



SEO eBook

Search Engine Optimization

Andreas Ramos

andreas.com

About SEO eBook

SEO eBook is an ebook on SEO (search engine optimization) that I update once or twice a year as I learn new things about search engines and SEO.

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About the Cover

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) argued the sun was the center of the universe, space was infinite, the stars were other suns (with their own planets), and there were people on those planets. For these ideas, he was burnt at the stake in 1600 AD. Ten years later, Galileo's telescope showed Copernicus was right. The woodcutting (made in the 1800s) shows Bruno realizing how Nature works.

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Foreword

Why I Wrote this eBook

Web 1.0 was the collection of websites, webpages, and search engines. People used search engines to find webpages. That was important because people used search engines to find pages. A search engine offers only ten results, so if your webpage was at the top, you got pretty much all of the traffic for that search. So you had to do everything possible to get your webpage to the top. You used SEO to show up at the top of search engine. Hundreds, if not thousands, of companies offer SEO services. Tens of thousands of people work in SEO.

But the web is changing. There are several new things:

- Google slowly realized their original idea of a search algorithm was easy to spoof. They had to develop a new approach to bring the best sites to the top and block the scams. Google is also adapting to mobile, which will change it into something that you may not even recognize as a search engine.
- Google isn't the only search engine. Baidu, the leading search engine in China, is #2 and Yandex in Russia is #3 (Bing is #4). Chinese and Russian are difficult languages, so both of them developed ways to index and search. In some features, they're better than Google. China's ecommerce market is larger than the USA. If your organization wants to be found on the web around the world, you must consider Baidu and Yandex.

It's no longer a simple matter of a few keywords, meta-tags, and links to be at the top of Google. You need to understand quality SEO. You need a unified approach that includes business strategy, branding, and digital marketing.

Andreas Ramos
Palo Alto, November, 2015

Using SEO

Seek and ye shall find. —Matthew 7:7

This ebook shows you how to use search engine optimization (SEO) to increase traffic, leads, and sales. I'll show you what search engines are looking for and how they rank pages. The book also covers how to deal with social sites and content marketing.

First, what is SEO? This stands for *search engine optimization*. In short, you make changes to a webpage so your visitors can find it in a search engine.

The Traditional Approach: Faith-based SEO

In the beginning of the web, SEO was about getting to the top of search engines. Why was number one so important? There was basically only one search engine and if your site was #1, it got most of the traffic.

To be #1 was also the easiest way to measure success. Everyone could type their favorite keyword, look in a search engine, and see the ranking for the page.

There was also the lack of information from Google. Asides from Zen advice to “build better pages,” Google didn’t help, which led to confusion and misinformation. SEO forums were filled with bad advice. Scammers took advantage of Google’s silence to offer useless services.

The Main Search Engines

There are hundreds of search engines, but only a few matter. Look in your analytics package to see which ones send traffic to your site. You can ignore the ones that don’t bring visitors.



Figure 1: In most of the world, Google, Bing, and Yahoo! are the main search engines. Chinese use Baidu, Russians use Yandex, and South Koreans use Naver.

Google has the most advanced search ranking process, so you can optimize for Google and you’ll be fine with the others.

The exception is Baidu, which is different due to the Chinese language. Baidu also has a number of requirements for a site to appear in its search engine (okay, you’ll have to speak Chinese :-)

Specialty Search Engines

There are also specialty search engines (also called *vertical search engines* or *portals*). Nearly every market has its own portals and search engines. For example, LuxuryLifeStyle.com is a portal for wealthy consumers. By being listed in portals, you get traffic that doesn’t depend on search engines. Get a list of over 600 specialty search engines and portals at <http://info.vilesilencer.com> and see which ones are relevant to your site.

If you buy links in those sites, use URL tagging so you can track the results in analytics. If a portal has a fee, you can see if the site sends you enough traffic and conversions to justify the fee. When you talk with the portal, ask for a free month so you can see if they produce profitable traffic.

Don't depend on search engines for all of your traffic. Search engines constantly changes their rules and many websites that had been at the top for years suddenly drop down. If your pages aren't findable, your sales will collapse. Try to diversify as much as possible.

The Links in the Search Engines

A user sees two types of links in a search engine results page: unpaid links and paid links, as shown next. The unpaid links are the result of the search engine's technology. They scan the Web, find the websites, and rank the results. The paid links, which are paid advertising, appear on the right side of the page. Sometimes, paid links are at the top of the page.

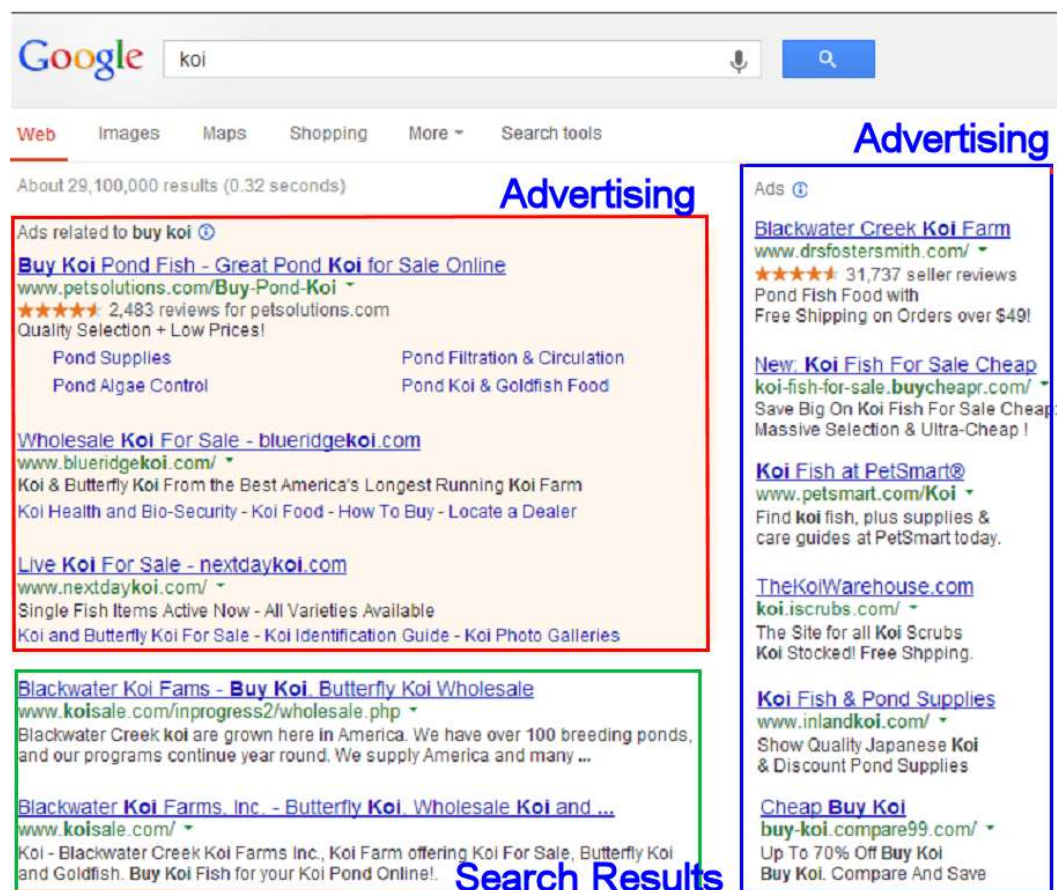


Figure 2: An example of a Google search results page (as shown in September 2013). At top left (the red box), there are three ads. Below (the green box) are search results. On the right side (the blue box), there are six ads. Most people don't realize the left side starts with ads. They think the first item is a search result. Most of the clicks are going to happen on the first three or four items at the top left. If your page is not in that space, it may as well not be in the search engine.

Unpaid links are also called *natural* or *organic results*. This is misleading because there's nothing natural about it. Search engines use complex rules to rank pages, they modify the results, and people use SEO to improve the ranking.

Beyond Search Engines: Social Media

In 1998, the web was much easier. Google was the main search engine. Social media was new and trying to establish itself. Within a few years, everything changed. It's no exaggeration to say Google got blindsided by social. They simply didn't expect it would become significant.

The premise of Google is to organize information, which means there are people who seek information, people who offer information, and Google wants to be the service that indexes and delivers that information. This also allows Google to make \$50 billion per year on advertising by creating an ad distribution network (ADN) for advertisers to show ads to customers.

But social didn't bother with this model. Starting with MySpace, Hi5, and followed by Facebook and dozens of other social sites, the web changed. Social tools allow people to talk directly with each other. They don't need search engines to find each other. Social tools form a vast (and anarchistic) town square where anyone can post and instantly (yes, within a second or two) reach a billion people. Nobody uses search engines to search Twitter; you use Twitter to search Twitter.

