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SEO Best Practice Guide

Comprehensive advice for natural
search marketers

Sample document for Econsultancy's full SEO Best Practice Guide.
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SEO Best Practice Guide



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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction..... | 2 |
| 1.1. About Econsultancy | 3 |
| 2. Introduction to search engine marketing..... | 4 |
| 2.1. Search engine marketing: opportunities and risks | 4 |
| 2.2. Why is search marketing so important? | 5 |
| 2.3. What is search engine marketing? | 6 |
| 2.4. Which search engines do we need to be visible in? | 8 |
| 2.5. Introducing SEO ranking factors..... | 10 |
| 2.6. Maximization for SEO | 12 |
| 2.7. Key challenges of search engine marketing..... | 13 |
| 2.7.1. Advantages of SEO..... | 13 |
| 2.7.2. Disadvantages of SEO | 13 |
| 2.7.3. Technical disadvantages | 14 |
| 2.8. Regulations | 15 |
| 3. How is this guide structured? | 16 |
| 3.1. Understanding success factors | 16 |
| 3.1.1. Success factor 1: SEO planning and keyphrase strategy | 16 |
| 3.1.2. Success factor 2: Index coverage | 16 |
| 3.1.3. Success factor 3: On-page optimization | 17 |
| 3.1.4. Success factor 4: Link building..... | 17 |
| 3.1.5. Success factor 5: A structured process for SEO..... | 18 |
| 3.1.6. Success factor 6: Conversion efficiency | 18 |
| 3.2. Features of this guide | 19 |
| 4. SEO Success Factor 1: Planning and strategy | 20 |
| 4.1. An introduction to planning | 20 |
| 4.2. Setting goals for search engine marketing | 22 |
| 4.3. Keyphrase analysis and selection | 24 |
| 4.3.1. What is keyphrase analysis? Why is it important? | 24 |
| 4.3.2. Why 'keyphrase'? | 24 |
| 4.3.3. Understanding searcher keyphrase usage behaviour | 25 |
| 4.3.4. Time-related variations in keyphrase behaviour | 26 |
| 4.3.5. Understanding different types of keyphrases | 27 |
| 4.3.6. Grouping and categorising keyphrases | 28 |
| 4.3.7. Keyphrase variants | 28 |
| 4.3.8. Synonyms | 29 |



| | | |
|---------|--|-----------|
| 4.3.9. | Keyphrase identification and selection process | 30 |
| 4.3.10. | Keyphrase identification tools | 37 |
| 4.4. | Auditing current performance | 41 |
| 4.4.1. | Conversion efficiency for different keyphrases, site sections and product categories | 41 |
| 4.4.2. | Cost-effectiveness of different referrers | 43 |
| 4.4.3. | Competitor benchmarking..... | 44 |
| 4.4.4. | Using advanced search syntax for competitor benchmarking | 50 |
| 4.4.5. | Measurement and tracking..... | 51 |
| 4.4.6. | Search engine marketing strategy selection | 52 |
| 4.4.7. | What is the right balance of spend between SEO and PPC? | 53 |
| 4.4.8. | Integrating different forms of search to target different phrase volumes | 54 |
| 4.4.9. | Using search marketing to target customers at different points in the buying process | 56 |
| 4.4.10. | Options for targeting phrases with SEO and paid search | 58 |
| 4.4.11. | Determining your strategic target keyphrases | 60 |
| 4.4.12. | The impact of affiliate marketing on SEM strategy | 60 |
| 4.4.13. | Continuous and campaign-based search strategy..... | 62 |
| 4.4.14. | Which engines to target | 64 |
| 4.5. | SEO resourcing and process | 64 |
| 4.5.1. | Selecting the right type of agency | 66 |
| 4.5.2. | Allocating internal resources..... | 72 |
| 4.5.3. | Black, white and grey hats: The importance of ethical SEO..... | 73 |
| 4.5.4. | Assessing proposals and pitches..... | 75 |
| 4.5.5. | Different fee structures (payment models) | 76 |
| 5. | SEO Success Factor 2: Index inclusion and coverage ... | 78 |
| 5.1. | An overview of how search engines work..... | 80 |
| 5.2. | Site submission to search engines | 84 |
| 5.2.1. | Which search engines to target?..... | 84 |
| 5.2.2. | Site submission approach..... | 84 |
| 5.2.3. | Google | 85 |
| 5.2.4. | Google Sitemaps | 90 |
| 5.3. | What is index coverage? Why is it important? | 92 |
| 5.4. | Evaluating index inclusion..... | 93 |
| 5.4.1. | Duplicate content..... | 94 |
| 5.4.2. | Supplemental pages | 96 |
| 5.4.3. | Google Sitelinks (site links) | 98 |
| 5.5. | Spam filters and over-optimization penalties | 99 |



| | | |
|-----------|---|------------|
| 5.5.1. | Types of penalties | 102 |
| 5.6. | Evaluate site indexing activity | 102 |
| 5.7. | Excluding pages and links from the site index..... | 104 |
| 5.8. | Time-related aspects of search index inclusion | 106 |
| 5.8.1. | The Google ‘sandbox effect’ | 106 |
| 5.8.2. | Content freshness | 107 |
| 5.8.3. | Content or domain longevity..... | 108 |
| 5.8.4. | Content and link velocity..... | 108 |
| 5.9. | Site migration | 109 |
| 5.10. | Dynamic content | 110 |
| 5.10.1. | Avoiding problems with Session IDs..... | 112 |
| 5.10.2. | Vertical Search – Inclusion and digital asset optimisation . | 113 |
| 5.11. | Local SEO | 120 |
| 5.11.1. | Ranking factors..... | 120 |
| 5.11.2. | Google and local search | 122 |
| 5.11.3. | Tools..... | 125 |
| 5.12. | International and multilingual SEO | 126 |
| 5.12.1. | Managing international search engine marketing | 126 |
| 5.12.2. | Selecting search engines to target for international search | 127 |
| 5.12.3. | Selecting agencies for international search..... | 128 |
| 5.12.4. | Considerations of international SEO..... | 129 |
| 5.12.5. | International SEO checklist..... | 132 |
| 6. | SEO Success Factor 3: On-page optimization..... | 133 |
| 6.1. | What is on-page optimization? Why is it important? | 133 |
| 6.2. | Selecting keyphrases for optimization..... | 134 |
| 6.3. | Occurrence of keyphrase in page body copy and meta information..... | 136 |
| 6.4. | Page markup factors..... | 138 |
| 6.4.1. | Standards adoption..... | 139 |
| 6.4.2. | Title tags..... | 140 |
| 6.4.3. | <meta name=“ ”> tags | 143 |
| 6.4.4. | Headings <h1>, <h2>, <h3> | 148 |
| 6.4.5. | Keyword formatting..... | 149 |
| 6.4.6. | Hyperlinks..... | 150 |
| 6.4.7. | Image tag ALT attributes | 152 |
| 6.4.8. | Re-structuring pages with HTML code | 153 |
| 6.4.9. | Reducing content by removing code to separate files..... | 155 |
| 6.4.10. | <noscript> tags | 156 |
| 6.4.11. | Framed sites | 157 |
| 6.4.12. | Optimising for Flash/Flash for SEO..... | 158 |
| 6.5. | Document-level keyphrase factors | 159 |



