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SAMPLE:
SEO Best Practice Guide

Comprehensive advice for search marketers

SEO Best Practice Guide

Contents

1.   Is this guide for you?

1.1.   Who is this Econsultancy Best Practice Guide aimed at?

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

Our guides explain best practice for successfully implementing digital marketing on a large-scale in medium and large organizations, but best practice guidelines also apply for smaller organizations.

The guides are being developed to be the definitive source for best practice on a range of online marketing topics.

Please send feedback and suggestions to **Chris Lake**, editor (chris@econsultancy.com).

In particular, the reports will help (and are aimed at):

- **Specialists in digital marketing teams** who are actively involved in improving results from online marketing activities.
- **Managers of digital marketing specialists** in a team who plan and control digital marketing.
- **Managers and team members responsible for traditional marketing activities** who want to understand the issues involved with successful planning, implementation and integration of digital marketing activities.
- **Specialists in specific digital marketing activities** such as search engine marketing who need to understand more about integration with other digital marketing activities.

Key features of our guides:

- **Comprehensive** – covers all aspects needed for success in one place but also referencing other in-depth sources in different portals, forums, blogs, whitepapers and books.
- **Accessible** – content will be chunked to help readers navigate to and assimilate relevant content.
- **In-depth** – Cover topics in sufficient depth to successfully implement suggestions.
- **Practical** – explains how to implement techniques and describe success factors that can be applied straightaway.
- **Improvement focused** – will explain how to revise existing approaches through evaluation of current approach, refining strategy and then implementing an improved approach.
- **Leading edge** – incorporating the latest best-practice advice and regularly updated to stay current with new additions clearly highlighted.

1.2. New features - update on latest developments in search

SEO is one of the most dynamic areas of marketing and indeed digital marketing as the three main search networks continuously refine their services as they vie to provide a better user experience.

For readers of previous editions of this guide, here is an update on the main innovations as we see them with links to the relevant sections.

1.2.1. Success factor 1. SEO planning and keyphrase strategy

We present some new measures that can be used for gap analysis in the section on **The Keyphrase Identifcation and Selection Process (3.3.9).**

Tools for keyphrase analysis and competitor performance have been updated with the latest raft of free research tools from Google in **Keyphrase Estimates (Table 5)** and new tools for assessing linking patterns, in **Example Keyphrase Performance Analysis (Table 6).**

The merits of keeping search in-house or outsourcing to different types of agencies is discussed through interviews with different clients and types of agencies in the section on **Selecting The Right Type of Agency (3.5.1).**

1.2.2. Success factor 2. Index coverage

The section on **Google Sitemaps (4.4)** has been updated and includes reference to Video Sitemaps. We have also updated content on **Vertical Search – Inclusion (4.13.2)** as well as digital asset optimisation, including tips for video optimisation.

The search syntax for determining **Supplemental Pages (4.6.2)** has also been updated.

A section on **Google Sitelinks (4.5.3)** has been added.

A major new section on **International and Multilingual SEO (3.6)** has been added, as well as an update to the section on **Geolocation (4.10.4).**

We have also collected together advice on avoiding negative ranking factors in a section on **SPAM Filters and Over-optimization Penalties (4.7).**

1.2.3. Success factor 3. On-page optimisation

Many site owners are naturally prejudiced against outbound links to third-party sites. We have added new best practice advice in section **Error! Reference source not found.** on why you hould consider this approach.

Google has amended the way it indexes Flash sites. This technique is referenced in the section on **Optimising Flash Sites (5.4.10).**

1.2.4. Success factor 4. Link-building

A new section covering types of **Linkbaiting (6.6.1)** has been included. We have also added checklists for those involved in link-building (see **Checklist For Quality Links, Section 12 / Appendix 4)**.

1.2.5. Success factor 5. A Structured Process for SEO

We have expanded on the concept of **PageRank Scultping (7.4.6)** that has become more widely used over the last year, covered in **the Creation of Themed Site Sub-sections for Targeted Keyphrases (7.10)**.