Here's an example of the change. The Twitter community, on its own, began using hashtags. In fact, Twitter.com rejected hashtags at first. But by 2010, people used five million hashtags daily so Twitter began to index them. This never would have happened at Google, which tightly controls and keeps secret the criteria for indexing. By spring 2013, Facebook and Google+ added hashtags.

What's so important about hashtags in SEO? You can create your own hashtag and use it instantly. There is no registration or fee. There are plenty of examples where a teen starts a hashtag at 9:35 pm in Philadelphia and within thirty minutes, twenty thousand people around the world are using it. There is nothing like this in Google. You can make up a new keyword and add it to your page, but it's unlikely other web pages will add your keyword.

Another example highlights the difference between search engines and social media. Let's say an earthquake happens in a remote region of China. If you search Google, it gives priority to selected official news services, such as the New York Times and so on. But it can take hours for news services to go through the process of assigning reporters, collecting information, and writing, editing, and presenting the news. In contrast, any person who happens to be in the area and has a cell phone can post a tweet with a hashtag and a photo or a video, which becomes available worldwide within a few seconds. Within a few minutes, others add additional tweets with more information. Twitter is the easiest and quickest way to learn what is happening. Many people don't even bother to look in Google for news.

Google has been trying to understand social. They first launched Google Wave, which was a copy of Facebook, but it failed within a week. They then launched Google+, which started as another copy of Facebook. They've been adding social signals to their algorithm, which means they look at a page's Facebook and Twitter traffic, comments, sentiment, and other social data. But this is a challenge because social sites can pop up and grow to tens of millions within months. In 1998, Andreas was the webmaster at Dialpad.com, a Silicon Valley startup that grew to 16 million users in one year, which at the time was the fastest growing website in history. Today, that would be modest growth. Vine picked up 40 million users in seven months and it's just one of the many video tools for Twitter. Much more is coming. China has Renren, Weibo, WeChat, and other social sites, each with several hundred million users. Some of these companies are setting up offices in Silicon Valley and beginning to add users around the world.

Social is also an SEO challenge for you. In social, there are no meta-tags, <H1> formats, or other standard SEO issues. This means when you're doing SEO, you can't just use traditional SEO. You must also use social SEO.

Technical SEO: Changes to the HTML Code

Okay, let's start with what I'll call *technical SEO* (some people call this *traditional SEO*). This means you make technical changes to the HTML in order to improve ranking in a search engine.

Many people like the idea of technical SEO. If you could just add the right keyword to a page and suddenly rank #1, that'd be a great solution. This actually worked in the late-90s with AltaVista and other search engines. Today, it's changed quite a bit.

Let's cover technical SEO so you can understand what it is. Then I'll discuss how it has changed and what works now.

First, an overview of the technical methods in SEO:

- **Navigation:** Improve the visitor's ability to navigate through your site to find pages.
- **Keyword research:** How to find the keywords that bring visitors and sales to your site.
- **Meta tags:** The HEAD section of a webpage contains three tags: the TITLE, DESCRIPTION, and KEYWORD tags. Use the keyword research to write these tags.
- **BODY tags:** The BODY section has the text that visitors see on their screen. You'll use the keywords for the page heading and the introductory sentence.
- **Sitemaps:** The two types of sitemaps are HTML and XML.

Enough theory. Let's get started.

Navigation

In traditional SEO, it was thought that indexing and ranking could be improved by managing the way that search engines moved through the site. This was called internal architecture, silos, or themes. The website's linking structure was modified to turn the website into several sets of pages, as shown next.

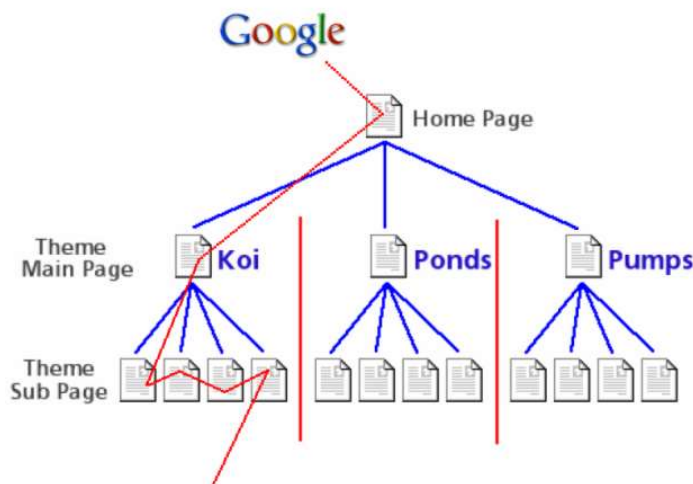


Figure 3: An example of traditional SEO restructuring of a website into themes or silos. The idea was to lead the search engine into a cluster of pages for koi, which would improve the context of these pages.

However, the last few years of social have shown that people want instant results. They don't want to go to a website and click through a series of links and pages to get what they want.

Don't obligate your visitors to navigate through a series of pages. Offer the information on the page. Simplify your web site. Make it easy for your visitors to find what they want.

Use your web analytics to make a list of your pages, and sort them by incoming traffic. You'll find most of your visitors enter your site on only a few pages. These pages are called *entrance pages*. Other pages may have more traffic because people are moving around within your site, but the entrance pages are where people enter your site. These pages attract visitors. Focus your SEO efforts on these entrance pages, which are usually the website's home page, the product pages, services pages, FAQs, the support page, and the contact-us page.

Find the Keywords

The next step in technical SEO is to identify the keywords for each page. The keywords are the search terms that users will type into a search engine to find your page.

As people use search engines, they have learned how to get better results. They find the more keywords they use in a query, the better the results. People now generally use three words in a search. I say "keywords," but I mean keyword phrases with three or four words, such as *organic koi food*.

- **Web Analytics:** Your web analytics tool showed you the keywords that visitors used to find your site. However, Google now hides the keywords. More in the summary to this chapter.
- **Your Website's Search Box:** When you put a search box on your website, you get a report of the search terms that visitors used. This can also show you the pages they visited, conversions, exits, and more.
- **Google's Keyword Planner:** You can enter a few keywords, and Google Keyword Planner shows you additional keywords. In addition, it can look at a webpage and recommends keywords for that page. If you have a well-written page, Google will give you lots of good keywords. This also means you can enter your competitors' websites, Wikipedia pages, industry sites, and so on to get keywords. This tool is in your Google AdWords account. You can find additional keyword research tools at Wordtracker.com and KeywordDiscovery.com.
- **Competitors' meta-keyword tag:** Visit your top five competitors' websites, select View | Source, and look at the tags in the <HEAD> section. Print out their product pages and look for keywords.
- **Brand names:** Add your product names to the list. If you sell Yasuhiro Koi pellets, add the product name (Yasuhiro Koi Pellets) to your keyword list.
- **Company names:** Add your vendors to the list. If you sell Koi pellets by Yasuhiro Corp., add the company name (Yasuhiro Corporation) to your keyword list.
- **Misspellings:** Add misspellings to your keyword list. For example, add *goldfsih*. Search for *goldfsih* and see how many have misspelled it. Add these misspellings at the bottom of your page by writing "Were you looking for *goldfsih*? We have goldfish." That lets the search engines index the misspelling on your page.
- **Web 2.0 and Social:** A number of Web 2.0 tools let you see what your target audience is looking for. Over 40 million people ask questions on Yahoo! Answers every month. You can sort these by topic and use these to build additional pages. You can also search Twitter hashtags to find additional queries. Use tools such as HashTagify to find the volume for hashtags or related hashtags. For more about Twitter tools, get Andreas' *#TwitterBook*.

In your research, you may find several thousand keywords. But which ones get the most traffic? Set up an AdWords account, add the keywords, and let it run for several weeks. AdWords will

show you which keywords actually get traffic, clicks, and conversions. If you want to test keywords and you don't yet have the webpage ready, point the ads to a related organization.

The Website's URL

If you don't yet have a URL for your website, put your main keyword in the website's URL. If people are searching for koi, they will more likely click on Koi-Planet.com than RondaAndMichelle.com. The point isn't to feed the keyword to the search engines. The point is to let searchers know that you have what they are seeking. Keep the following points in mind:

- Put your main keyword at the beginning of the URL. Koi-Planet.com is better than Planet-for-Koi.com.
- If you already have a URL such as RondaAndMichelle.com that doesn't match your keyword, consider changing your URL. You can set up a redirect on the old site to point to the new site. Another solution is to buy URLs for each product, such as Koromo-Koi-Planet.com, Asagi-Koi-Planet.com, and so on.
- If you don't yet have a URL, use AdWords to help you to find a good URL. Run an AdWords campaign with several thousand keywords for ten business days. You'll see which words get the most traffic and clicks.

If you can't change your URL, work with that. If it's RondaAndMichelle.com, then add your keyword in the folder, so it appears as RondaAndMichelle.com/Koromo-Koi/.

