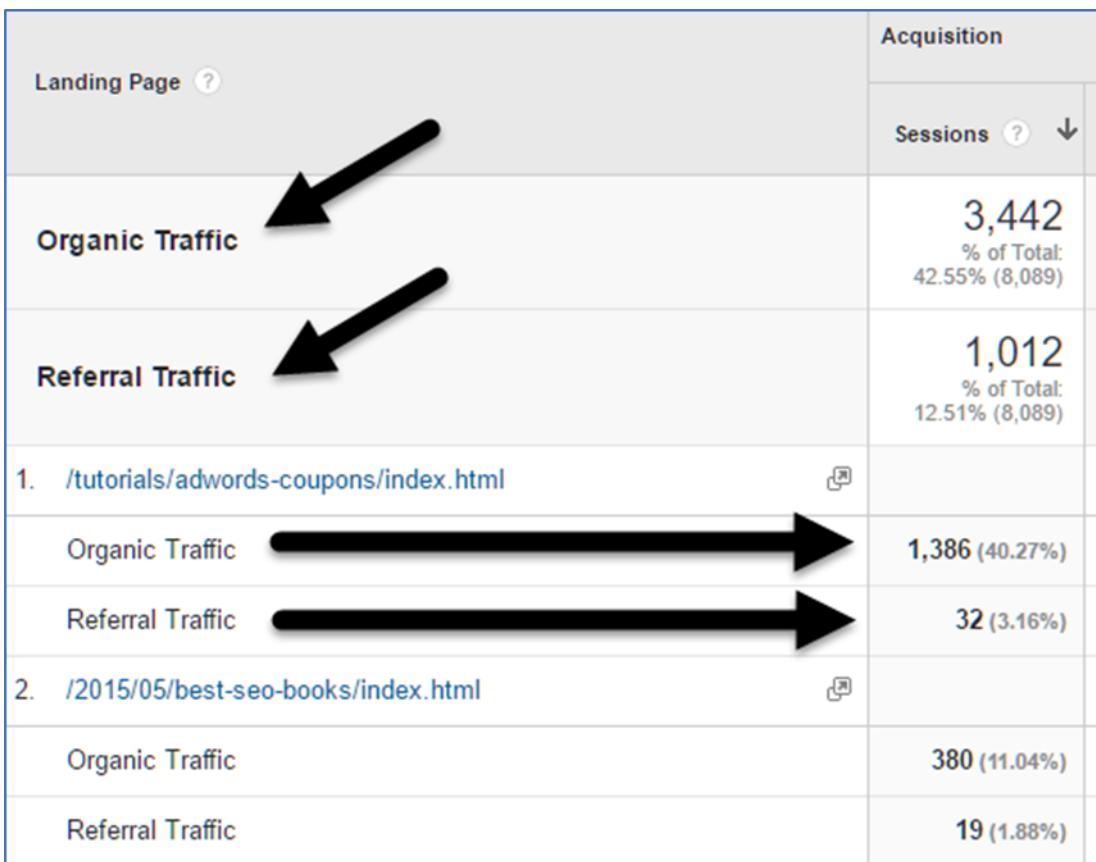
Tablet and Desktop Traffic. Click here to filter and see ONLY traffic from tablets or desktops.

The concept is to *first* click on a Segment, and *then* click the blue **Apply** button. *Next*, with these Segments on, browse other data in Google Analytics on the right menu such as

the Geo information, or landing page information to see what's going on with respect to ONLY that Segment. You can enable up to four segments to compare at any given time. (For help with Google Segments, visit <http://jmlinks.com/15e>).

VIDEO. Watch a video tutorial on Google Analytics segments at <http://jmlinks.com/18a>.

For example, here's a screenshot comparing "Organic Traffic" and "Referral Traffic" by looking at landing pages:



This shows that organic traffic was responsible for 1,386 visits to the AdWords Coupon page vs. only 32 for referral traffic. In this way, you can compare / contrast traffic sources or other elements as you scroll through AdWords data. It's marketing "slicing and dicing" at its best!