| | |
|---|------------|
| 6.5.1. Keyphrase(s) within domain name | 159 |
| 6.5.2. Document filename..... | 160 |
| 6.5.3. Non-HTML document types..... | 161 |
| 7. SEO Success Factor 4: Link building..... | 162 |
| 7.1. Introduction | 162 |
| 7.2. What is link building? Why does it matter to SEO?..... | 163 |
| 7.3. Understanding PageRank | 163 |
| 7.3.1. Which values are assigned to PageRank?..... | 164 |
| 7.4. Principles of applying PageRank for SEO | 165 |
| 7.4.1. PageRank's First Principle: more links from other pages to a page increase PageRank | 165 |
| 7.4.2. PageRank's Second Principle: pages with higher PageRank are more valuable | 167 |
| 7.4.3. PageRank's Third Principle: linking pages with a large number of outbound links tend to be less valuable | 169 |
| 7.4.4. PageRank's Fourth Principle: PageRank varies throughout a site according to site structure | 172 |
| 7.4.5. PageRank's Fifth Principle: PageRank has been supplemented by other assessments of the value of a link for the keyphrase in question | 174 |
| 7.4.6. PageRank's Sixth Principle: links from pages in context for a particular phrase are more valuable | 177 |
| 7.5. Domain popularity | 180 |
| 7.6. A recommended process for external link building | 181 |
| 7.6.1. Illegal and legal links | 181 |
| 7.6.2. Search engine guidelines | 181 |
| 7.6.3. Link-building strategies..... | 181 |
| 7.6.4. Link freshness and velocity | 183 |
| 7.7. Link-building approach 1: Natural link building using quality content..... | 184 |
| 7.7.1. Linkbaiting..... | 186 |
| 7.8. Link-building approach 2: Requesting inbound-only links... | 188 |
| 7.9. Link-building approach 3: Reciprocal linking | 191 |
| 7.10. Link-building approach 4: Buying links | 193 |
| 7.10.1. For posterity..... | 194 |
| 7.10.2. Buying links direct from another site..... | 196 |
| 7.10.3. Paying for links by bloggers..... | 197 |
| 7.10.4. Buying links from a link broker..... | 198 |
| 7.11. Link-building approach 5: Creating your own external links. | 199 |
| 7.11.1. Content syndication | 199 |
| 7.12. Outsourcing of creation of news content..... | 200 |
| 7.12.1. Google News optimization..... | 201 |



| | | |
|-----------|---|------------|
| 7.13. | Link-building approach 6: Online PR and social media | 202 |
| 7.13.1. | Integrating SEO into PR campaigns..... | 207 |
| 7.13.2. | Web 2.0 and social media on-page optimization | 211 |
| 7.13.3. | Social bookmarking and social networks | 215 |
| 7.14. | User-generated content and SEO | 219 |
| 7.14.1. | Creating more natural keyword variation | 219 |
| 7.14.2. | Making your pages more unique | 219 |
| 7.14.3. | Generating content | 220 |
| 7.14.4. | Ideas for link-building opportunities | 220 |
| 8. | SEO Success Factor 5: A structured process for SEO . | 221 |
| 8.1. | Structured process for site architecture & internal linking | 221 |
| 8.1.1. | What is site architecture? | 222 |
| 8.2. | Improving index inclusion | 222 |
| 8.3. | Indexation as KPI | 222 |
| 8.4. | Revising site architecture and linking strategy | 223 |
| 8.4.1. | How does information architecture affect SEO?..... | 223 |
| 8.4.2. | Getting consistency within site architecture | 224 |
| 8.4.3. | Information silos and site architecture | 227 |
| 8.4.4. | Strengthen your silos through tactical linking structure | 228 |
| 8.4.5. | Using keyword research to sculpt site architecture | 229 |
| 8.5. | Internal linking strategy including creation of link-rich pages | 229 |
| 8.5.1. | Links from standard navigation | 232 |
| 8.5.2. | Links from ancillary navigation (footers)..... | 232 |
| 8.5.3. | Links from document listings..... | 233 |
| 8.5.4. | Using design technologies in internal linking..... | 234 |
| 8.5.5. | Sitemaps..... | 235 |
| 8.5.6. | Body copy (inline links) and image links | 236 |
| 8.5.7. | Benefits of internal cross linking..... | 237 |
| 8.5.8. | Analysing site folders to determine linking strategy..... | 238 |
| 8.5.9. | Links from newsletters and blogs on sub-domains | 238 |
| 8.5.10. | Links between different sites owned by a brand | 239 |
| 8.5.11. | Broken links | 239 |
| 8.5.12. | Using analytical tools to review linking strategy..... | 240 |
| 8.6. | Improve page template effectiveness | 240 |
| 8.7. | Improve SERPs effectiveness..... | 241 |
| 8.7.1. | What determines the effectiveness of your call-to-action within the SERPs?..... | 241 |
| 8.8. | Influencing click behaviour..... | 243 |
| 8.9. | Refine SEO for homepage and other key pages | 244 |
| 8.10. | Creation of themed site sub-sections for target keyphrases .. | 245 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 8.10.1. Doorway pages | 247 |
| 8.10.2. Other types of content which may help SEO..... | 247 |
| 8.11. Optimization of other existing pages | 248 |
| 8.11.1. Deciding which existing pages to optimize | 248 |
| 9. SEO Success Factor 6: Conversion efficiency of landing pages | 249 |
| 9.1. Introduction | 249 |
| 9.1.1. What is conversion efficiency? Why does it matter?..... | 249 |
| 9.2. What is a landing page? | 250 |
| 9.3. Defining landing page objectives | 250 |
| 9.4. Measuring landing page effectiveness | 251 |
| 9.5. The zero defect approach to improving landing pages | 251 |
| 9.6. Different types of landing page | 252 |
| 9.7. Different referrer types | 253 |
| 9.8. Landing page success factors | 253 |
| 9.8.1. Guideline one: Deliver relevance..... | 254 |
| 9.8.2. Guideline two: Integrate with referral source(s)..... | 254 |
| 9.8.3. Guideline three: Provide sufficient detail to support the response decision..... | 255 |
| 9.8.4. Guideline four: Start the user on their journey | 255 |
| 9.8.5. Guideline five: Use the right page length | 256 |
| 9.8.6. Guideline six: Use meaningful graphics | 256 |
| 9.8.7. Guideline seven: Remove menu options | 256 |
| 9.8.8. Guideline eight: Consider using a ‘flowable’ or liquid layout design | 256 |
| 9.8.9. Guideline nine: Remember search marketing | 257 |
| 9.8.10. Guideline ten: Remember the non-responders | 257 |
| 9.8.11. Guideline eleven: ‘TIMITI’ | 257 |
| 9.8.12. Guideline twelve: Consider landing page longevity | 258 |
| 10. Appendix 1: Copywriting for SEO: A guide for content owners and reviewers | 259 |
| 10.1. Step 1: Aims | 259 |
| 10.2. Step 2: Identify keyphrases | 259 |
| 10.3. Step 3: Choosing a document name and location | 261 |
| 10.4. Step 4: <title> tags | 262 |
| 10.5. Step 5: Meta tags | 262 |
| 10.6. Step 6: Body copy | 263 |
| 10.7. Step 7: Heading styles | 264 |
| 10.8. Step 8: Hyperlinks (o)..... | 264 |
| 10.9. Step 9: Images | 264 |