1.2.6. Success factor 6. Conversion efficiency

With the increased popularity of experimentation to improve website conversion testing techniques such as AB Testing and Multivariate testing have become more popular. We discuss the implications in **Guideline 11: 'TIMITI' (8.9.11)**.

2.   Introduction to search engine marketing

2.1.   Search engine marketing – opportunities and risks

Search engine marketing (SEM) is the single biggest opportunity in online marketing, which is unsurprising given the growing popularity of search engines for researching products, services and organizations. In this section we will set the scene...

Where are we at?

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

Comscore reported in February 2009 that there were 13.5B searches in the US alone (up from 6.5B searches in January 2008[1]). According to estimates this is only 10% of a world total of 135B searches per month[2].

So what's the big challenge?

Tapping into the searching behaviors of your audience and figuring out which keywords you need to focus on requires great tenacity. Not to mention securing top rankings for your chosen keywords. If you have tried SEO you'll know how tricky this can be.

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

And the risks...?

You are probably aware of the risks of SEM. Since most search engine traffic typically originates from one source (typically 'The big G', aka Google) there is a significant risk that algorithm changes can seriously dent your traffic.

We've all heard the horror stories about being top one day and nowhere the next, but how do you ensure this doesn't happen to you?

On top of all that you also need to manage the risks of pages not being included in the search engine, or of being barred completely for infringing its guidelines.

Where do I start?

You've already started. We created this guide to provide a super-comprehensive, hype-free compilation of best practice in SEM. Digest it in chunks, then act accordingly. And remember to educate agencies and colleagues along the way (no file-sharing though...!).

[2] http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?press=2018

2.2. Why is search marketing so important?

Web users love to search. They use the main search engines like Google, Yahoo!, MSN Search and Ask to find one thing only – information.

What sort of information are they looking for?

Clearly this depends on the individual. They might be looking for entertainment[3] news, or hunting for product reviews, or trying to compare vendors and services, or seeking their soulmate, or buying a second-hand car. All these goals can start with a simple search query.

The use of keywords or keyphrases (combining several keywords) helps users find exactly what they want. Modern search engines are generally great at delivering **relevant results** to users.

Relevance (or relevancy if you are in the US) is the mantra of all search engine engineers.

A word from our resident lexicologist…

Understanding **keyphrases** enables marketers at companies 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. We'll get onto that in due course…

So how big is search?

The number of searches by people trying to find information is still growing dramatically. Nielsen//NetRatings reported that there were 5.7 billion searches in the US in January 2006, a 39% year-on-year increase from 4.1 billion in January 2005[4]. Furthermore, the number of searches in the US is more than 183 million per day.

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[3] *Google Zeitgeist (http://www.google.com/intl/en/press/zeitgeist.html and http://www.google.co.uk/press/zeitgeist.html) shows that the most popular searches in Google are all about entertainment, but with some consumer brands making the top 10 in some countries. Yahoo! Buzz service shows similar results (http://buzz.yahoo.com/overall/).*
[4] *Nielsen Netratings. http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_060302.pdf*

3. SEO Success Factor 1: Planning & Strategy

3.1. An introduction to planning

Ok, pull up a chair... This marks the beginning of this guide to SEO. Smart marketers never launch any strategy without an appropriate amount of planning, so that's what we'll look at first.

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 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 maximize results at the right cost.
- Can diversify the risks of over-reliance on one approach.
- Achieves integration of SEM with other campaign activity.

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

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

4. SEO Success Factor 2: Index inclusion and coverage

In this section we look at search engine index inclusion, the first practical stage of SEO. Index inclusion means ensuring that as many as possible of the relevant pages from your domain(s) are included within the search engines you want to be listed in. We will look at selecting search engines, techniques for site submission, and how to counter technical problems which may stop your site being indexed correctly.