Note: Should you use a hyphen or an underscore in your URL? There's two parts to this. As a technical issue, the hyphen and underscore act like a space, so the search engines see Koi-Planet as "Koi Planet." It used to make a difference whether the URL used a hyphen or underscore, but that doesn't matter anymore from a technical point of view. However, how will your audience search? Google gives them the result they seek. If they search for Koi-Planet with a hyphen, Google will show the link with a hyphen. If they search for it with an underscore, Google will show the version with the underscore. The technical issue isn't important; what matters is whether your audience will remember your name and how they will search for you.

Tip: When you write your URL, use capital letters to mark the beginning of words. It's easier to read RondaAndMichelle.com than rondaandmichelle.com.

Let's now look at the HTML code. Don't worry; I'll focus only on what you need to know to modify the tags for SEO.

In the page's HTML code are two sections: the HEAD and the BODY. The HEAD section contains information about the page; the BODY section holds the text for the page.

The HEAD section contains several tags, including TITLE, DESCRIPTION, and KEYWORD. In the following sections, I'll show you how to edit these tags.

The TITLE Tag

The TITLE tag is in the HTML's HEAD section. The text in the TITLE tag is displayed in the upper-left of the browser window. Here's an example of a TITLE tag:

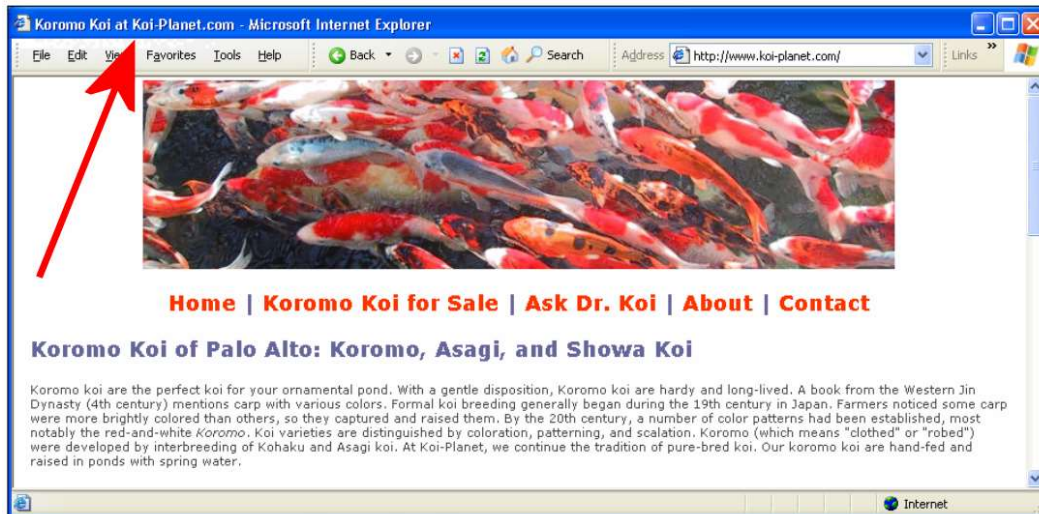


Figure 4: The TITLE tag appears at the top of the browser.

For SEO purposes, the TITLE is also used in the heading that appears in the search engine. This is what the user sees in the search engine results list. Just as with the URL name, the point isn't to feed keywords to the search engines. It's to let visitors know that you have what they are seeking.

Here are examples of TITLE tags in a search for koi pond:

[Koi Fish: Live Japanese Koi Fish for Outdoor Ponds](http://www.liveaquaria.com)
www.liveaquaria.com > Pond Fish ▾
Find koi fish at LiveAquaria.com. Our large selection of Japanese koi perfect for outdoor ponds. Visit us online today!

[Ponds- Create a Pond, Plants for Koi Ponds](http://www.hgtv.com)
www.hgtv.com > Outdoors > Landscaping ▾
Start your pond planning on HGTV.com. We've got tons of tips and inspiration for koi ponds, waterfall ponds and more.

[Japanese Koi Pond Santa Rosa ...](http://www.koiandpondinc.com/)
www.koiandpondinc.com/ ▾
Japanese Koi Pond, Pond Supply, Pond Filters...

Figure 5: The text that appears in the heading of each search result is taken from the webpage's TITLE tag.

An Enquiro study found that a match between the user's search term and the text in the TITLE tag was the single most important item in attracting a click. Look at the TITLE as a short ad for your product. Here are some points to keep in mind:

- Write a TITLE tag that encourages visitors to come to your webpage. The TITLE tag states the benefits to your visitors. Use the keyword first and then the name of the webpage.
- Search engines have a limit to the number of characters they fetch from the TITLE tag. This varies according to the search engine. In general, use no more than 66 characters (including spaces). To find the number of characters, paste the text into Word and use Tools | Word Count.
- Here's an example of a TITLE tag:

```
<TITLE>Koromo Koi at Koi-Planet.com</TITLE>
```

You can use Google Analytics to test the TITLE tags. In Google Analytics, go to Content | Content by Title. That web analytics report shows the page's traffic. Try different TITLE tags, based on top keywords from analytics and PPC, and see if the traffic improves.

You can also use PPC to test the TITLE tags. Create PPC ads with different TITLE tags and then select the one with the highest click-through rate.

By the way, it's a convention to write "TITLE" in capital letters so it stands out. It doesn't matter for HTML if this is upper case or lower case.

The DESCRIPTION Tag

The DESCRIPTION tag is also in the HEAD section.

Search engines display the content of the DESCRIPTION tag to the visitor in the search engine results page.

Let's look at those results again. The search engine fetches the content for the two lines of descriptive text from the webpage's DESCRIPTION tag. In the following example, the first two entries have complete sentences. But the third description is made up of fragments of sentences.

[Koi Fish: Live Japanese Koi Fish for Outdoor Ponds](#)
[www.liveaquaria.com](#) › Pond Fish ▾
Find koi fish at LiveAquaria.com. Our large selection of Japanese koi perfect for outdoor ponds. Visit us online today!

[Ponds- Create a Pond. Plants for Koi Ponds](#)
[www.hgtv.com](#) › Outdoors › Landscaping ▾
Start your pond planning on HGTV.com. We've got tons of tips and inspiration for koi ponds, waterfall ponds and more.

[Japanese Koi Pond Santa Rosa ...](#)
[www.koiandpondinc.com/](#) ▾
Japanese Koi Pond, Pond Supply, Pond Filters...

Figure 6: The text that appears in the body of each search result is taken from the webpage's DESCRIPTION tag.

The third item has ellipses (three dots...) in both the TITLE and DESCRIPTION tag. This means the search engine isn't using the page's TITLE or DESCRIPTION tags. Either the tags are missing or for some reason, the search engine chose to ignore them. Instead, the search engine is fetching text from the body of the webpage. It ignores marketing text (such as "We're the best in the world!") and chooses sentence fragments that indicate information (such as archive, news, health care, and so on).

To write your DESCRIPTION tag, follow these guidelines:

- Use your top two or three keywords and write a complete sentence. Put the top two or three keywords first, then the description, and finally your organization's name.
- Look at other descriptions in the search engine and notice what it considers important, such as the words *archive*, *FAQ*, *news*, *health care*, *information*, *tips*, *guide*, *reviews*, *comparisons*, and similar.
- Use up to 155 characters (including spaces) in the DESCRIPTION tag. Paste the text into Word and use Tools | Word Count to count the number of characters.
- Here's an example of a DESCRIPTION tag:

```
<meta name="DESCRIPTION" content="Koromo Koi for Your Pond. FAQ, Tips, Advice, Information, and More at Koi-Planet.com in Palo Alto. Call us at 800-KOI-FISH.">
```

Here's how the webpage will appear in the search engine listing.

Koromo Koi at [Koi-Planet.com](#)
Koromo Koi for Your Pond. FAQ, Tips, Advice, Information, and
More at Koi-Planet.com in Palo Alto. Call us at 800-KOI-FISH.

Figure 7: The heading comes from the TITLE tag. The two lines of body text come from the DESCRIPTION tag.

Check Your TITLE and DESCRIPTION Tags

You can use Google Webmaster Tools to check your TITLE and DESCRIPTION tags. If tags are missing, you can add them. If pages have duplicate tags, the search engines can't distinguish the pages. Write unique tags for each page. If tags are too long or too short, the Google Webmaster Tools can alert you so you can write better tags. Webmaster Tools even tell you if the TITLE tags are uninformative so you can write informative, descriptive ones.

Google Webmaster Tools are free. Search for *Google Webmaster Tools*.

The TITLE and DESCRIPTION tag are not for the search engines. They don't care what you put in there. The point of these is to write text that will appear in the search results page and get people to click on your link.