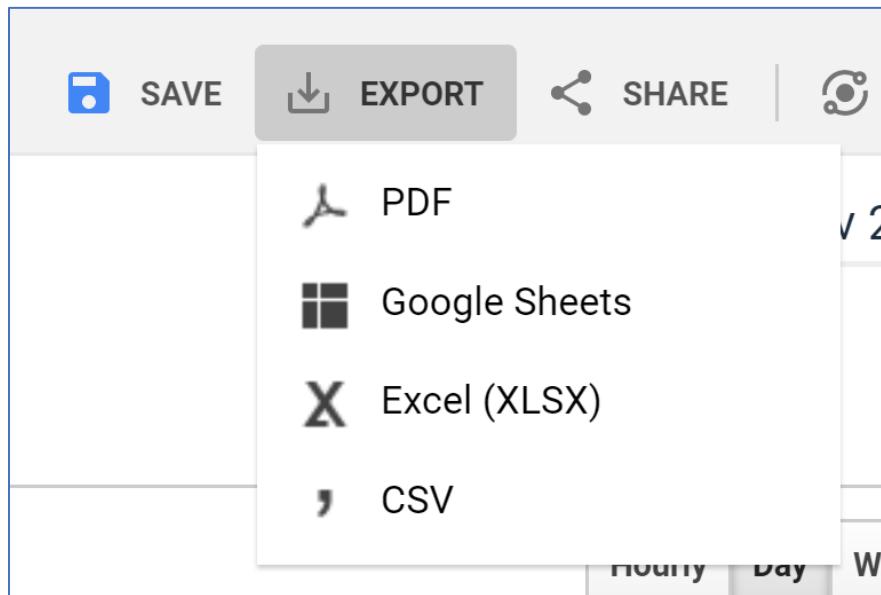
Custom Segments

You don't have to be content with the pre-built segments in Google Analytics. Simply click on the red "New Segment" button and follow the step-by-step wizard to create a custom segment. Scroll down the left-hand menu to filter your data by parameter; "conditions" is probably the most useful feature here. Remember to use the "Help" file (available top right, under the three dots) if you don't understand what a term means. You can read the Google help file on how to create a custom segment at <http://jmlinks.com/19b>.

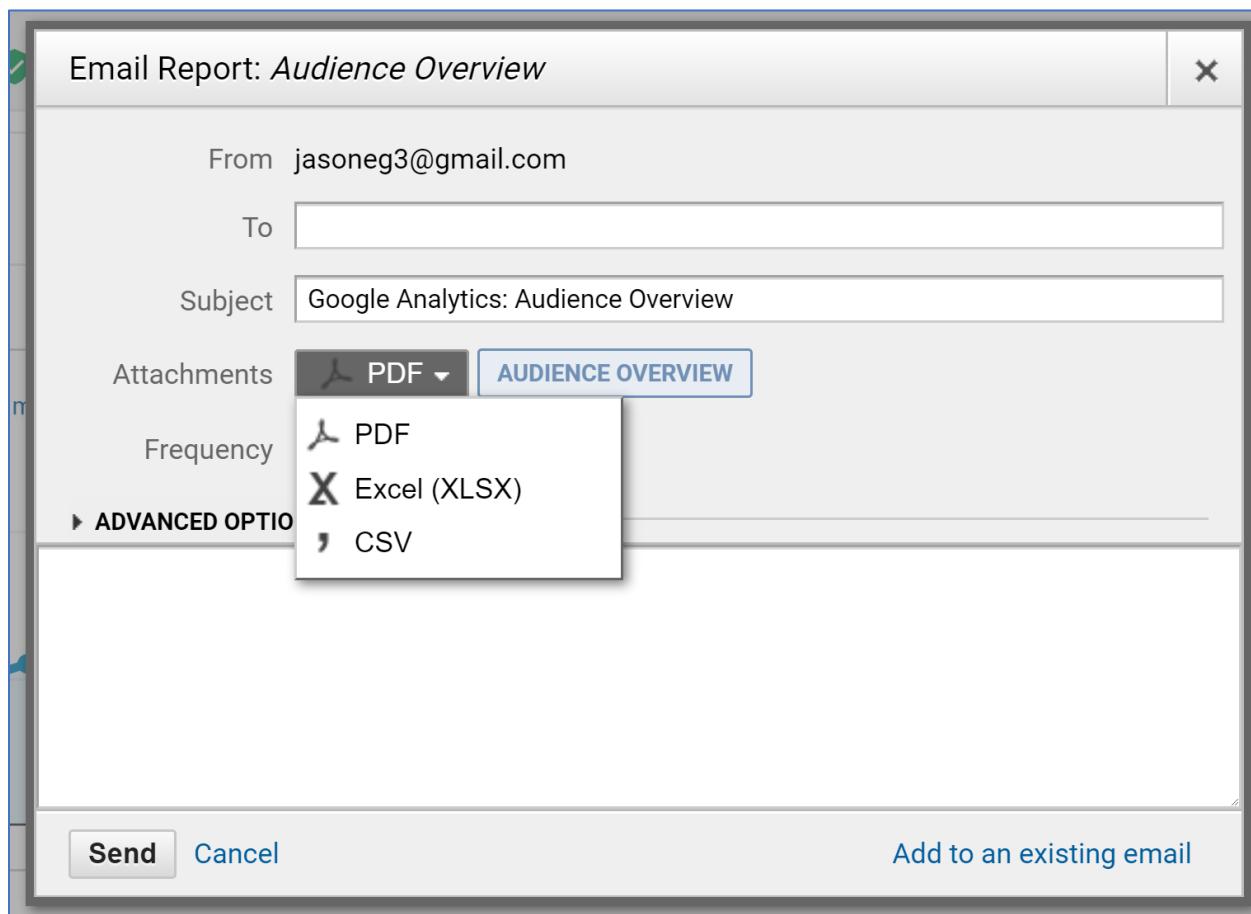
You can use a custom segment, for example, to track user behavior that originates in a newsletter, a Facebook ad campaign, or even to compare the behavior of people from Texas vs. people from Oklahoma.

