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## CH4- First Stages of SEO

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SEO projects require forethought and planning to obtain the best results, and SEO needs to be considered during, and incorporated into, all stages of a website development or redevelopment project.

**We will discuss several aspects of how SEO projects start, including:**

- Putting together an SEO plan
- Performing a technical SEO audit of a site
- Setting a baseline for measuring results and progress

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### # The Major Elements of Planning

- As any experienced **SEO consultant** will tell you, you should **incorporate** your SEO **strategy** into the site planning process long before your site goes live.
- Your strategy should be well **outlined** before you make even the most basic **technology choices**, such as the **hosting platform** and your CMS.



- There are a **number of major components** to any SEO plan

#### 1. Technology Choices

- As we already suggested, SEO is a **technical process**, and as such, it impacts major technology choices.
- **For example**, a CMS can facilitate—or, possibly, undermine—**your SEO strategy**.
- Some platforms do not allow you to have **titles and meta descriptions** that vary from one web page to the next, **create hundreds (or thousands)** of pages of **duplicate content**, or make a **302 (temporary) redirect** the default redirect.

#### 2. Market Segmentation

- **Another critical factor** to understand is the nature of the market in which you are competing.

- This tells you **how competitive the environment** is in general, and augmented with additional research, you can use this information to tell how competitive the **SEO environment is**.
- **Another method** you can use to get a very quick read on competitiveness is using a keyword tool such as the **Google Traffic Estimator**

### 3. Where You Can Find Great Links

- Getting third parties to **link** their websites to yours is **a critical part of SEO**.
- **Without inbound links**, there is little to no chance of ranking for competitive terms in search engines such as **Google**, whose algorithm relies heavily on link measuring and weighting criteria.
- From random blog posts or forums. Understanding this will help you build your overall content plan.

### 4. Content Resources

- The driver of any **heavy-duty link campaign** is the quality and volume of your content.
- If your **content is of average quality and covers** the same information dozens of other sites have covered, it **will not attract many links**.
- If, however, **you are putting out quality content**, or you have a novel tool that many will want to use, you are more **likely to receive external links**.

### 5. Branding Considerations

- Of course, **most companies have branding concerns as well**.
- The list of **situations where the brand can limit the strategy** is quite long, and the opposite can happen too, where the nature of the brand makes a **particular SEO strategy pretty compelling**.

### 6. Competition

- Your SEO strategy can also be **influenced** by your **competitors' strategies**.

**There are several scenarios you might encounter:**

- a. The **competitor discovers a unique, highly converting set of keywords**.
- b. The **competitor discovers a targeted, high-value link**.
- c. The competitor **saturates a market segment, justifying your focus elsewhere**.
- d. Weaknesses appear in the competitor's strategy, which provide opportunities for exploitation.

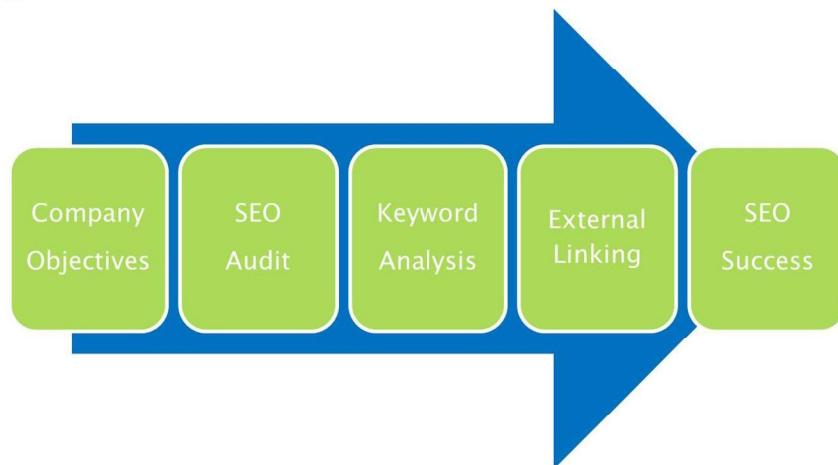
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## # Identifying the Site Development Process and Players

**Before you start the SEO process**, it is imperative to identify

- who your target audience is,
- what your message is, and
- how your message is relevant.