| | |
|--|-----|
| 10.10. Step 10. Re-optimize page..... | 265 |
| 11. Appendix 2: SEO performance audit template | 266 |
| 12. Appendix 3: SEO Ranking factors quick reference summary | 275 |
| 12.1. On-page optimization ranking factors..... | 275 |
| 12.2. Off-page optimization ranking factors | 282 |
| 13. Appendix 4: Checklist for quality links | 286 |
| 14. Appendix 5: Mobile SEO | 290 |
| 14.1.1. Types of mobile search | 291 |
| 14.1.2. Create a mobile-ready site | 291 |
| 14.1.3. Render your existing site | 292 |
| 14.1.4. Standardize technical layouts | 293 |
| 14.1.5. Sitemapping | 294 |
| 14.1.6. Content accessibility | 295 |
| 14.1.7. Link-building | 296 |
| 15. Appendix 6: Example Request for Proposal template | 297 |
| 15.1. Background information..... | 297 |
| 15.2. Proposal | 299 |
| 16. Glossary..... | 302 |
| 17. About the foundation author and contributors..... | 309 |
| 17.1. Foundation author | 309 |
| 17.2. Expert contributors | 309 |



Dedicated to Jaamit Durrani

Jaamit was a popular, well-respected and highly active member of the SEO community, whose life was cut short in a tragic accident towards the end of 2010.

The two posts he contributed to Econsultancy remain invaluable advice and are testament to his skills and ability to share practical insight to help SEOs work smarter, rather than harder.

Nine common SEO campaign mistakes

<http://econsultancy.com/uk/blog/5530-nine-common-seo-campaign-mistakes>

Seven sensational SEO tips for ecommerce sites

<http://econsultancy.com/uk/blog/5131-7-seo-tips-for-ecommerce-sites>



1. Introduction

Econsultancy's Best Practice Guides help organizations improve their results from digital marketing through improved planning and execution.

They have been developed to be the definitive source for best practice on a range of online marketing topics and aim to explain best practice for successfully implementing established digital marketing techniques across organizations of all sizes – from micro-businesses to enterprises.

In particular, the reports are developed to aid the following people:

- **Digital marketing professionals.** Individuals in digital marketing teams who are actively involved in improving results from online marketing activities.
- **Specialists.** Those involved with specific digital channels such as search engine marketing and need to understand more about integration with other digital marketing activities.
- **Managers of digital marketing.** Those in a team responsible for planning and controlling digital marketing.
- **Marketing managers and team members.** Anyone responsible for traditional marketing, who wants to understand the issues involved with successful planning, implementation and integration of digital marketing activities.

Key features of our guides:

- **Comprehensive.** They cover all aspects needed for success in one place as well as referencing other in-depth sources across different portals, forums, blogs, whitepapers and books.
- **Accessible.** Content is segmented to help readers navigate and assimilate relevant content.
- **In-depth.** Topics are covered in sufficient depth to successfully implement suggestions.
- **Practical.** They explain how to implement techniques and provide key success factors that can be applied straightaway.
- **Improvement-focused.** Our guides explain current strategies, tell you how to refine them and will then help you implement an improved approach.
- **Cutting edge.** The latest best-practice advice is incorporated and potential areas of focus for the future are highlighted.

Econsultancy's Best Practice Guides are updated on a regular basis, so the information contained within is recent and valid at the time of publication. Send any questions or comments to editor@econsultancy.com

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1.1. About Econsultancy

Econsultancy is a [digital publishing and training group](#) used by more than 200,000 internet professionals every month.

The company publishes [practical and timesaving research](#) to help marketers make better decisions about the digital environment, build business cases, find the best suppliers, look smart in meetings and accelerate their careers.

Econsultancy has offices in New York and London, and hosts more than [100 events](#) every year in the US and UK. Many of the world's most famous brands use Econsultancy to [educate and train](#) their staff.

Some of Econsultancy's members include: Google, Yahoo, Dell, BBC, BT, Shell, Vodafone, Virgin Atlantic, Barclays, Deloitte, T-Mobile and Estée Lauder.

[Join Econsultancy](#) today to learn what's happening in digital marketing – and what works.

Call us to find out more on +44 (0)20 7269 1450 (London) or +1 212 699 3626 (New York). You can also [contact us online](#).

Further reading

SEMPO State of Search Engine Marketing Report 2010

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/sem-po-state-of-search>

Global Search Marketing Statistics

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/global-search-marketing-statistics>

UK Search Marketing Statistics

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/uk-search-marketing-statistics>

North America Search Marketing Statistics

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/north-america-search-marketing-statistics>

UK Search Engine Marketing Benchmark Report

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/uk-search-engine-marketing-benchmark-report>

SEO Agencies Buyer's Guide

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/seo-agencies-buyers-guide>

SEO Request for Proposal (RFP) Template

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/sem-seo-request-for-proposal-rfp>

Search Engine Marketing: SEO – Digital Marketing Template Files

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/search-engine-marketing-seo-digital-marketing-template-files>

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Business Case

<http://econsultancy.com/reports/sem-search-engine-optimization-seo-business-case>



2. Introduction to search engine marketing

2.1. Search engine marketing: opportunities and risks

Search engine marketing (SEM) remains one of the supporting pillars of online marketing, which is unsurprising, given the continued growth in the popularity of search engines amongst users to research products, services and organisations.

Where are we at?

Search usage is continuing to rise among consumers and professionals, who use search engines like Google and Bing to find what they're looking for.

At the beginning of 2010, the total worldwide search market had more than 131bn searches conducted by people aged 15 or older from home and work locations, a 46% increase from 12 months previously.¹ This equates to more than:

- 4bn searches per day
- 175m per hour
- 2.9m per minute

It's expected that a similar rate of growth has occurred during the equivalent period, 2010-2011, and will continue to increase for the foreseeable future.

What's the big challenge?

If you have already tried SEO you'll know how tricky it can be. Tapping into the searching behaviours of your audience and figuring out which keywords you need to focus on requires great tenacity. Additionally, you have to find ways to secure top rankings for your chosen keywords.

Continued innovations from the rival search engines, coupled with increased activity from your competitors, means that you also have to identify the right approaches and deploy the right resources to rank well.