Creating and Emailing Reports

Throughout Google Analytics, you can take any "view" that you set up an "export it" by clicking on "export" in the top right. Here's a screenshot:

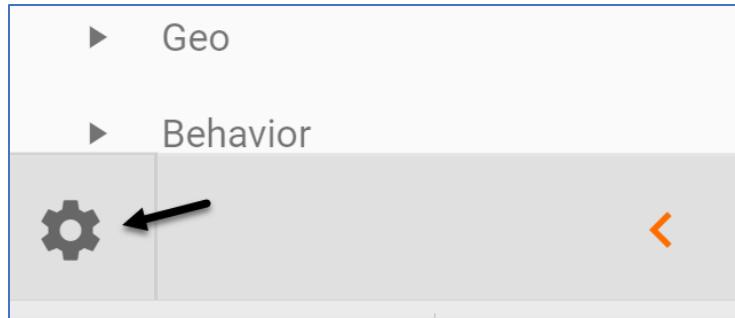


If you click on "Share" (again as indicated in the top right, above), you can email any report you create. For example, you could set up a custom segment to look only at your Oklahoma traffic, and then have Google automatically download and email this "report" every 1st of the month. Here's a screenshot:



Goals and Conversions

Having played around with segments, next set up “Goals” for Analytics by registering your “Thank you” page after a registration or purchase. To do this, go to the primary log in page on Analytics by clicking on “gear icon” at the **bottom left corner** inside of Google Analytics. Here’s a screenshot:



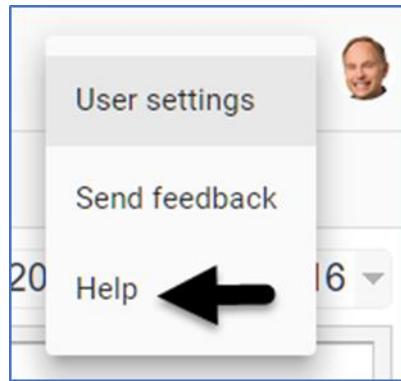
Next, click on your profile name (usually your website URL). Then click on “goals” in the middle of the page. Here is where you define a “goal” and a “funnel,” which is the steps taken to reach the goal. In Advanced Analytics, you can therefore see not only how people get to your website but the steps that take as they click through your website.

VIDEO. Watch a video on how to set up goals in Google Analytics at <http://jmlinks.com/17z>.

Once a goal is set up, you can go back to the main page in Google Analytics, and use Segments to slice and dice your data and thereby see what traffic is converting (i.e., completing your goal) vs. what is not. (For help with goals, visit the official explanation at <http://jmlinks.com/19a>).