- There are no web design tools or programming languages that tell you these things.
- Your company's **marketing, advertising, and PR teams** have to set the objectives before you can implement them—**successful SEO requires a team effort.**



- **Your SEO team should be cross-functional and multidisciplinary,** consisting of the team manager, the technical team, the creative team, the data and analytics team (if you have one), and the major stakeholders from marketing, advertising, and PR.
- **In a smaller organization,** you may have to wear all of those hats yourself.

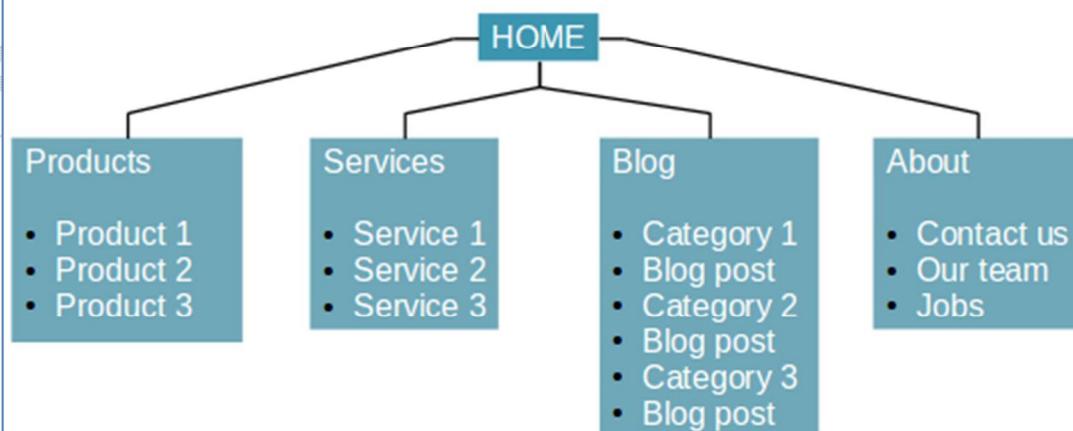
**Advertising messages** need to be well thought out and prepared. You do not want your team bickering over whether to optimize **for “hardcore widget analysis” or “take your widgets to the next level.”**

Advertising serves multiple purposes, but its most fundamental purpose is to compel people to take a specific action.

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## # Defining Site's Information Architecture

### What exactly is Information Architecture?



**Whether you're working with an established website or not**, you should plan to research the desired site architecture (from an SEO perspective) at the start of your SEO project.

**This task can be divided into two major components: technology decisions and structural decisions.**

### 1. Technology Decisions

- As we outlined previously in this chapter, your technology choices can have a major impact on your SEO results.

#### **The most important issues**

- 1) Dynamic URLs
- 2) Session IDs or user IDs in the URL
- 3) Superfluous flags in the URL
- 4) Links or content based in JavaScript, Java, or Flash
- 5) Content behind forms (including pull-down lists)
- 6) Temporary (302) redirects

### 2. Structural Decisions

- One of the most basic decisions to make about a **website concerns internal linking and navigational structures**,
- Which are generally mapped out in a site **architecture document**?
- What pages are **linked to from the home page**?
- **What pages are used as top-level categories that then** lead site visitors to other related pages?

### 3. Target keywords

- **Keyword research is a critical component of SEO.**
- What search terms do people use when searching for products or services similar to yours?
- How do those terms match up with your site **hierarchy**?
- **Ultimately, the logical structure** of your pages should match up with the way users think about **products and services like yours**.