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¹ <http://econsultancy.com/uk/reports/global-internet-statistics-compendium>



Where do I start?

You've already started. We created this guide to provide a super-comprehensive, hype-free compilation of best practice in natural search. Most of this guide is aimed at helping you perform well in the organic search results, although there is some crossover with paid search in Section 4.4.7. This is detailed at greater length in Econsultancy's [Paid Search Best Practice Guide](#).

By reading this guide you can maximise your opportunities from search engine marketing while minimising your risks. We recommend that you print this guide, reading it in specific sections and then acting accordingly.

2.2. Why is search marketing so important?

Web users love to search. They do this to find only one thing: information that's relevant to *them*.

What sort of information are they looking for?

Clearly this depends on the individual. They might be looking for entertainment news, hunting for product recommendations, trying to compare vendors and services, seeking their soulmate, or buying a second-hand car. All these goals can start with a simple search query.²

Modern search engines are generally great at delivering relevant results to users and relevance, or relevancy, is the mantra of all search engine engineers.

The use of keywords or keyphrases (combining several keywords) helps users find exactly what they want and understanding keyphrases enables marketers to target users showing intent or interest in their products.

Notice that we say 'keyphrase' (short for 'keyword phrase') rather than 'keyword'. This is because search engines such as Google attribute more relevance when there is an exact phrase match on a web page (a phrase that matches the user's search term).

Search engines also assess other occurrences of the keywords and synonyms on the page, and also those websites/pages linking to a page. This, plus much more, is covered in the guide.

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² <http://www.google.com/intl/en/press/zeitgeist2010/>



3. How is this guide structured?

3.1. Understanding success factors

We have seen that many factors influence successful SEO activity. To help simplify our explanation of best practice, Econsultancy has identified six key groupings of success factors for natural search which are summarised for quick reference below.

Within each of these areas, detailed recommendations of best practice for all significant ranking factors are explained.

The success factors which are used to structure the recommendations in this best practice guide:

3.1.1. Success factor 1: SEO planning and keyphrase strategy

How to develop a structured plan to evaluate and improve SEO, covering these topics:

- Setting goals through demand analysis and conversion modelling.
- Auditing current performance including competitor benchmarking.
- Keyphrase analysis and selection.
- SEM strategy – integration between SEO, PPC and other online marketing.
- Evaluation and improvement process.
- Resourcing.

3.1.2. Success factor 2: Index coverage

How to achieve index inclusion in the different search engines covering these topics:

- Site submission – how to get a new site listed in the search engines.
- Google Sitemaps – an essential tool for evaluating and improving index coverage.
- Evaluating site index inclusion and robot indexing activity.
- Site inclusion and page exclusion – how to use Robots.txt and meta tags to control.
- Domain strategy – approaches to distribute content across different domains including issues such as top-level domain variants, sub-domains, geolocation (international domains), domain hijacking and canonicalization.
- Time-related content issues including the Google ‘sandbox effect’, content freshness and link velocity.
- Indexing of dynamic content including problems with URL rewriting and Session ids.

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3.1.3. Success factor 3: On-page optimization

In this section we make recommendations on how you should create documents which the search engine will assess as being highly relevant to a particular search term a search user has entered as their query.

The most basic test of relevance is the number of times the search phrase appears on the page. However, there are many factors which are also applied. In this section we will review:

- Within page keyphrase factors including keyword density, synonyms and position
- Page markup keyphrase factors including syntactical accuracy, <title> tags, <meta> tags, hyperlink tags and alt tags.
- Document-level keyphrase factors such as the inclusion of keyphrases in the domain and document filename.

An additional guide on on-page optimization is provided in Appendix 1. Copywriting for SEO – a guide for content owners and reviewers.

3.1.4. Success factor 4: Link building

In this section we show why the links between pages are at least as important as on-page optimization in determining results from SEO.

We will review the principle of PageRank, pioneered by Google to assess the relevance of pages based on their link popularity. PageRank has many implications for the way sites should be built and pages are linked, and we describe six principles you need to be aware of.

Although PageRank is today not given as much weighting in generating search results, many of these principles can still be applied to give better results from SEO.

We will also recommend approaches on the main strategies for external link building from third party sites:

1. Natural link building through quality content.
2. Requesting inbound-only links.
3. Reciprocal linking.
4. Buying links.
5. Creating your own external links.
6. Generating buzz through PR.
7. User generated content.

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3.1.5. Success factor 5: A structured process for SEO

In this section we bring together all the techniques detailed earlier in the report and recommend the best overall approach to SEO.

We have identified ten classic approaches to SEO which are part of a typical SEO project.

The processes or activities are:

1. Improving index inclusion.
2. Revising site architecture and linking strategy.
3. Formulating an internal linking strategy.
4. External link building.
5. Improving page template effectiveness.
6. Improving SERPs effectiveness.
7. Refining SEO for homepage and other key pages.
8. Creating themed pages for target keyphrases.
9. Partitioning existing content between different pages.
10. Optimising other existing pages.

3.1.6. Success factor 6: Conversion efficiency

The main part of this report has focused on how to attract quality visitors to a website. But of course, to be of value overall, SEO must meet the marketing objectives of a site.

In this final section we review how to best devise landing pages of the site to meet this goal. We also look at the implications of structuring these pages.

The principles we will explain for effective landing pages for SEO also support the aims of other e-communications such as paid search, online advertising, affiliate marketing and email marketing.

The main topics we will cover are:

- Setting balanced objectives for landing pages.
- Understanding different types of landing pages.
- Balancing usability, accessibility and persuasion.
- Measuring landing page effectiveness.
- Ten guidelines to improving landing page efficiency.

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3.2. Features of this guide

We have incorporated a range of features to help make this guide an effective learning tool:

- 65+ Key recommendations.** Guidance on all the issues an organisation should pay attention to in their SEO strategy. These are in highlighted orange boxes.
- 65+ Tips.** Practical recommendations to improve results. These are highlighted in blue boxes.
- Stats.** Boxes which summarise research that supports a success factor.
- Resources.** Links to tools, articles and portals found within the body text, footnotes and in the resources section at the end of the guide.
- 80+ SEO ranking success factors boxes.** Designed for easy reference, these cover all of the major factors which affect SEO results. They are mainly positive factors which improve results, but negative factors are also referred to.

Each box often contains several related best practice ranking factors. These boxes have been designed to be consulted at a glance to understand best practice without reading too much text.

The ranking success factors are structured based on the experience of the author and the review team but, as part of the review process, each factor has been checked against other existing lists of ranking success factors³.

The guide provides much more depth on each factor (as shown below), including examples, several best practice guidelines and issues to watch for.

The importance rating gives a general indication of the relative importance of each factor. Its main purpose is to highlight ranking factors to really pay attention to.