The KEYWORD Tag

Once upon a time in a galaxy far away, the KEYWORD tag told the search engine what the webpage's main keywords were. Here's an example of the KEYWORD tag:

```
<meta name="KEYWORD" content="japanese koi, japanese goldfish,  
japanese fish, koromo koi, ornamental ponds, backyard ponds, koi  
planet,">
```

But spammers abused this, so search engines gave up on the meta-keyword tag. They ignore it.

You can either put a few keywords there to fill the space or just not use it.

Folder Names and File Names

Search engines don't care what you call your files. But it may help your visitors if they see a webpage named koromo-koi.html instead of prod-ID=3043. Whenever possible, use human-readable file names.

Should you use hyphens or underscores in file names? It used to make a difference if the file name was koi-food.html or koi_food.html. It doesn't matter anymore.

The Headings on the Page

First, let's look at the page heading. Just like any magazine article, a page should have a heading. Search engines pay attention to headings because these carry information about a page. The heading should use the H1 tag (H1 = heading). Here's an example of an H1 tag:

```
<H1>Japanese Koi for Ornamental Ponds</H1>
```

The most common problem with headings is use of the wrong tag. Many web designers don't like the H1 heading because it uses a big font. They choose instead images, SPAN tags, or DIV tags. That looks nice, but search engines can't tell if those images are headings. Body text that uses SPAN will be treated as body text, not as header text. Search engines want to see a heading because these contain information.

To get the search engine to index the heading, use an H1 tag to mark the heading. You can still have your design. Use CSS to modify the look of the H1 tag so it renders the way you want it.

Here are two tips:

- Use your top keywords as the first word in the heading, such as "Koromo Koi Farms of Palo Alto."
- There are several <H> tags. <H1> denotes a first-level heading; <H2> denotes a second-level heading, and so on (there is also <H3>, <H4>, etc.) Use an <H1> at the top of your page, followed by an <H2>.

The Text on the Page

The text on the page should be descriptive, informational, and include the main keywords. Here are some points to keep in mind when creating body text:

- Use your keywords in the first two to three words of the body text.
- Use words that mark information, such as *news*, *guide*, and *summary*.
- Use the <P> tag to mark body text.
- Write naturally. Don't stuff keywords into a page. Don't use keyword-density tools. Search engines have tools to detect machine-generated text.
- Add a short summary (two or three lines) at the top of the page. This tells people that they've arrived at the right page.

If it's relevant for your organization, add your street address, city, state, and telephone number on your index page and your product pages. When people look for local services, search engines will give priority to local websites.

Tip: Don't open the first paragraph with a sentence that starts with a clause, such as "If you are looking for something nice to put in your pond..." People scan the first few words of the first paragraph. If it's not relevant, they go back to the search engine. Open the first sentence with your keywords. For example, "Koromo koi are ideal for your backyard pond."

Links within Your Site

Links on your pages let your visitors go from one page to another within your site. To get your visitors to click on the links, write text that offers useful information. Put your main keywords in the anchor section of the link. Here's an example of a link:

Read [how to cure fungus in koi](koi-fungus.html).

The text "how to cure fungus in koi" is in the anchor section.

Put the links within paragraphs as part of sentences.

Don't use generic or broad links, such as "Products". Use the names of products, such as koromo koi, asagi koi, and so on.

Don't put a list of links at the bottom of the page. Search engines have learned that people don't click on those long lists of links, so these don't matter.

Tags in the Images

To provide accessibility to the Web for visually impaired users, the ALT attribute can be placed in an image link. This allows descriptive text to be added to an image.

Don't put keywords into the ALT attribute in order to influence search engines. Do this only to help visually impaired users. If you add too much text to the image tag, this may be seen as an attempt to influence the search engine. Here are some points to keep in mind:

- Add your USP to the ALT tag in the image link.
- Don't put too much text into the ALT tag. The amount of text should be proportionate to the size of the image. If the image is a small button, don't add a long paragraph of text.

Here's an example of an image link with an ALT tag:

```

```

Links to Your Site, Link Building, and PageRank

In the beginning, Google counted the number of inbound links to your webpage to determine your page's rank: the more links, the higher you ranked. This set off a race to collect links. Webmasters used all sorts of methods to get thousands, even tens of thousands, of links. People asked for links, swapped links, and bought links. Fraudulent SEO services sold links.

When Google realized people were collecting links, they changed the rules. Low quality links don't matter anymore. Google uses their team of Quality Raters, holistic matching, and social signals to determine rank. Write useful content and make sure it is indexable.

However, many scams offer link building. You've seen the offer "Have your website submitted to 600 search engines for only \$20!" These are scams.

You don't need link building. When you create authoritative, informational, or useful pages, people will link to your page. If someone has to buy links, that means the page isn't good.

Sitemaps

Sitemaps list the pages at a website. There are two types of sitemaps: HTML and XML.

- HTML sitemaps are for people. They can get an overview of the site and find the pages they need, just like maps help you find your way around town. HTML sitemaps once were important for SEO, but they have been replaced by XML sitemaps. In terms of SEO, don't worry too much about the HTML sitemap. Just make it useful for visitors. Create a plain-text sitemap that lists the significant pages at your site. You don't need to list every page, just the main pages. Place a plain-text link to the sitemap on the index page.
- XML sitemaps are also a list of files in XML format. XML sitemaps include sitemaps, global sitemaps, image sitemaps, and video sitemaps.

XML sitemaps were developed to solve several problems. When websites began using roll-down menus, images for links, and Java, Ajax, or Flash for navigation, search engines often couldn't follow the links, so those websites weren't indexed. HTML sitemaps were fine for small sites with a few dozen pages, but it wasn't feasible to make HTML sitemaps for sites with 500,000 pages. XML solved these problems. Webmasters can create an XML file that contains a list of all links and feed that directly to the search engine's index.

The major search engines agreed on a standard format for XML sitemaps. You can use the same XML sitemap for all major search engines, including Ask.com and Moreover.com.

A number of tools can be used to create XML sitemaps. If you have fewer than 500 pages, use the free tool at XML-Sitemaps.com. For larger sitemaps, try the one by Johannes Mueller (<http://gsitecrawler.com/>). You can find a list of XML tools at Google Webmaster Tools.

Once you've created the XML sitemap, submit it to the search engines with Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Tools.

XML sitemaps can hold up to 50,000 URLs in one file (and not more than 10MB in size). For very large sites, you can create an XML sitemap index file that points to subpages. The limit is 2.5 billion URLs. I've created sitemaps with 50 million URLs. To learn how to build sitemap index files, visit Webmaster Tools and search for "Sitemap Index File."

Which Language Do You Use?

Results are also sorted by language. Search engines can identify 43 languages such as German, Chinese, Arabic, and so on.

Google shows search results in the language used to perform the search. Therefore, someone searching in China will see results in Chinese, not Japanese, Italian, and so on. The search engine knows this because the user is in Nanchong, China (location), has their browser set to Chinese (browser settings), and is using Chinese search terms (language).

The exception is English. The European Union uses English as the common language. Nearly all colleges and universities in Asia and the Arabic world use English to teach courses in technical and scientific subjects as well as economics and business. Therefore, Google always shows pages in English for the results of a search in another language. Someone in Holland or Vietnam will see results in English, along with their results in Dutch or Vietnamese.

Write a page in your language and add a copy of the page in English for the rest of the world. If you are in Denmark, write your pages in both Danish and English.

What about Chinese and Russian?

If China is important to you, you must make sure your site shows up in Baidu, the search engine of China. Google has only 1% market share in China. As for Russia, you must appear in Yandex, the search engine of Russia. Both of these can index their language better than Google. They also have features that don't exist in Google. Work with people who understand Yandex and Baidu. A translation won't be enough.

Additional Items for Technical SEO

Here's a list of additional items for technical SEO:

- Make it obvious you are the rightful owner of the concept
- Add links to relevant authoritative sites
- If relevant, use microformats
- If you have images, use keywords in the image file name and add captions under the images
- If you have video, follow the SEO guidelines for video
- If you have apps, use ASO (App Store Optimization). See my *ASO Book* (at Amazon).
- If social media is relevant to you, carry out SEO for social media to ensure your profile will show up in Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, WeChat, GleeBee (okay, I made that up), and every other relevant social site
- If you've written books, make sure both your author name and your books show up in Amazon and Kindle
- If you're selling products that are available on Amazon, make sure your products show up by name and concept in Amazon
- Review your web analytics. Look at the section for organic, paid, social, and referrer traffic. See where your visitors are coming from and optimize for those sites.

There are several more items, plus each of these items has lots of details, but you can see that technical SEO is a to-do list. The challenge is in the scope of the project: what if you have 50,000 pages? Technical SEO becomes a matter of managing a bit of work.

Summary for Technical SEO

I covered technical SEO (meta tags, keywords, links, sitemaps) so you can understand it. In short,

search engines used keywords to index webpages. People used keywords to search for pages in search engines. So you found those keywords, put them in your pages, and people could find your pages. That's the way it worked for the last fifteen years. That was keyword-centric SEO.