### 4. Cross-link relevant content

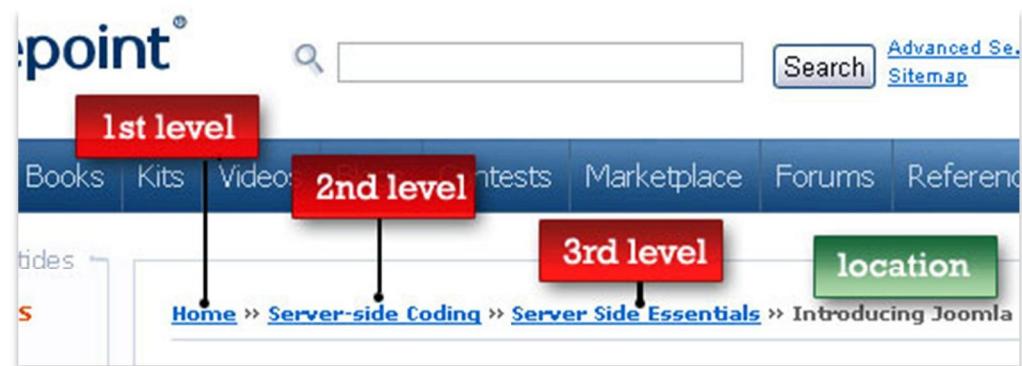
- **Linking between articles that cover related material can be very powerful.**
- It helps the **search engine ascertain** with greater confidence how relevant a web page is to a **particular** topic.
- We can be **extremely** difficult to do well if you have a **massive ecommerce site**.

### 5. Use anchor text

- **Anchor text** is one of the **golden opportunities of internal linking**.
- **As an SEO practitioner**, you need to have in your plan from the very beginning a way to use keyword-rich anchor text in your internal links.
- **Avoid using text such as "More" or "Click here,"**

### 6. Use breadcrumb navigation

- Breadcrumb navigation is a way to show the user where he is in the navigation hierarchy.



## 7. Minimize link depth

- **Search engines (and users)** look to the **site architecture** for clues as to what pages are most important.
- **A key factor is how many clicks from the home page** it takes to reach a page.
- **A page that is only one click** from the home page is clearly important.
- **A page that is five clicks away** is not nearly as influential.
- **In fact, the search engine spider may never even find** such a page (depending in part on the site's link authority).

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## # Auditing an Existing Site to Identify SEO Problems

- **Auditing an existing site is one of the most important tasks that SEO professionals encounter.**
- SEO is still a relatively new field, and many of the limitations of search engine crawlers are nonnutritive.
- In addition, many web developers, unfortunately, are not well versed in SEO.
- Even more **unfortunately, some stubbornly refuse** to learn, or, worse still, have learned the **wrong things about SEO**.

Indexing	Off-Page Factors	Content	Accessibility
<input type="checkbox"/> Site Indexing <input type="checkbox"/> Google Webmaster Tools <input type="checkbox"/> Sitemap.xml	<input type="checkbox"/> Inbound Links <input type="checkbox"/> Outbound Links <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/> Duplication Issues <input type="checkbox"/> Anchor Text <input type="checkbox"/> Alt Tags	<input type="checkbox"/> Robots.txt <input type="checkbox"/> JavaScript Coding <input type="checkbox"/> User Agent <input type="checkbox"/> 404 Error Page
On-Page Factors	Meta-Tags	Structured Data	Navigation
<input type="checkbox"/> W3C Compliancy <input type="checkbox"/> 404 Error Page <input type="checkbox"/> Header Tags <input type="checkbox"/> Page Speed	<input type="checkbox"/> Page Titles <input type="checkbox"/> Meta Descriptions <input type="checkbox"/> Geo-Tags & Microformats <input type="checkbox"/> Canonical Use	<input type="checkbox"/> Schema.org <input type="checkbox"/> Data Highlighter (Google Webmaster Tools)	<input type="checkbox"/> Site Architecture <input type="checkbox"/> Page Depth <input type="checkbox"/> Internal Linking

➤ **Elements of an Audit**

**1. Usability**

- Although this may not be seen as a **direct SEO issue**, it is a very good place to start.

**2. Accessibility/spiderability**

- Make sure the site is friendly to search engine spiders.

**3. Search engine health check**

- Here are some quick health checks:

- Perform a site:**yourdomain.com** search in the search engines to check how many of your pages appear to be in the index.  
Compare this to the number of unique pages you believe you have on your site.
- Test a search on your brand terms to make sure you are ranking for them (if not, you may be suffering from a penalty).