The actual importance of the factors will vary for different search engines, markets and audiences. It also depends on previous SEO efforts. If you have solved an inclusion problem, it is no longer important!






| | | Importance: | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|---|
| | |  | 5/5 |
| | |  | 4/5 |
| | |  | 3/5 |
| | |  | 2/5 |
| | |  | 1/5 |
| SEO Ranking Success Factor XX | <Name of factor> | Applies to: | <Scope:Whole site, each page, which search engine?> |
| What is it? | <A brief description of the factor and why it is important to ranking> | | |
| Example: | <An example from a real site, search listings or search engine syntax> | | |
| Best practice: | <A series of recommendations, starting with the most important> | | |
| What to watch for? | <Related factors to consider> <Possible penalties or negative ranking factors associated with misapplication of factor> <Tools to apply> <Links to find out more information> | | |

Table 1: Example ranking success factor checklist box

³ Google ranking factors list at: Vaughn's One-Pagers <http://www.vaughns-1-pagers.com/internet/google-ranking-factors.htm> and Rand Fishkin's seomoz (<http://www.vaughns-1-pagers.com/internet/google-ranking-factors.htm>)

4. SEO Success Factor 1: Planning and strategy

Contributor

The following section (pages 20-40) has been reviewed and updated by Jack Hubbard, CEO, Propellernet.

4.1. An introduction to planning

Before the strategising and planning begins it's important to remember why it pays to do things right.

Simply put, search is a gateway to those in-market customers that haven't, as yet, made a brand decision. And if search is a gateway, Google, which dominates most of the global market, is the de facto gatekeeper.

No matter what piece of research you've bought into, it's likely that at least 80% of the available clicks are taken by SEO and the majority of those are taken on the first page (particularly at the top).

A strategic approach to SEO is one that will provide the most relevant answers in a format that Google understands and this means planning across three main areas:

1. **Content** - Investing in the creation of rich, unique and compelling content (text, video, images or widgets) that:
 - Addresses a particular search query.
 - Demonstrates to users and search engines that you are an authority on a specific topic.
 - Attracts reputation via recommendation (links, re-tweets, likes etc).
 - Helps you to convert.
2. **Structure** – Embracing the technical challenges of configuring a website in a way that Google can understand.
3. **Authority** - Cultivating your content's reputation by maximising link development and other authority-building opportunities.

In terms of how you deliver across those three main areas, it's important to remember that Google is increasingly favouring sites that are genuinely relevant and authoritative, rather than those using techniques that just simulate relevance.

A planned approach to SEM that uses an integrated approach to SEO and paid-search marketing should pay dividends because it:

- Enables the potential for SEM to be quantified through demand analysis and the gap between opportunity and current results to be assessed.
- Sets the right objectives and puts in place the right tracking systems and review process to improve results.
- Selects the most appropriate combination of SEO, paid search and affiliate marketing to maximise results at the right cost.
- Can diversify the risks of over-reliance on one approach.
- Achieves integration of SEM with other campaign activity.

Prioritisation is a vital element of planning. A number of SEO activities such as addressing indexing issues or implementing user generated content to product pages can have a site-wide traffic impact.

However for many brands it takes specific focus to capitalise on the opportunity that top visibility can bring. This is especially true for brands looking to dominate for specific non-brand keywords, or sub-set of keyphrases where competition is high but the gains highly lucrative.

If your brand offers a wide range of services or products this issue is compounded. Consequently, a prioritisation of where to focus content creation and link-building strategies is critical to winning in the SERPs against your keyword level competitors and delivering the best return on your investment.

In this section we recommend an approach based on these steps:

1. Goal setting.
2. Keyphrase analysis and selection.
3. Current performance auditing.
4. Competitor benchmarking.
5. SEM strategy selection.
6. Resourcing SEM.

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4.2. Setting goals for search engine marketing

As with all marketing activities it is essential that you set some realistic goals for your SEO campaigns. This will help you to get the most out of your budget, and it also gives you benchmarks so you can measure, review and improve performance.

With SEM we are fortunate that there is reasonable information to set quantitative objectives based on the potential market size (such as that in Table 1), as well as existing results from your web analytics data (e.g. visits to your site from search engines and conversion rates).

Key Recommendation 1

See how successful your SEM has been by setting quantitative goals. These should be based on demand through search volumes for different products and conversion on your site to your marketing outcomes.

Setting goals for SEM can be difficult as you need to involve the site owner and the team executing the work. Typically, the site owner won't have sufficient knowledge of search behaviour and conversion rates, which means that realistic objectives may be difficult to set.

Meanwhile, the agency or internal search specialist may not want to commit to goals which will increase their workload or reduce their profitability on the project. This is more of a problem for SEO than PPC marketing since there is less correspondence between cause and immediate effect for SEO.

We need to remember that SEM is not only the preserve of e-retailers and transactional site owners. This section will cover the following common types of websites and search marketing objectives:

- Sales for transactional e-commerce sites such as retail, financial services and travel.
- Lead generation for higher value business-to-consumer and business-to-business sites.
- Branding and awareness for brands such as fast-moving consumer goods which do not typically just sell direct.
- Intermediary sites such as brokers and affiliates.
- Media-owned sites or content sites such as online newspapers and magazines.
- Public sector organisations offering information about services and complying with freedom of information legislation.

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Regardless of the site, these are common types of high-level goals used for search engine marketing:

- i. **Position-based.** This is most commonly used for SEO rather than PPC. It is important that these targets reflect high volume, high intent keyphrases in the major search engines.

Example: To achieve 100 top ten positions, 5,000 top 50 positions, or preferably, more specific goals for specific phrases in a market.

SEO tip 1

Measuring SEO success according to positions is often meaningless, since it is position for important keyphrases such as high-volume, low-intent phrases or lower volume, high-intent phrases that is important.

- ii. **Visitor volume-based.** This is best for non-transactional sites without clear outcomes seeking to generate brand awareness and interaction.

Example: To achieve 5,000 clicks across agreed phrases per month.

- iii. **Outcome-based.** This should be straightforward to measure for a transactional site, but is less easy for sites in other sectors, such as recruitment (see tip).

Example: To achieve 5,000 leads/registrations or sales from SEO or PPC per month.

SEO tip 2

For non-transactional sites such as a recruitment website, we recommend allocating points for different types of outcome. For example, one point could be for a completed job search, five points could be assigned to a registered CV etc. This method of assessing quality can also be used for transactional sites.

- iv. **Market share-based.** With detailed keyphrase analysis or use of tools such as the Google Traffic Estimator or Hitwise, it is possible to calculate a 'share of search' within a product category as explained in the next section.

You can also aim for sales levels from SEM within a particular category to be at least those of other channels. However, care must be taken with these tools since they may be skewed by automatically submitted searches from rank-checking, link-building or click fraud software tools.

Example: To achieve 20% share of search within 12 months for a particular keyphrase.

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4.3. Keyphrase analysis and selection

4.3.1. What is keyphrase analysis? Why is it important?

Keyphrase analysis and selection are core to success in SEM. Identifying relevant keyphrases for your marketplace is a crucial starting point for both starting and refining SEO and PPC marketing.