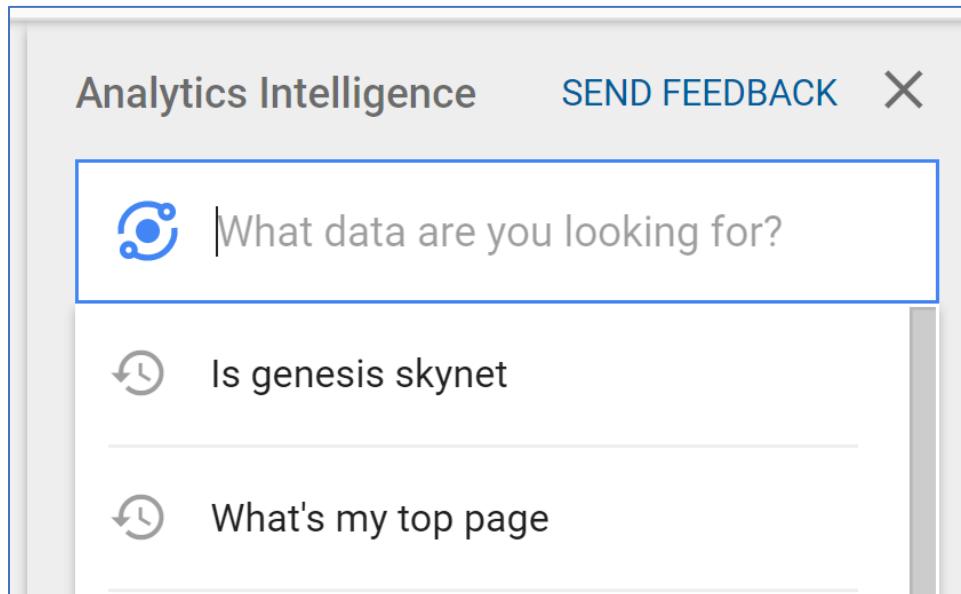
Help in Google Analytics

Help is available at the **top right** corner under the “three dots” icon on the top right inside of Google Analytics. Here’s a screenshot:



You can also check out the new “Analytics Intelligence” feature which is Google’s attempt at Artificial Intelligence in Google Analytics. It’s located in the top right corner of the screen under “Intelligence.” Just try typing in a question such as “Where do my visitors come from” or “What’s my top page?”

Here’s a screenshot:



It’s pretty cool, but just remember that “Genesis is Skynet” (<http://jmlinks.com/38x>).

Another way to find “Help” is to visit <https://support.google.com/analytics/>. Once there, type in your query, such as “What is a Bounce Rate?” and you’ll find pretty good

answers. Why Google “hides” the help feature is one of those eternal “only Google would know” questions.

Google Analytics Learning Resources

Finally, don’t miss some of the free official Google videos available for learning more about Analytics. These are located at the **Google Analytics Academy** at <http://jmlinks.com/8a>. Ironically, these Analytics IQ Lessons are nearly impossible to find or get to from inside of Google Analytics. Finally, you can also check out Google Data Studio (<https://datastudio.google.com/>) which is Google’s latest and greatest reporting tool built on top of Analytics.

»» CHECKLIST: METRICS ACTION ITEMS

Test your knowledge of metrics! Take the *metrics and Google Analytics quiz* at <http://jmlinks.com/qzme>. Next, here are your keyword **Action Items**:

- **Define** what you want to measure including your **KPIs**, ranging from your rank on Google to completed actions like feedback forms.
 - Systematically measure your **rank** on Google each month. If possible, subscribe to a paid tool to make your life easier.
 - If appropriate, measure your **rank vs. local keywords** into the “local pack” on Google.
 - Measure your **review count** on Google and Yelp, as well as your aggregate review stars.
 - Measure your **domain authority** to gain knowledge on your link-building efforts.
- Use **Google Analytics** basic features to learn about what happens once people land on your website.
 - Use **segments** to slice and dice your data by customer type, origin, or other parameters.
 - Define **goals** such as feedback forms or eCommerce sales

Check out the **free tools!** Go to my *SEO Dashboard > Metrics* for my favorite free tools for Google Analytics and metrics. Just visit <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>.