**4. Keyword health checks**

- Are the right keywords being targeted? Does the site architecture logically flow from the way users search on related keywords?

**5. Duplicate content checks**

- The first thing you should do is to make sure the non-www versions of your pages (i.e., **http://yourdomain.com**) 301-redirect to the www versions of your pages (i.e., **http://www.yourdomain.com**), or vice versa (this is often called the canonical redirect).

**6. URL check**

- Make sure you have clean, short, **descriptive URLs**. Descriptive means keyword-rich but not keyword-stuffed.

**7. Title tag review**

**8. Content review**

**9. Meta tag review**

**10. Sitemaps file and robots.txt file verification**

**11. Redirect checks**

**12. Internal linking checks**

**13. Avoidance of unnecessary subdomains**

**14. Geo-location**

**15. External linking**

**16. Page load time**

**17. Image alt tags**

**18. Code quality**

## # Identifying Current Server Statistics Software and Gaining Access

We will discuss in detail the **methods for tracking results and measuring success**, and we will also delve into how to set a baseline of **measurements for your SEO projects**. But before we do that, and before you can accomplish these tasks, you need to have the right measurement systems in place.

### 1. Web Analytics

Analytics software can provide you with a rich array of valuable data about what is taking place on your site. It can answer questions such as:

- 1. How many unique visitors did you receive yesterday?**
- 2. Is traffic trending up or down?**
- 3. What are the most popular search terms with which people find you?**
- 4. What are the most popular pages on your site?**
- 5. What are the best-converting pages on the site?**

### 2. Logfile Tracking

- **Logfiles** contain a detailed click-by-click history of all requests to your web server.
- Make sure you have access to the **logfiles** and some method for analyzing them.
- If you use a third-party hosting company for your site, chances are it provides some sort of free logfile analyzer,
- Such as **AWStats, Webalizer, or something similar**.
- Obtain access to whatever tool is in use as soon as you can.

### 3. Google and Bing Webmaster Tools

- As mentioned earlier, other valuable sources of data include Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Tools.

### 4. Search Analytics

- Search **analytics** is a new and **emerging** category of tools.
- Search **analytics tools specifically monitor** how your website interacts with the search engines.

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## # Determining Top Competitors

- Understanding the **competition should be a key component of planning** your SEO strategy.
- The **first step is to understand who your competitors** in the search results really are.
- It can often be small players who give you a run for your money.
- **For example**, consider the previously mentioned credit card search in Google **Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover Card** all fail to reach the #1 position in the Google results.

### • Find Spam Competitors

- Affiliates that cheat tend to come and go out of the top search results, as only sites that implement ethical tactics are likely to maintain their positions over time.
- You can help expedite the cheaters' fall from grace by reporting them to Google at <http://www.google.com/contact/spamreport.html>, or better yet, via the dashboard in your **Google Webmaster Tools account**

### • Seeking the Best

- Look for competitors whose efforts you would like to emulate (or "**embrace** and **extend**," as Bill Gates would put it)—usually a website that consistently dominates the upper half of the first page of search results in the search engines for a range of **important keywords that are popular and relevant to your target audience**

**To assess competitors' competence at SEO, you need to answer the following questions:**

1. Are their websites fully indexed by Google and Yahoo!?
2. Do their product and category pages have keyword-rich page titles (title tags) that are unique to each page?
3. Do their product and category pages have reasonably high PageRank scores?
4. Is anchor text across the site?
5. Are the websites getting penalized or much keyword repetition? You can overdo SEO.
6. Are they spamming the search engines?

### • Uncovering Their Secrets

- Let's assume your investigation has led you to identify several competitors who are gaining excellent search placement using **legitimate, intelligent tactics**. Now it is time to uncover their secrets:

- What keywords are they targeting?  
**<meta name="keywords" content="keyword1, keyword2, ...>**
- Who's linking to their home page, or to their top-selling product pages and category pages?
- If it is a **database-driven site**, what technology tricks are they using to get search engine spiders such as **Googlebot** to cope with the site being dynamic?
- What effect will their **future SEO initiatives have on their site traffic**?
  - a. Simply go to **Compete.com**, **Quantcast.com**, or **Alexa.com**
  - b. The **Wayback Machine** (<http://www.archive.org>) provides an amazingly extensive archive of web pages.