We often see SEM projects progressing to more interesting technical issues such as assessing index inclusion or on-page optimization for SEO, or reviewing existing keyphrases for paid search, but initial keyphrase analysis is not an area to take any shortcuts on.

Key Recommendation 2

Ensure sufficient SEM project time is devoted to keyphrase analysis, demand evaluation and selection.

Detailed keyphrase analysis and selection enables you to:

- Review the phrases which let you connect with potential customers as they search for products, content or experiences.
- Select keyphrases which indicate intent on the part of your audience. This will help you qualify which phrases you should prioritise.
- Set goals for returns on SEM based on the number of relevant searches and the cost of achieving results.
- Select SEM strategy for achieving results for each keyphrase – which combination of SEO, paid search and affiliate marketing will work best?
- Review progress against these goals.

4.3.2. Why ‘keyphrase’?

In this report we use the term ‘keyphrase’ (short for ‘keyword phrase’) rather than ‘keyword’ since search engines such as Google attribute more relevance when there is a phrase match on a page, or the words are closer together.

For example, if someone is searching for a ‘*low-cost mortgage*’, Google will attribute more relevance (and so higher rankings) to a page that contains the exact keyword phrase ‘*low-cost mortgage*’ than a page that contains ‘*mortgage*’ at some point on the page but ‘*low-cost*’ elsewhere on the page.

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4.3.3. Keyphrase identification and selection process

In this section we recommend four stages for identifying and selecting keyphrases.

SEM agencies and internal staff vary in the details of their approach to keyphrase analysis, so it is worth finding out exactly what stages and tools they use, and on what basis each keyphrase is identified and selected.

Stage 1. Scope keyphrases identifying main themes

The aim of this stage is to identify manageable groups of related keyphrase themes, which are used to structure all SEM activities. These include setting objectives, reviewing performance and ongoing campaign management.

Each theme will typically be made up of one or two words. It is useful to separate brand-related terms from generic terms.

Initially, it is best simply to determine these groups by the products and services that are available. If the website has been designed in a structured way, with planned information architecture, or if it is based on an existing product catalogue then this should be fine as a starting point.

You need to determine a manageable number of themes for review and improvement. This could be between 10 and 1,000 different groups depending on the number of products or services offered.

Key Recommendation 3

Ensure your keyphrase analysis and performance reporting systems enable you to compare behaviour and performance at different aggregate levels, as well as at individual keyphrase levels. This should be a key question during supplier selection.

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5. SEO Success Factor 3: On-page optimization

Contributor

The following section (pages 133-137) has been reviewed and updated by Will Critchlow, founder and chief strategist, Distilled.

5.1. What is on-page optimization? Why is it important?

We introduced the importance of on-page optimization at the start of this guide. On-page optimization is vital to achieving good results through SEO.

The search engines want to return results to their users that are highly relevant to the phrases they are searching for. To determine whether or not a page is relevant to a particular keyphrase, the search engines take into account a number of different factors.

For example, for a page to appear relevant to a particular phrase, it should at the very least contain that phrase on the page. However, if the page in question actually contains that phrase in the title, it would appear even more relevant.

There are a number of myths surrounding on-page targeting, especially related to keyword frequency or density. However, in its own words, Google states the following:

“Google goes far beyond the number of times a term appears on a page and examines all aspects of the page’s content (and the content of the pages linking to it) to determine if it’s a good match for your query.”⁴

In this section we will look at the ranking factors you can adopt on-page in order to give your page the best change of ranking highly in the search engines for your target keyphrases. We will look at the following:

- The usage of the keyphrase within the body of the page.
- The use of meta information including title tags, h1 tags, and image alt tags.
- The use of the keyphrase in the URL.

Getting your on-page targeting right will really help your page appear relevant to the search phrase. (See: Key recommendation 40). Combined with link building, which helps your page appear valuable to the search engines, this will help optimize your site to perform well in the search engines.

Key Recommendation 40

Because the search engines determine the relevance and value of pages and sites algorithmically (and not by human review), they have to rely on a number of signals which govern which pages rank well for certain phrases. However, the real trick is not just to *appear* relevant and valuable to the search engines, but to actually *be* relevant and valuable to the users.

⁴ Google Technology introduction page: <http://www.google.com/technology>

5.2. Selecting keyphrases for optimization

Before you start optimising pages, or adding new content to your website, you need a plan to highlight those keyphrases which you are targeting for each content section. Authors and editors must be made aware of this plan.

It's important for you to be clear about the keyphrases you are targeting on each page. You should have one core keyphrase, a secondary keyphrase and two or three tertiary keyphrases.

| Keyphrase priority | Purpose of target keyphrase | Example |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Primary keyphrase(s) | The main keyphrase the page is targeted for which is searched for most commonly. | Cheap phone bills |
| Secondary keyphrase(s) | An alternative to the main phrase that is searched upon less often. | Phone bill saving |
| Tertiary keyphrase(s) | Other alternatives. | Reduce phone bill, lower phone bill, cutting phone bill, UK. |

Table 2: Example of different keyphrase priorities

These phrases should make sense together on the page. The best way to test this is to ask yourself:

“If I was the user, and I searched for these phrases, would I expect to find the same page, or a different page?”

It is always sound advice to double-check your SEO efforts against the impact they will have on user experience.

Deciding which keyphrases to go after can be difficult, but you will have to prioritise. Factors affecting your decision will be:

- Search volume
- Relevance
- Intent
- Strength of competition

While there might be a load of search traffic for a one-word search term, it can be unclear what the intent of the searcher is, and competition may be fierce. However, you want there to be sufficient monthly search volume for your core keyphrases to make your pursuit worthwhile.

The main factors when considering the strength of the competition are the number of different sites (aka domains) that link to both the site and the specific page of those already ranking well in the search results.

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5.3. Page markup factors


Contributor

The following section (pages 138-161) has been reviewed and updated by Joe Friedlein, CEO, Browser Media.

Despite the emergence of many sophisticated content management systems and e-commerce shopping catalogues, the creation of web pages effective for SEO still fundamentally relies on mastery of the HTML coding used to form pages.

Specifically, accurate use of the HTML standards in line with the Worldwide Web Consortium (www.w3.org) is important.

Furthermore, search engines have **specific standards** or approaches for the way they interpret page markup.

| SEO Ranking Success Factor | Accurate use of HTML markup standards | Applies to: Each page on site | Importance:  3/5 |
|----------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--|
| What is it? | Accurate use of the HTML standards in line with the Worldwide Web Consortium (W3C) (www.w3.org). Use of markup tags. Furthermore, search engines have specific standards or approaches for the way they interpret page markup, to provide you with extra help with this area. | | |
| Example: | This survey by Google (http://code.google.com/webstats/index.html) highlights some errors in coding such as the way the meta tag often coded wrongly for different areas of markup. | | |
| Best practice: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Follow the markup standards suggested by the W3C 2. Use the latest HTML syntax recommended by search engines where known. 3. Check for quality of page coding through HTML validation tools. Are you using latest coding techniques for different parts of the site? Find out more: http://validator.w3.org/ | | |
| What to watch for? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate across different areas of code: <head> including document definition, title and meta tags, • Key <body> elements include markup for table and hyperlinks (e.g. rel="nofollow" and title="") and img attributes. | | |

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6. SEO Success Factor 6: Conversion efficiency of landing pages

6.1. Introduction

The main part of this report has focused on how to attract quality visitors to a website. But of course, to be of value overall, SEO must also meet marketing objectives.