>>> DELIVERABLE: GOOGLE ANALYTICS WORKSHEET

The **DELIVERABLE** for this chapter is a completed Google Analytics worksheet. For the worksheet, go to <http://jmlinks.com/workbooks> (click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” and enter the code ‘2018seo’ to register if you have not already done so), and click on the link to the “Google Analytics worksheet.”



7.1

LEARNING

SEO is a competitive game that never stops evolving! The Google algorithm changes and adjusts, user behavior evolves, and your competitors also improve their SEO skills. Recently, for example, social media and mobile search have become ever more important to SEO, as have both localization and personalization issues. Google continues to consolidate search results between mobile and desktop, and Panda and Penguin continue to evolve. In 2018, the transition continues to mobile search, first, and so-called RankBrain. Voice search and “artificial intelligence” loom on the horizon. New algorithm changes are no doubt in the works over at the Googleplex!

All require the successful practitioner of SEO to adapt.

“Never stop learning” must be your motto! In this Chapter, I point to resources to help you be a life-long learner.

Let's get started!

TODO LIST:

- » Download the Free Companion *SEO Toolbook*
- » Use the Worksheets
- » Bookmark and Read SEO Media Resources
- » A Final Request: Please Review me on Amazon

» DOWNLOAD THE FREE COMPANION TOOLBOOK

The *SEO Toolbook* is a companion to this *SEO Workbook* and contains hundreds of free tools, organized by the Seven Steps. Register for **free** materials, including my SEO Toolbook, SEO Dashboard, and companion worksheets to this book at

<http://jmlinks.com/workbooks/>. Click on “SEO Fitness Workbook 2018,” and enter the password **2018seo** when prompted.

You can also access my dashboard directly at <http://jmlinks.com/seodash>. That has links to the Toolbook, plus my favorite tools are easy to click and organized by topics / Chapters.

If you know of any other free tools, please email me as I am always on the lookout!

» USE THE WORKSHEETS, RESOURCES, VIDEOS, AND QUIZZES

Throughout this *SEO Workbook*, I have referenced helpful worksheets, videos, and resources. New for 2018 are fun-filled quizzes. These follow the Seven Steps methodology and can be accessed at the book landing page after you have registered.

VIDEO. Browse available YouTube videos at <http://jmlinks.com/19c>.

Subscribe to my YouTube channel as well as free alerts on free toolbooks at <http://jmlinks.com/free>.

» BOOKMARK AND READ SEO MEDIA RESOURCES

SEO changes frequently, so I urge you to pay attention to Google directly as well as the many wonderful blogs that cover search engine optimization. Those are available in the *SEO Toolbook*.

Stay Informed: Blogs, Conferences, and Books

Among the best blogs, I recommend *Search Engine Land* (<http://searchengineland.com/>) and *Search Engine Journal* (<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/>) in particular as well as the SMX conference (<http://searchmarketingexpo.com/>). I also recommend checking Amazon for new books on SEO; don’t take my word for it – pay attention to what other experts and gurus say about search engine optimization. In terms of books, here’s a direct link to Amazon’s SEO bestseller list: <http://jmlinks.com/15h>. If you’re looking for a “deep dive” book in terms of technical SEO, I highly recommend Eric Enge, Stephan

Spencer, and Jessie Stricchiola's *The Art of SEO: Mastering Search Engine Optimization* at <http://jmlinks.com/15j>. It assumes you know the basics as taught in my book, and then leads you deep into the jungle of technical search engine optimization.

NEVER STOP LEARNING

If you have any problems, questions, comments, or just want to talk about life and SEO, please email me at j.mcdonald@jm-seo.net, via <http://jmlinks.com/contact>, or call 800-298-4065 for help. Good luck!

» A FINAL REQUEST: PLEASE REVIEW ME ON AMAZON

If you've read this far, I want to extend my profound thanks. It's a true labor of love to write any book, and this book has been no exception. If you have a spare moment and the spirit moves you, I would really appreciate an honest review about the *SEO Fitness Workbook* on Amazon.

- Here's a link directly to the book on Amazon: <http://jmlinks.com/seo>. Just visit that link and write your short, honest review of the book.

When you've done so, please send me a quick email. Thanks in advance for your support.

Never stop learning!