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### # Assessing Historical Progress

- **Measuring the results of SEO** changes can be challenging, partly because there are so many moving parts and partly because months can elapse **between** when changes are made to a site and **when results are seen in search rankings and traffic**.



#### A. Maintain a Timeline of Site Changes

- Keeping a log of changes to your site is **absolutely recommended**.
- If you're not keeping a **timeline** (which could be as simple as an online spreadsheet or as complex as a professional project **management** visual flowchart).
- You **should track more than just site changes as well**. **External factors** that can have a big impact on your **SEO results** include confirmed search engine algorithm updates, competitor news events (e.g., product or company launches), and breaking news.

**There are many scenarios**

- i. If search traffic spikes or plummets
- ii. When gradual traffic changes begin
- iii. To track and report SEO progress

#### B. Types of Site Changes That Can Affect SEO

- Your log should track all changes to the website, not just those that were made with SEO in mind.

**Here are some examples:**

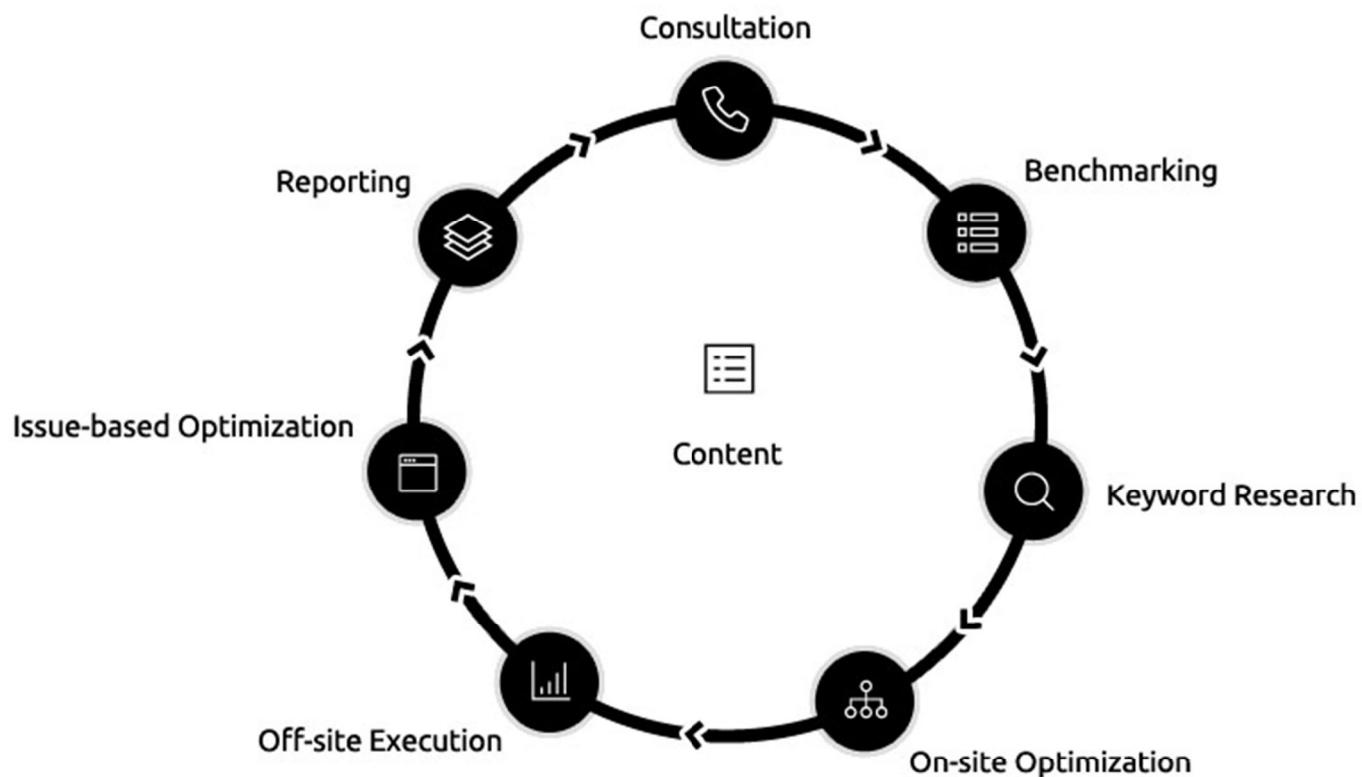
- Adding content areas/features/options to the site
- Changing the domain of the site.
- Modifying URL structures
- Implementing a new CMS.
- Establishing new partnerships that either send links or require
- Acquiring new links to pages on the site
- Making changes to navigation/menu systems
- Implementing redirects either to or from the site.
- Marketing activities that may drive upticks in usage/traffic and the source