But search engines are changing. Why? Because it's easy for hackers, spammers, and scammers to spoof the search engines. They flood the web with millions of pages with keywords, pages, and links.

Many of you are thinking, wait, here's a whole chapter all about keywords, and now it says things are changing? That's right. I had to explain traditional SEO as keyword-centric SEO so you could understand it. Easily 90% of people in SEO and practically all of the SEO tools are based on keywords as the central idea, actually, as the only idea in SEO. But the search engines are moving away from that.

So what are search engines moving towards? They are looking at the quality of the information. Your page should answer the user's intent for the query. What is the user thinking? What does she want to find? What would count as a good answer? Do people trust your webpage? Was it written by experts? Is it authoritative? The next section shows how search engines determine this.

Quality SEO: Improve the Quality of the Content

The original idea of search engines was to use algorithms to index and rank pages based on links, keywords, and meta-tags. The goal was objective ranking of pages. But any system can be manipulated by outsiders. Within a few years, black hat SEOers learned how to manipulate Google. The search results were corrupted with spam, junk, fake sites, and get-rich-quick schemes.

So Google had to come up with another way to rank pages.

Google's New Approach: Quality Webpages

How did Google solve this problem? They gave preference to quality, which got rid of junk.

Google looked for pages with useful information of high quality by real experts at actual organizations and gave priority to those pages. Low-quality junk pages were either deleted from the index or pushed so far down that they effectively disappeared.

How did Google identify quality? They began to use people to evaluate pages. The evaluations are passed to computers that use machine learning and neural networks to create patterns that identify additional similar pages. The high-quality pages move to the top. Low quality sites are blocked.

There isn't a generally-used name for this approach. Many people in SEO still don't realize how this works and they continue to use technical SEO which is keyword-centric.

I call this approach *Quality SEO*. In this chapter, I'll describe this and give you ideas on what you can do to improve your pages.

Google Quality Raters: 10,000 People

Since its founding, Google has insisted that search rankings are the result of a software algorithm. (An algorithm is a set of rules for a process. For example, a software program or a cake recipe is an algorithm.) By relying on software-based rules, Google makes it appear that search results are neutral and objective.

But Google has more than an algorithm. Google uses 10,000 college students and home workers to evaluate websites. The Google Quality Raters are hired by ZeroChaos (formerly WorkforceLogic) and other companies which work on contract for Google. The Quality Raters work from home, all over the world, in 43 languages. These people are given lists of terms to search and websites to visit. They check the links that show up in search results. Are these official, informational, or transactional (shopping) sites? Is the page vital, useful, relevant, slightly relevant, spam, or porn?



Figure 8: The 10,000 Quality Raters work for ZeroChaos and several other companies which work for Google. They evaluate hundreds of millions of webpages.

They judge whether a shopping site is a real merchant or a scam. There's a list of features that a merchant site should have in order to get a high score. They lower the score for sites that are scams or affiliates. They look for whether a site lets visitors view their shopping cart contents, provides full contact information (including a physical address), and so on. If your shopping website is an honest business, this is a good thing. Google gets rid of your scam competitors.

This isn't guesswork. I have copies of the Google Quality Rater manuals for nearly every year from 2007 to now. I've met with Quality Raters, who let me log into Google Quality Rater tools, where I spent several hours to review and rate webpages. Google updates and revises these manuals yearly and by comparing these, I can see how they change and improve the process.

At first, Google obligated its thousands of engineers and staffers to review pages as part of their work. Every few days, an employee would be given a few pages to review. But that interrupted their work and they soon realized there was a better way to do this, so they outsourced the review work to ten thousand people to look at pages and rank the quality of the content and sites. Over the years, they've optimized the process so they only need about 8,000 people to review pages.

Want to be a Quality Rater? Earn US\$14.50 per hour and work from home in your pajamas, pretty much anywhere in the world. Search for "google quality rater" and send in your resume.

What about the other search engines? Bing also uses humans to evaluate websites, just like Google. The Bing system is called the *Human Relevance System* (HRS), which is described in their *HRS Judging Guidelines* manual. I met with senior persons at Yandex and Baidu, who told us they also use human reviewers. At Yandex, they are called Assessors. The Yahoo! search directory was managed by people for its first five years. In 2005, senior Yahoo! computer scientists presented research to show that human evaluation was feasible. However, Yahoo!'s search engine is now powered by Bing, so Yahoo! results are also based on human review.

At Google, Bing, Yahoo!, Yandex, and Baidu, people review business sites to see if it is a legitimate business. They also review the ads. Text ads are generally reviewed by software (looking for keywords) and image ads (banner ads) are reviewed by people to ensure it is not porn. Google blocked over 350 million ads in 2013.

Google also reviews Google+ business pages and search results in Google Maps.

In summary, all of the large search engines use humans to evaluate pages. The results are processed by machine learning tools to create patterns so software can identify additional pages. At Google, the result is shown to Quality Raters in a tool called Side-by-Side (SxS), which shows two sets of search engine results, side-by-side, and the reviewers decide which set is better.

The User's Intent

The key issue in the Google Quality Rater manual is *the user's intent*. This phrase appears over and over, 168 times in 137 pages. Google reminds the Quality Raters to look at the search query and *try to understand the user's intent*. What does the visitor mean by her search? Which result would be the best answer to her query?

The Quality Raters look at pages and rank them into several categories:

- **Vital:** The top rating of Vital (V) goes to the official page that matches the user's intent. The page is both exactly what the user seeks, and the page is the official site for the entity, so the page will be #1. For example, if a user is searching for Cisco (a computer company), she clearly wants to go to the company's website, so the website Cisco.com will be rated as Vital and will be moved to the #1 position.

- **Useful:** If a page is high quality and authoritative, it gets the Useful (U) rating. Many pages can get this rating, including news stories about Cisco, Wikipedia articles, stock price information, and so on.
- **Relevant:** If a page is less comprehensive and less authoritative (written by non-experts), but it is helpful to many users and it's good-to-average in quality, it gets the Relevant (R) rating. Many pages fall in this category.
- **Slightly Relevant:** Many pages may be useful for some users, so they get the Slightly Relevant (SR) score.

The Quality Raters also mark pages if they are **Off Topic** (OT) (it didn't match the user's intent and shouldn't appear in the search results), **Porn** (P) (if the user does not expect erotica in the result), or **Didn't Load** (D), which means the page was broken and didn't open or requires a registration and so on. Pages with any of these ratings will be blocked from the search results.

These categories are not exact; there is a sliding scale, so a webpage can be high, medium, or low within some of these categories.

If a page asks for payment or personal information, the raters should be extra-critical to make sure the site is a reputable merchant. They review the catalog, shopping cart, and transaction engine for criteria such as :

- Return policy with a physical address
- Shipping charges calculator that works
- Tracking of FedEx or UPS orders
- Transaction processing by Yahoo Merchant, Paypal, and similar

A longer list is available below.

The Quality Ranking for a Webpage

The manual also describes a series of criteria for judging the quality of a page and site:

- **Reputation:** What do other people say about the site? The raters should review forums and comments. If there are many negative reviews, a site gets a lower ranking. The manual gives examples on how to do this. To see what people say about *The Guardian* (a British newspaper), search for < "TheGuardian.com" -site:TheGuardian.com reviews > or < "TheGuardian.com" -site:TheGuardian.com comments > (without the angle brackets).
- **Highest Quality:** The rating of *highest quality* goes to websites and webpages with a clear purpose, clear navigation, expertise, professional content, awards, and contact information.
- **High Quality:** A rating of *high quality* goes to sites with expertise and the cited references.
- **Medium Quality:** The site gets a *medium quality* rating if it could be better. It should have good contact information.
- **Low Quality:** A site gets a *low quality* rating if it feels unsatisfactory, there is a lack of expertise, it is not credible or untrustworthy, it has poor layout and broken links or features, or it has a negative reputation (negative comments either on the site or in other sites.)
- **Lowest Quality:** This goes to sites with poor layout, absolutely no information on who created or maintains the site, bad grammar, or an extremely negative reputation.

The reviewers look at the layout. It should be excellent or good. They look at grammar and spelling. They look at the site's copyright year (e.g., andreas.com © 2015) to see if it is actively maintained. If the site covers items that require fresh or recent information, then they look for recently-updated pages.

And of course, there is a long list of what qualifies as webspam. If the quality raters get a whiff of fraud on a page, the page gets marked as spam and it disappears from the search results. These items include: keyword stuffing (obvious intent to add keywords), hidden text, cloaking, sneaky redirects, too many ads, no main content, parked domains, deceptive content, fake blogs, copied content, auto-generated content, doorways, thin affiliates, and more.