In this section we review **how to best devise landing pages** of the site to meet this goal. We also look at the implications of structuring these pages.

The principles we will explain for effective landing pages for SEO also support the aims of other e-communications such as paid search, online advertising, affiliate marketing and email marketing.

The main topics we will cover are:

- Setting balanced objectives for landing pages.
- Understanding different types of landing pages.
- Balancing usability, accessibility and persuasion.
- Measuring landing-page effectiveness.
- Twelve guidelines to improve landing page efficiency.

6.2. Measuring landing page effectiveness

Most capable web analytics systems will report on site conversion rates and page bounce rates. To improve performance you also need to break down these metrics for different keyphrases, then see if visitors were referred by SEO or PPC, and then look at the referring search engine.

Key Recommendation 41

Ensure your web analytics software can report bounce and conversion rates at a granular level, ie by keyphrase, by SEM tactic and by search engine.

As a minimum, your web analytics system should readily allow you to view data on bounce rates (the proportion of visitors who leave the page without visiting more pages) and conversion rates (the proportion of visitors who complete the intended outcome) for different referral sources (eg paid vs natural search vs online ads).

Ideally, it should also enable you to complete A/B testing where different visitors are served different pages, so differences in bounce and conversion rates can be assessed.

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7. Appendix 4: Checklist for quality links

Internal staff, your SEO, PR or digital agency or indeed anyone involved in gaining links for your site, can often be unaware of some of the nuances involved.

This is a checklist which summarises the main issues we have discussed in the report.

Links obtained must have the following characteristics to be valuable:

| Required feature of link | Example |
|---|--|
| 1. Anchor text. Text links preferably contain relevant anchor text for target keyphrases such as product names. | Good: <company name> + <main product names> Poor: Click here |
| 2. Adjacent text. Plain text next to a link is valuable if relevant. If the company name is used as the link, then the adjacent text is relevant. | Good: <u>Company name</u> specialising in <main product name(s)> |
| 3. Domain or link popularity aka PageRank of site. The site overall should have a large number of external or backlinks – ideally more than 50 external links. | To check backlinks http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com to test number of links to a site. To check PageRank, use the Google Toolbar or a service such as SearchStatus which also includes Compete Rank as a further indication: A site with a homepage Rank of four or above is most valuable Take the title or h1 from the site and copy it into Google. If the site ranks no one it shows authority. |

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8. Glossary

| | |
|--|---|
| 301 Redirect (permanent redirect) | Interpreted by search engine robot that the current domain is no longer valid. All links to the domain (and PageRank) are typically assigned to the site which is pointed to by the redirect. Used to amalgamate PageRank and give a single URL for a company or group of products. This redirect is implemented on the server (server-side). |
| 302 Redirect (temporary redirect) | Interpreted by search engine robot that both the target domain and the current domain are temporarily invalid. Use for geolocation to point country specific domains (ccTLDs) as separate listings. But note this is used for domain hijacking and as a consequence can result in sites getting penalised. This redirect is implemented on the server (server-side). |
| Accessibility | An approach to site design intended to accommodate site usage using different browsers and settings particularly required by the visually impaired. |
| 'Alt' image tags | Graphical images that form each page can have 'hidden text' associated with them that is not seen by the user, but will be indexed by the search engine. This is required for accessibility compliance (screen-readers used by the blind and visually impaired read out the 'alt' tags), but is also used by the search engines to determine relevance. |
| Affiliate marketing | Typically, a commission-based arrangement where referring sites (publishers) receive a commission on sales or leads by merchants (retailers). A lead may be based on data captured during an enquiry, or it could be simply a visitor to the site (a click), in which case it overlaps with paid-search marketing. |
| Authority pages | A concept related to Hilltop . A page which contains many inbound links about a topic. 'Expert pages' (hubs) are given more weighting to identify authority pages. |

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9. About the foundation author and contributors

9.1. Foundation author

The original guide was created during 2008 by Dr Dave Chaffey ([@DaveChaffey](#)) who provides advice on digital marketing strategy at [SmartInsights.com](#). He also trains for Econsultancy, currently on the Advanced SEO and Google Analytics courses.

His original Success Factors structure (See *Section 3*) remains in place, as does a large proportion of the original content. Many of the fundamental ranking factors for success in SEO are still fully applicable to search professionals operating in today's marketplace.

Over the last 15 years, Dave has trained or consulted on the full-range of online marketing approaches with a range of B2C and B2B companies from well-known brands to smaller businesses. Companies he has worked with include 3M, Barclaycard, BP, CIPD, CMP Information, Eurooffice, HSBC, Nectar, Mercedes Benz, Nokia and Tektronix.

He is a prolific e-business author, whose books include *Internet marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice*, *E-marketing Excellence*, *Total Email Marketing*, and *E-business and E-commerce Management*.

9.2. Expert contributors

Econsultancy wishes to extend sincere thanks to the following SEO professionals. Between them, they have carefully reviewed and updated the original previous content, adding current front-line best-practice tips and insight derived from their experience in this complex area of online marketing.

Lee Colbran

SEO director, FreshEgg

Lee is one of the founding directors of [FreshEgg](#) and has been fascinated by internet marketing and SEO since his school days. He has given several talks on the constantly evolving discipline of SEO at various public events, seminars and conferences.

Although he is one of the most knowledgeable SEO practitioners in the UK, he never refers to himself as an 'SEO expert' claiming that, given the dynamic nature of the discipline, there can be no such thing. In the world of SEO, what worked yesterday may not work as well tomorrow.

Lee is a firm believer that SEO ideas have to be both creative and effective and should be integrated with an understanding of a client's business needs so that constantly updated SEO expertise can be translated into continuing success online.

Section: Auditing current performance and competitor benchmarking

Pages: 41-51

Malcolm Coles

Independent SEO consultant

Malcolm Coles is an SEO and content strategy consultant who works for publishers, big brands and small websites.

He is well-respected in the industry amongst his peers and is a regular guest blogger for Econsultancy.

He also blogs at malcolmcoles.co.uk and you can find him on Twitter at [@malcolmcoles](https://twitter.com/malcolmcoles).

Section: Copywriting for SEO

Pages: 259-265

Teddie Cowell

Director of search, Guava

Teddie has more than 12 years' experience of new media and emerging technologies and provides [Guava's](#) intellectual edge, keeping on top of the latest developments in the industry to ensure the company remains at the forefront.