### C. Previous SEO Work

- When you are brought on to handle the **SEO for a particular website**, one of the first things you need to find out is which SEO activities have previously been attempted.
- **There may be valuable data there, such as a log of changes that you can match up with analytics data to gauge impact.**
- If no such log exists, you can always check the **Wayback Machine** (<http://www.archive.org>) to see whether it has historical logs for your website.

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### # Benchmarking Current Indexing Status



- **The search engines have an enormous task:** that of indexing the world's online content—well, more or less. The reality is that they try hard to discover all of it, but they do not choose to include all of it in their indexes.
- There can be a variety of reasons for this, such as the page being inaccessible to the spider, being penalized, or not having enough link juice to merit inclusion.
- **When you launch a new site or add new sections to an existing site, or if you are dealing with a very large site, not every page will necessarily make it into the index.**

**Google**

site:kscpac.org

All
Images
News
Maps
More
Settings
Tools

About 44 results (0.29 seconds)

**Try Google Search Console**  
[www.google.com/webmasters/](http://www.google.com/webmasters/)  
 Do you own **kscpac.org**? Get indexing and ranking data from Google.

**Kamani Science College And Prataprai Arts College**  
[kscpac.org/](http://kscpac.org/) ▾  
 Since pre-independence period, the Amreli region had remained outstanding in the sphere of the education. Late Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gayakwad, a great ...

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[www.kscpac.org/exam\\_form.php](http://www.kscpac.org/exam_form.php) - Translate this page  
 Eco Green Theme is a free website template provided by toplate.com.

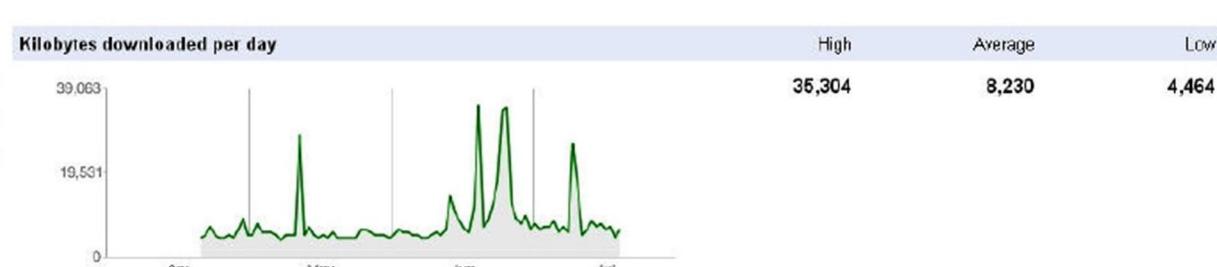
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[www.kscpac.org/fees](http://www.kscpac.org/fees) ▾  
 Kamani Science College And Prataprai Arts College. Lathi Road, Vidhyavihar, Amreli-365601, Phone No- 02792 222047 ...

**Keeping a log of the level of indexation over time can help you understand how things are progressing. This can take the form of a simple spreadsheet.**

Related to indexation is the crawl rate of the site. Google provides this data in Google Webmaster Central (Figure Above).