Most of those are obvious spammer tricks. However, two methods are widely used by many people without realizing the danger:

- **Auto-generated Content:** Lots of software allows you to create personal newspapers. These tools collect content from other sites and present them as new pages. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of these content generation tools, along with millions of these auto-generated pages. This is called *content curation*, where curation implies an editor or reviewer who collected the content. In reality, someone adds a series of keywords to a tool and it generates the pages. Google blocks these sites because it's just copied content.
- **Parked domains:** Many people buy dozens of domain names and point them to another site. That worked in 2002 but no more. Google Quality Raters mark parked domains as junk.

This is not the complete list: if you invent a new scam, Google will add it to the list.

Let's EAT: Expertise, Authority, Trust

Ready for another Google acronym? Google asks its quality raters to look for **EAT**. This stands for expertise, authority, and trust:

- **Expertise:** The page was written by people who have expertise (experience) in the topic. If the page is about diabetes, then it should be written by leading medical doctors or professors. If the page is about skateboards, then it should be by champion skateboarders.
- **Authority:** The page has authority because other reputable, authoritative websites link to it. If it has links from The New York Time, Stanford, or the CDC, it is respected by experts. Links from non-valuable sites are irrelevant. (This means buying links or link building has no impact). Authoritative websites will link to you on their own: you can't pay them or ask them for a link.
- **Trust:** Does the page appear trustworthy? Is it by a real company with real people?

Why such a focus on quality? Users expect good results for a search. If a search engine show spam, users get frustrated and go elsewhere. So search engines give priority to quality pages.

YMYL: Your Money or Your Life

Yes, another Google acronym. If a webpage has to do with issues in health, medicine, finance, law, or major purchases, Google calls these *Your Money or Your Life* (**YMYL**) issues and tells their reviewers to be *extra-critical* (they also use this phrase in their manual).

Pages are considered YMYL if they cover the following:

- Shopping, such as payments, etc.
- Financial, such as investments, taxes, retirement, home purchase, insurance, etc.
- Medical and health, incl. any private medical information
- Legal issues, incl. wills, divorce, etc.
- Other, incl. child adoption, car safety, etc.

Google expects *especially high standards* for YMYL pages. I've italicized *especially high standards* because those are the exact words that Google uses. Quality Raters look at the quality of the webpage. Pages with the most EAT will move to the top.

Criteria for the Highest Quality (HQ) Pages

A webpage can be ranked in several levels, but only one matters: **Highest Quality (HQ)**. There are lower levels, but they don't matter because they get very little traffic.

Google reviewers give the Highest Quality (HQ) rating to websites with the following:

- **Credentials:** Content is written by experts with professional degrees, licenses, or credentials (doctors, nurses, professors, etc.) from leading universities. State their credentials on the page.
- **Authority:** The site is approved by the leading recognized association or organization
- **Expertise:** Statements are justified by citing appropriate texts and experts
- **Awards:** The site has industry-recognized awards from valid organizations
- **Reputation:** What do other people say about the site? Raters review forums and comments. If many negative reviews, a site gets a lower ranking. To see what people say about Godiva, search for: <"Godiva.com" -site:Godiva.com reviews > or <"Godiva.com" -site:Godiva.com comments >. Google also suggests for reviewers to use the Better Business Bureau (at BBB.org) to check a company, such as <"godiva.com" site:bbb.org>. Google also suggests reviewers can use Wikipedia to check on people and organizations, such as <godiva site:wikipedia.org>.
- **Freshness:** If relevant, show freshness. Add the day, month, and year for conferences, events, news items, etc.
- **Purpose:** The purpose is clear. The site and pages have a clear focus and purpose.
- **Further Information:** Links point to additional external pages of high quality
- **Navigation:** Navigation is clear and easy to use
- **Design:** Good overall design, which includes layout, white space, and graphics
- **Grammar and Spelling:** Appropriate grammar, spelling, and tone
- **Contact Information:** Clearly stated name, email, telephone, fax, and postal mailing address
- **Evidence of Maintenance:** Show active maintenance (such as the creation data, copyright year). It should be clear who is responsible for maintenance.

If your site has any form of registration, transaction, or payment, it should meet as many of the following criteria as appropriate. These should be of high quality and they should work:

- The "view your shopping cart" link stays on the same site
- Shopping cart updates when you add items
- Return policy with a physical address
- Shipping charge calculator that works
- Wish list, gift registry, ability to postpone purchase
- Track FedEx orders
- User forum that works
- Ability to register or log in
- Transaction processing by Yahoo! Merchant, Amazon, Volusion, or Paypal are acceptable

As for mobile pages, the current Quality Rater manual points out that many mobile pages often have less content and limited functionality. In general, mobile pages are often rated as *not helpful*. If mobile is important to you, make sure your mobile pages are high quality.

Finally, Google also wants to offer a good mix of results. They don't want to show just a list of ten links. They want to show links, news, photos, and so on. In Google's *Side-by-Side* (SXS) quality testing tool (another Google quality rater tool), the quality raters select the search results page with

the best mix of formats, which include text, blogs, videos, photos, news, and so on. If your page isn't showing up on the search results, you can review that results pages and see if there are opportunities. If the results page shows links and news but there are no videos, you should create a video and perhaps Google will add that.

You may have noticed that keywords and links are not in these lists. Quality raters do not look at the standard elements of traditional SEO.

Let's repeat that. The human reviewers do not look at the standard elements of traditional SEO. Meta-tags, keywords, links, and so on don't matter for quality review. But it matters for technical evaluation. What's the difference?

Let's Now Compare Technical SEO and Quality SEO

Okay, now that we see how search engines use meta-tags and human reviewers to index pages, let's compare the results of technical SEO and quality SEO.

The search engines discovered in the early 2000s that there were two kinds of searches:

- **Informational Searches:** People are looking for information, such as "what is...", "how to...", "how do I...", and so on. Informational searches are for terms that nobody owns, such as *pregnancy*, *credit cards*, *publishing*, and so on. About 80% of searches are informational searches.
- **Navigational Searches:** About 20% of searches are looking for a website, person, company, product, thing, or place. These items are owned by a person, organization, or government. People are looking for Godiva chocolate, Jerry Seinfeld's page, the Tesla car, or Yosemite.

Google shows two kinds of results to these searches:

- **Informational Results:** Google shows the best page for that topic. The page has EAT: Expertise, Authority, and Trust. This page is neutral (it doesn't promote a company or product) and non-sales (it doesn't sell products).
- **Navigational Results:** Google finds the official page for the item and shows it at the top of the search results with the link to that item, such as *godiva.com*, *JerrySeinfeld.com*, or *Tesla.com*.

It's important to understand the difference so you know what to do:

- If you have an informational page about a topic, Google will use Quality Raters to review your page. You get to the top if your page has EAT.
- If your page is the official page about the topic (you own the topic), then you use technical SEO to ensure the search engines can find, index, and show your page. Your page will automatically be #1 at the top of the search results.

How to Use Technical SEO to Win in Navigational Searches

Technical SEO works for concepts and terms that your organization owns: the name of your company, your name, your trademarked products or services, books, videos, and so on. It also works for organizations that are the owners of parks, museums, cities, etc. The web page is the authoritative page for the concept.

If technical SEO is done correctly, a *navigational search* will bring up this result in the top position on the first page.

Why does this work so well? Because if you're the owner of the concept, then clearly, your webpage should be the top result for a search. Competitors will never beat your page.

Of course, an organization may not bother to do technical SEO so you can show up higher than the organization, but eventually, either the search engines will figure this out or the organization will improve its SEO, and you'll be knocked off position #1. So if you're #1 for something that you don't own, don't count on it. The owner only has to wake up and your page will drop.

This is bad news if you're selling something for which you don't have the rights. If your shoe store is selling the *Nike Airflex TornadoMax* shoe, you'll never be #1 for it. Nike will be #1 for that term because they own it. You might get position #5 if your company is Footlocker. (The solution is to pay for ads in Google. It's much better to sell something that you own than to sell another company's products.

Technical SEO is fairly straightforward task of meta-tags, keywords, formatting, and other items. As I wrote above, it can be a checklist.

How to Use Quality SEO to Win in Informational Searches

As you saw, *quality SEO* doesn't use meta-tags, keywords, or links. You can't use technical SEO to get to the top of an informational search.

The 2015 Google manual states (section 9.2, p. 58): The top three page quality considerations are 1) *quality of the content*; 2) *level of EAT* (Expertise, Authority, Trust) (especially for YMYL pages); and 3) *reputation of the site*. Technical SEO issues aren't in the list. *It's the quality of the content, not the quality of the SEO, that counts.*

As part of SEO work for my clients, I review informational search results pages. I've often seen items show up on page one where the page had no meta-tags or keywords.

You win for informational searches if your page has EAT. You write a webpage that offers information about a topic. This should be as good as a Wikipedia page or a university graduate student's paper on the topic. It has to be written by persons who have experience in the field and who are seen as authoritative by other significant organizations. The webpage (and website) also has to be trustworthy. The quality of the page also has to attract links from universities, government sites, and major newspapers and magazines. The previous sections on quality SEO listed many more criteria for the quality reviewers.