He also leads a team of project managers and enterprise search optimizers, and is a regular speaker at search engine marketing events. His deep knowledge of paid and organic search, creative thinking and enthusiasm for everything he does makes him well-respected in the industry.

He had a front row seat for the dotcom boom and then bust, seeing exactly what was working and what was not – and fed these invaluable lessons back into his approach to search engine marketing.

Section: Site migration, dynamic content and vertical search

Pages: 109-119

Will Critchlow

Founder and chief strategist, Distilled

Will co-founded the search agency [Distilled](#) in 2005 and now concentrates on business development and client strategy. In practice, this means he spends a lot of time presenting and writing about search and meeting with existing and prospective clients.

Will is regularly quoted in a wide range of media on the subject of SEO and internet marketing in general. He also regularly speaks at conferences and training sessions.

Section: On-page optimization

Pages: 133-137

Joe Friedlein

CEO, Browser Media

Joe Friedlein is the founder and MD of [Browser Media](#), a specialist search engine marketing agency. A veteran of the Web 1.0 days, Joe has an extensive working knowledge of ‘all things web’, but has focused on search engine marketing for the past eight years.

Section: Page markup factors

Pages: 138-161

Andrew Girdwood

Media innovations director, bigmouthmedia

A committed digital marketing pioneer, Andrew is responsible for the development of [bigmouthmedia's](#) search marketing strategies for major clients.

One of the best known experts in the UK search business, he is widely regarded as an industry thought-leader, speaking regularly on the latest technical developments hitting the sector. An internet evangelist, when not appearing at events such as SMX, Ad:tech, Internet World, SES and the Online Marketing Show, Girdwood spends his time reading patent applications from search engines, monitoring digital innovators and analysing algorithmic trends.

Section: SEO Success Factor 4: Recommended process for external link building

Pages: 181-201

Neilson Hall

Director of search, iProspect

Neilson has six years' experience in the digital industry. He is a regular contributor to leading industry publications, has sat on the Search Council and has appeared numerous times on Sky News and Radio 4 speaking about all things digital.

Neilson is particularly interested in channel integration and the cost savings and ROI that can be attained through the effective implementation of a holistic marketing strategy. He has managed many blue chip clients in a variety of verticals. These include: Direct Line, Compare the Market, Adidas, Shop Direct, British Gas, Ebay, American Express, Vodafone and Aviva.

Section: Search engine overview

Pages: 78-91

Jack Hubbard

CEO, Propellernet

Jack has worked in search marketing for 13 years and co-founded [Propellernet](#) in 2003.

As CEO, he does the bigger-picture thinking that drives the company in the right direction and keeps their clients 10 steps ahead of the competition.

That means snuffling his knowledge-hungry nose through countless books, keeping a massive ear to the ground, aligning Propellernet's focus to the important trends and sifting out the jargon and bandwagon fads.

Section: Planning and Strategy

Pages: 20-40

Rishi Lakhani

Independent search marketing Consultant

Rishi spends his days helping brands sort out their online marketing strategies and his nights hunting loopholes in the SERPs. He currently blogs his findings over at <http://explicitly.me> and bores people on twitter: [@rishil](#)

In his lifetime in the industry, he has delivered several nominated and award-winning SEO, affiliate and paid-search campaigns and has been rapped on the knuckles by his peers for exposing search engine exploits.

Section: Search engine marketing strategy selection

Pages: 52-64

Alex Moss

Independent SEO consultant

Alex Moss has been working with HTML since he was 13. His skills, which stem originally from self-taught design and development, have now evolved into a wide range of knowledge on SEO.

After receiving his degree in Law and IT in 2006, Alex took an interest in SEO and began working as an independent consultant, immersing himself in all aspects of SEO. He particularly enjoys on-site optimization and WordPress SEO, design and plugin development.

His WordPress plugins include Facebook Comments, Twitter Feed and Google News Sitemap. As well as working in-house, Alex helps run [Pleer SEO](#) in Manchester.

He also writes guest blogs now and again for sites such as Econsultancy and SearchEngineWatch. You can find him on [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

Section: SEO performance audit template

Pages: 266-274

Lisa Myers

CEO, Verve Search

Lisa Myers is CEO and owner of SEO and social media agency, [Verve Search](#). She has 11 years' experience in marketing, of which six years was in search. Lisa is heavily involved in the global search community and respected by peers and search engines alike.

She is a regular contributor to the online marketing press both on and offline, and has authored several best-practice SEO whitepapers and guides. Lisa is also an active blogger in the SEO and social media community and founder of the SEO blog: [SEO-Chicks.com](#). She is co-founder of the international search blog, [StateofSearch.com](#).

Lisa has also won a row of prestigious awards including: B2B Newcomer of the Year at the B2B Marketing Awards in 2007; Best Use of Technology by an Under 30-Year-Old Woman at the Blackberry Women & Technology Awards in 2008. In 2009 Lisa made the prestigious 35 Women Under 35 high achievers list in Management Today which was also published by The Times.

Section: Site architecture & internal linking

Pages: 221-240

David Naylor

Director of search marketing, Bronco

David Naylor, more commonly known as DaveN, started working in the SEO industry over 13 years ago.

David's main motivational driving force is the belief that there is no point having a site if it doesn't rank at number one. His dedication to giving clients great ROI has led to the constant development of new optimization techniques and the ability to see algorithmic changes before most other SEOs. David Naylor has the reputation of being one of the best SEOs in the world, with a proven track record of successes in the most competitive markets.

David's blog attracts a worldwide audience and is well known for its down-to-earth, yet informative approach on all SEO issues. Always at the forefront of the latest search engine topics, David is an established authority within the SEO community. David owns [Bronco Internet](#), a highly talented and successful SEO and web development agency.

Section: SEO Ranking factors quick reference summary

Pages: 275-285

Kelvin Newman

Creative director, SiteVisibility

In his role as creative director at SiteVisibility, Kelvin's responsible for the iTunes most popular marketing podcast. On the show he's collaborated with a number of the world's most respected marketers including Seth Godin, Tim Ferris, David Meerman-Scott, Avinash Kaushik & Jakob Nielsen.

Author of one of the most comprehensive guides to link building, the *Becoming a Clockwork Pirate* ebook, he's also delivered presentations across the UK & Europe at events like A4U, SMX London and SASCON. He organises the #brightonseo conference series and regularly contributes to State of Search & Econsultancy and is heavily involved with SiteVisibility's innovative search marketing campaigns for clients such as Gumtree, FindaProperty, Gala Bingo & uSwitch.

Section: Online PR and social media

Pages: 202-220

Nichola Stott

Director, theMediaFlow

Nichola Stott is director and founder of theMediaFlow, a UK SEO and social media agency, and co-founder and director of SEO PR Training.

Nichola has over six years' experience in search, four of which at Yahoo as head of UK search partnerships. She is a regular SEO conference speaker and writes for a number of industry blogs including SearchEngineWatch, State of Search and SEO Chicks, as well as for the Econsultancy Blog.

Section: Link building: PageRank principles

Pages: 162-179

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