#### Crawl stats

Googlebot activity in the last 90 days



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## # Benchmarking Current Rankings

# Benchmarking: not a simple choice

1. What to benchmark?
    - Publications, citations, societal impact, research funding, students
  2. Which measures to use?
    - Journal rankings, ISI JIF, h-index & variants, total cites
  3. Which data source to use?
    - Thomson ISI, Scopus, Google Scholar, Microsoft Academic
  4. At what level to benchmark?
    - Individuals, Departments, Faculty/School, University
  5. Who to benchmark against?
    - Similar entities, aspirational benchmarks?
- Most of these decisions are independent, though some are linked

- People really love to check their search rankings.
- Many companies want to use this as a measurement of SEO progress over time, but it is a bit problematic, for a variety of reasons.

### Here is a summary of the major problems with rank checking:

#### **Google results are not consistent:**

- **Different geographies** (even in different cities within the United States) often give different results.
- **Different data centers give different results** (and you can hit multiple data centers from a single location at different times).
- **Results are personalized for logged-in users based** on their search histories.
- **No rank checker can monitor and report all** of these inconsistencies (at least, not without scraping Google hundreds of times from all over the world with every possible setting).

#### **The Google API rarely matches up to what anyone sees in the search results.**

#### **Obsessing over rankings (rather than traffic) can result in poor strategic decisions:**

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## # Benchmarking Current Traffic Sources and Volume

**The most fundamental objective of any SEO project should be to drive the bottom line.** For a business, this means delivering more revenue with favorable ROI. As a precursor to determining the level of ROI impact, the SEO practitioner must focus on increasing the volume of relevant traffic to the site. This is a more important objective than anything related to rankings or number of links obtained.

Today's web analytics tools make the gathering of such data incredibly easy.

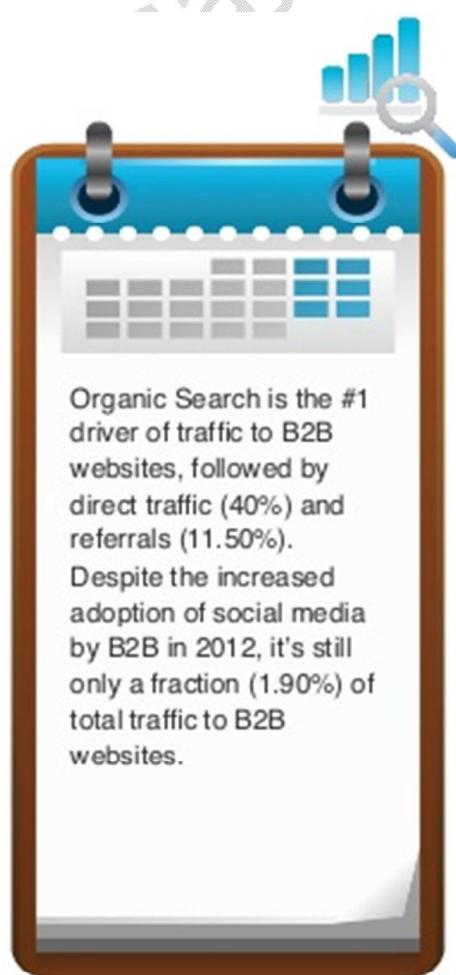
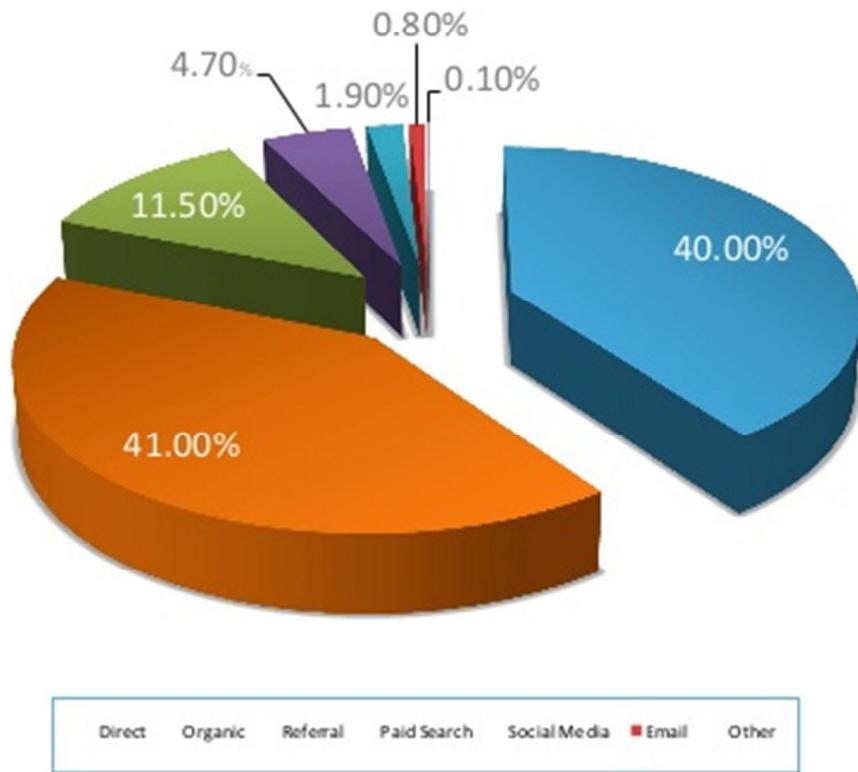
**Two high-quality solutions are available that are completely free:**  
**Google Analytics and**  
**Yahoo! Web Analytics.**