This work is not easy (and it's not cheap) and that's the point. When people search for information, they want the best results. The search engines want to provide those results. The best pages will be at the top.

There is also the competition. For any topic, there are tens of millions of pages. For *pregnancy*, there are 261 million pages. To show up on page one for pregnancy, your page has to be one of the ten best out of 261 million pages (that's 0.000,000,01% of those pages).

Which brings up another problem: the humans at search engines have been reviewing pages since 2005. This means every meaningful or worthwhile topic already has ten pages that are considered the best pages for that topic. For you to get onto page one, your page has to displace a currently-existing top page.

That's the challenge. You're not just competing against search engines. You're competing against millions of other very good pages.

Often, a page may rank high but doesn't meet Google's quality criteria. Just because your page has been at the top for ten years, it may not be there tomorrow. When Google's reviewers get around to reviewing your page, they may find better pages, or someone writes a new better page, your page will drop.

In my experience, it can make one or two months of research and writing to create such a page. But there's no guarantee that the search engines will move it to page one.

Tips on Writing Good Content

Google offers their cryptic answer, “*write good content*”. This means build pages that are useful to your visitors. Nearly every company writes its websites from its own point of view. The company tells the world what the company thinks about itself. But that’s wrong. The audience sees the site from the audience’s point of view, not the company’s. Just like Google Quality Raters, ask yourself about *the user’s intent*, what the person intended by that search. What are they looking for? Look at examples of search queries from your audience in your website’s search box, your web analytics tool, Web 2.0 question/answer sites, or Twitter. Understand what they are trying to learn. Offer the answer that would count as the best answer for that query. Build pages that answer that query. Your webpages should be *customer-centric*. This matches how Google Quality Raters look at pages.

I know that this will be difficult for many sites. If you’re the webmaster for a small health clinic in Mexico City, it’s not feasible to write such articles. Many companies and organizations don’t have the resources, experts, or money to meet these high standards. Write the best you can and add citations for factual statements. Show where you got the information. Add a page with complete contact information, including names and the street address. Use good grammar and spelling.

There’s another approach. Again, look at the top ten results. The search engines found that people want to see a variety of results, not just the same type of result. People want to see webpages (text), news, products, Wikipedia articles, photos, videos, and social media. Offer a different type of format and the Quality Raters may add that to the results page. If the top ten pages are text articles about products, you could create a video or photo essay for your product.

Can Google Really Review Millions of Daily Searches?

There are billions of webpages and billions of searches. Can Google really review that?

You can easily calculate if this can be done. First, start by asking how many pages can be evaluated by Quality Raters.

Google’s rating tool monitors the workers. If they move too slow, they are reminded to work faster. Each reviewer has two minutes to review and rate a page. That’s 30 pages per hour. They’re allowed to work only 20 hours per week, so they review around 600 pages per week. Let’s say they work 50 weeks per year, so each person reviews 30,000 pages per year. Multiply by 8,000 Quality Raters to get 240 million pages per year. This has been going on since 2007 (seven years), so Google has reviewed some 1.7 billion pages. Let’s assume 30% inefficiency, so perhaps a billion pages have been reviewed. Each page is reviewed by three people, so at least 330 million pages have been manually reviewed.

Google looks at that body of data to make inferences about what indicates the quality of a page. They are using machine learning to understand pages. The result is a profile for types of quality. If quality raters can identify high-quality pages, then software can find additional high-quality pages.

This also regrettably means that you may have a good page, but if it matches the profile of poor pages, your page will be ranked as a poor page.

The Google Knowledge Graph

So what’s the implication of all of this? Where is Google going? This project and its body of data is the basis of the *Knowledge Graph* and the latest versions of the Google algorithm.

The Google Quality Raters look at what people ask and they find the best replies to those queries. But instead of posting a list of webpages with the answers, Google now often just gives you the answer. This becomes important as people are moving from desktop to mobile. When you search with your phone, you don’t really want a list of websites that you’ll have to visit, one by one, and read until you discover the answer. You just want the answer.

For example, Google's reviewers see that the queries "what is the height of the Eiffel Tower?" "how tall is the Eiffel Tower?" "how high is the Eiffel Tower" are all the same question. So Google gives you the answer, along with a short summary, in a box on the right side.

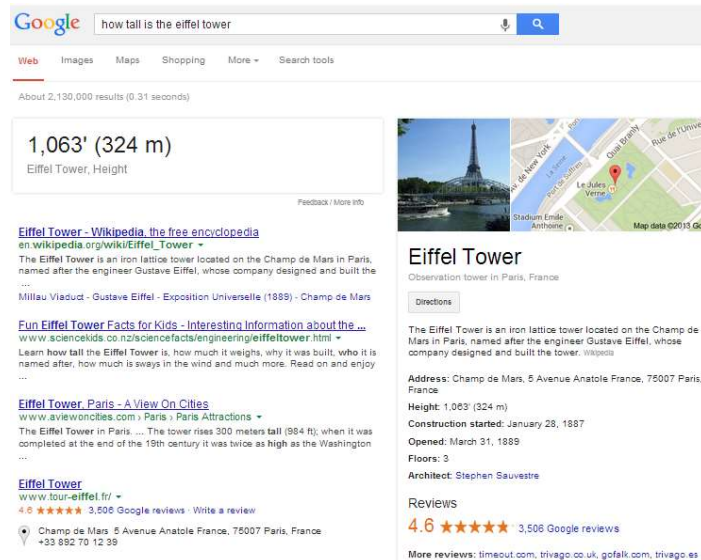


Figure 9: When you search on a desktop computer, Google gives you the answer at the top, along with a short summary in a box on the right side, and the usual list of links on the left side.

That's what Google shows you on a desktop computer. What does it show you on a mobile phone?

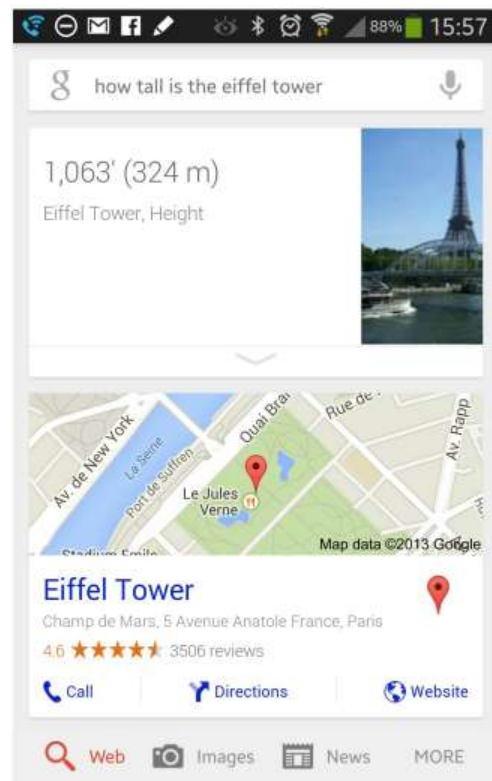


Figure 10: Try this on your mobile phone. Click the Google search box and speak "How tall is the Eiffel Tower?" Google's voice tells you the "The Eiffel Tower is 1,063 feet tall" and shows you this.

See? Links to websites are gone. Google shows an answer which they themselves wrote. Google is evolving from a search engine (an index of web pages) into an *answer machine*.

This also works with visual search. Add the Google Goggles app to your phone and point your phone at that tall thingy and Google will tell you it is the Eiffel Tower. Google visual search can recognize just about any significant building or monument.

Your phone has geo-location (it looks at signals from GPS, wifi, and cell phone towers), so it knows you're standing in the Champs de Mars in Paris and you say "Okay, Google, how tall is that thing over there?" Your phone will talk to you with the answer.

If your phone has a recent version of Android, it includes Google Now. These are short cards with information, such as weather and commute traffic. It also includes suggestions based on your interests, behavior, and locations. Google Maps has information about all locations, so Google can watch where your phone is and give you additional recommendations. If it sees that you like to go to Sichuan restaurants, it'll suggest additional restaurants based on behavior of people similar to you who also like Sichuan restaurants. As data builds up, Google gets better at giving you suggestions.