These tools are sufficient for many smaller sites, though larger sites will probably need to consider

A paid solution such as

**Omniture.com,**  
**IBM Unica NetInsight, or**  
**Webtrends.com.**

## 2012 TRAFFIC BY SOURCE



### # Leveraging Business Assets for SEO

Chances are your company/organization has a lot of valuable commodities beyond the website that can be put to good use to improve the quality and quantity of traffic you receive through search engine optimization efforts.

Some of these things in the subsections that follow.

1	Other Domains You Own/Control
2	Partnerships On and Off the Web

3	<b>Content or Data You've Never Put Online</b>
4	<b>Customers Who Have Had a Positive Experience</b>
5	<b>Your Fans</b>

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## # Combining Business Assets and Historical Data to Conduct SEO/Website SWOT Analysis

A classic staple of business school is the **SWOT analysis**—identifying the

<b>strengths</b>	<b>weaknesses</b>	<b>opportunities</b>	<b>threats</b>
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<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Identifying strengths is typically one of the easier objectives:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What sources of traffic are working well for your site/business?</li> <li>• Which projects/properties/partnerships are driving positive momentum toward traffic/revenue goals?</li> <li>• Which of your content sections/types produces high traffic and ROI?</li> <li>• What changes have you made historically that produced significant value?</li> </ul>
<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Determining the weaknesses can be tougher (and takes more intellectual honesty and courage):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What content is currently driving low levels of search/visitor traffic?</li> <li>• Which changes that were intended to produce positive results have shown little/no value?</li> <li>• Which traffic sources are underperforming or under delivering?</li> <li>• What projects/properties/partnerships are being leveraged poorly?</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Parsing opportunities requires a combination of strength and weakness analysis.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What brainstormed but undeveloped or untested projects/ideas can have a significant, positive impact?</li> <li>• What traffic sources currently sending good-quality traffic could be expanded to provide more value?</li> <li>• What areas of weakness have direct paths to recovery?</li> </ul>
<b>Threats</b>	<b>Determining threats can be the most challenging of the tasks. You'll need to combine creative thinking with an honest assessment of your weaknesses and your competitors' strengths, and consider the possibilities of macro-events that could shape your website/company's future:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your areas of weakness, which players in your market</li> <li>• What shifts in human behavior, web usage, or market conditions could dramatically impact your business/site?</li> <li>• Which competitors have had the most success in your arena? How have they accomplished this? Where do they intersect with your business/customers?</li> <li>• Are there any strategies implemented by start-ups in similar businesses that have had massive success in a particular arena that could be dangerous to your business if they were replicated in your market?</li> </ul>

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