Here's an example of Google Now suggestions for me:

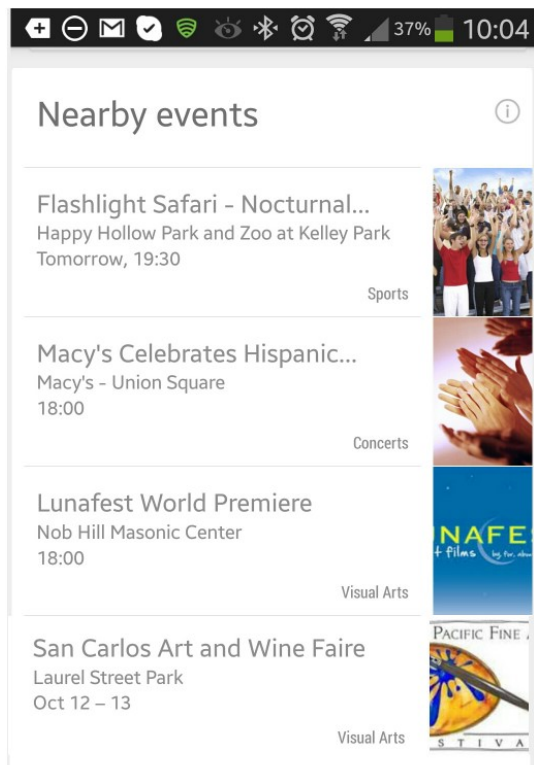


Figure 11: Here is a *Google Now* card from my phone. It looked at my interests, searches, past locations, behavior, and perhaps my friends to see I might be interested in these events. Again, Google isn't showing a list of links. Google created the cards, texts, and photos. Click one of those to see additional information (and you'll get a card, similar to the one for the Eiffel Tower).

Now add Google Glass and Google+ to this. Google is moving to where you will use Google through your mobile device, not your desktop computer or laptop.

Google will give people a spoken answer to a spoken query.

SEO for Your Images

So how can you use SEO if images don't have keywords? It turns out search engines are pretty good at image recognition.

Add the Google Goggles app to your smart phone and take a snapshot of things, like book covers, wine bottles, and stuff in your refrigerator. It can identify them. On your desktop computer, search for art work, such as paintings by your favorite artist Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-1880). Pick one his paintings at random and point your phone at it. Google Goggles will tell you the artist's name and the title of the painting. See? It knows obscure painters. Point Goggles at landmarks, such as bridges, cathedrals, and buildings (you can also use photos from your travels). It can also identify most cars.



Figure 12: Try *Google Image Search*. Drag an image into the box and, generally, Google will be able to identify it. Make sure your logo and products can be identified by Google. It can also recognize a photograph of you.

You can also search images on your desktop computer at images.google.com. Take a photo of something and see if Google can identify it.

What about faces? Use Baidu on your phone and scan your friend's face to find other people who look like her. Google only shows you other photos with similar shapes and colors.

How do you SEO your images? Post clear large photo of your logo, products, and packaging to your webpages or blog. Add your keywords to the page. Use your keyword in the file name. If it has a location, include GPS tagging.

Summary for Your Quality-Based SEO Strategy

Google, Yandex, Baidu, and Bing have moved beyond technical SEO (meta tags, keywords, links). They added intent and quality. They ask *does the page answer the user's intent for the search query?*

To decide which pages should be at the top for the query, the search engines use human reviewers to evaluate the quality of the content, the expertise of the authors, and the reputation of the site. Google makes profiles of the best pages and looks for other pages that match those profiles.

To get your page to show up in the large search engines, make sure your page answers the user's query by offering a page that is authoritative and has high quality information. If it is a business site (any form of transaction), make sure your site meets the criteria for commercial sites. You must ensure Quality Raters will see your site as a reputable authority for your market, topic, or interest.

Conclusion to SEO eBook

Use SEO to Help the Search Engines

The search engines want to deliver the best search results, so you should help the search engines.

- Use technical SEO. Make sure search engines can index your page so your page shows up as the number one page for topics that you own.
- Use quality SEO. See what people want and offer answers. Make sure your webpage has EAT (Expertise, Authority, Trust).

However, that's not all. SEO and search is only part of reaching your audience.

The Big Picture: Go Beyond SEO

At Google conferences, Google VPs will say there are three actors in the world of search: the users, Google, and websites. Google pays attention only to users. If users are happy, they return to Google. That's what matters at Google. To put it clearly, Google doesn't care about your website.

Your goal should not be to show in a search engine. If you focus on being in search engines, you're putting your organization's existence in the hands of search engine companies. They simply don't care if your organization exists or not. When Google changes its rules, they won't announce it and they won't answer the phone, whether your website is for your cat or a \$50 billion global corporation. Your traffic can fall 60% in one day, and for many companies, that can put them out of business.

Use search engines to bring visitors to your site, but don't rely on them. Develop as many paths as possible for your audience to come to you: websites, search engines, apps, digital advertising, social media, video, images, books, and so on. You can use the methods of SEO on all of these: SEO for social media, SEO for Amazon, SEO for apps, and so on.

Good luck,

Andreas
andreas.com
Palo Alto, California

Resources

About this eBook

SEO eBook is an ebook on SEO that I update once or twice a year. Get the latest version at andreas.com/book-search-engine-marketing.html. Version 2.3, February 10, 2016.

Additional Books on SEO

In researching my books, I've read practically every book on SEO. The best books:

- *Search Engine Marketing, Inc.*, by Mike Moran and Bill Hunt (IBM Press, 2014, 3rd edition. 673 pages, \$55, ISBN 978-0133039177). Mike Moran (mikemoran.com) is a former IBM Distinguished Engineer, a digital marketing consultant, a worldwide professional speaker and trainer, and a senior strategist at Converseon. Bill Hunt is president of Back Azimuth Consulting (back-azimuth.com) and an internationally recognized search marketing expert who has spoken at conferences in over 30 countries. Their book, known as the "*Bible of Search Marketing*," was the first to combine the business and marketing side of search with a technical approach that can scale to even the largest of websites.
- *RussianSearchTips.com* is a blog by Anna Oshkalo. She is Russian who lives in Stockholm and writes an excellent analysis of what Yandex is up to and how it works. Yandex, which started years before Google, faced the challenge of indexing Russian, which has a difficult grammar. For years, Google was poor at indexing Russian (the same happened in China). Yandex has been leading the way in the use of neural networks to develop search engines. They are remarkably open at their website on how their search engine works. Anna's blog postings also help. By understanding these, you get a better idea of what Google is doing.
- *2012 Search Marketing – SEO Edition*, by Kaci Bower, et al (MarketingSherpa, 198 pages, \$447). This report is a survey of several thousand people who work in SEO. They rank their tactics and methods. This is broken out by industry, business type (B2B or B2C), company size, and so on. It's useful as a benchmark to see what your competitors are doing.

Additional eBooks

- For more about SEO, go to andreas.com/search-engine-marketing/
- To learn how to calculate KPIs, CPL, and CPA, get the free KPI eBook. Go to andreas.com/info-kpi.html
- To learn about content marketing, go to andreas.com/content-marketing
- To get the free Twitter ebook, go to andreas.com/twitterbook
- For additional new books, join Andreas' mailing list at andreas.com/maillinglist.html

Glossary

Term	Definition
Click-Through Rate (CTR)	If an ad is displayed 100 times and 20 people click on it, that's a 20% CTR.
Impressions	An impression is when someone has the opportunity to see your ad. It doesn't mean they actually saw your ad. When you browse through a magazine, each ad gets an impression. Impressions don't indicate much.
Keywords	The search term that someone enters in a search engine to search for something. It's the users, not the company, who choose keywords.
Landing Page (LP)	The visitor clicks a link and is brought to a landing page. The landing page is relevant to the visitor's search.
Natural Search	The unpaid results on the left side in search engines. On the right side are the PPC ads (paid placement). Unpaid listings are called organic results, natural results, or algorithmic results.
Organic Search	See <i>Natural Search</i> .
Pay-per-Click (PPC)	This is an online advertising model in which you pay for each click on your ad.
PPC	See <i>Pay per Click</i> .
Search Engine Optimization	Improving a webpage so your target audience can easily find it in search engines.
SEO	See <i>Search Engine Optimization</i>
Spamming a Search Engine	Trying to mislead a search engine to rank your website higher. Don't do this. You'll rank higher for a few days and then you'll be banned.
URL	Universal Resource Locator. A website's address (for example, andreas.com).
Web Analytics	Tools that analyze and compare web visitor to allow business decisions. Web analytics tools report the number of conversions, the visitors' keywords, the sites that sent converting traffic, and so on.

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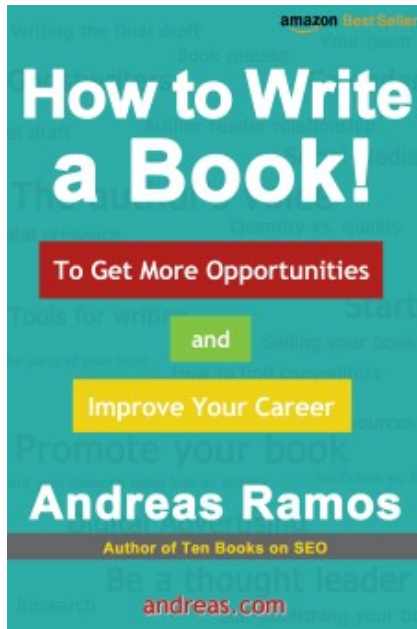
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