Index inclusion is mainly seen as an issue for new sites created for new companies, brands or campaigns. However, internal or external factors may change **index coverage** through time.

For example, pages will be added and removed regularly for most sites, and you should check that old pages / sections are removed from search indexes. Changes to the hardware and software technology used to host or manage content may also alter index inclusion.

Review your strategy for creation of custom 404 error pages for when visitors referred from search engines arrive at a page that is no longer available. The query string from the search engine can be parsed to identify relevant content and give a 'friendly error page'. Customer 404 error pages are also displayed when there are link errors within the site. However, their use may have limitations[5]. In some cases, if a page performing well for SEO has to be changed it may be better to a use a permanent 301 redirect to the home page although this creates a confusing user experience.

In 2008, Google introduced a very useful tool within Google Webmaster Tools to show which pages linking to you are generating a 404 Page Not found error[6] which is also registered as a Crawl error by Google. Site owners can be contacted and errors potentially corrected, linking to more relevant pages. The article announcing the figure suggests that links to 404 pages are not credited as much as a correct page, as would be expected. This tool also makes it easier to fix errors within sites.

The search engines themselves also cause problems with exclusion. While it is today rare for a site to be dropped from the index completely unless it has been banned, temporary fluctuations in number of pages indexed are common. Reasons for these include algorithm adjustments where a new index is propagated over several servers and possible conflicts between different versions of robots.

Sample only, please download the full report from:

http://econsultancy.com/reports/search-engine-optimization-seo-best-practice-guide

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[5] *One reviewer (Bigmouthmedia) advised caution with use of custom 404's since this can slow or prevent the page from actually being removed from the index. Additionally, excluding the page from the index - wastes all of the history and links that a page may have accumulated over time. So consider redirecting the user to a similar page instead, which will then inherit these properties, whilst still removing the old URL from the index. Since content modifications on most sites are common this is quite an important issue so the approach should be reviewed with the agency or technical team.*

[6] *http://www.mattcutts.com/blog/free-direct-text-links/*
http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2008/10/webmaster-tools-shows-crawl-error.html

Our coverage of how to achieve **index inclusion** in the different search engines includes these topics:

- **An overview of how search engines work**. What is index coverage? Why is it so important?

- **Site submission to search engines** – how to get a new site listed.

- **Google Sitemaps** and how it can increase index coverage.

- **Evaluating index inclusion** and robot indexing activity.

- **Site inclusion and page exclusion** – how to use Robots.txt and meta tags.

- **Domain strategy**. Dealing with issues such as sub-domains, geolocation, top-level domain variants, domain hijacking and canonicalization.

- **Time-related content issues**, including the much-discussed 'Google Sandbox'.

- **Content freshness** and link velocity.

- **Dynamic content,** including problems with URL rewriting and session IDs.

4.1. An overview of how search engines work

The general high-level process for how the search engine compiles its index is straightforward. It is shown below in *Figure 13*. The search engine has to manage two main processes: **crawling and indexing the web pages** and then **responding to a user query** by ranking the relevant pages referencing the search query, extracting the titles and documents snippets from the documents and then returning these as the search engine results pages (SERPs).

The crawler module of a search engine uses server-side software known as a **robot** (aka 'bots') or **spider** to compile an index containing every word on every page along with the page address / URL. Markup code such as formatting and scripting code is ignored, so the index is based on the readable text only.

The search engine weights its index using a complex algorithm based on a variety of factors, discussed later in this report, and then stores the index as part of a database on a web server. This index is what is searched when searchers type in keywords.

The implications of Google Universal Search

With the Google Universal Search announced in May 2007[7], Google made significant changes to the way its results pages are displayed. What are the implications for search marketers? Read on...

Table 1: Google Universal Search

SEO Ranking Success Factor 3	Universal search	Applies to: Different forms of media indexed by search engines	Importance: 2/5
What is it?	With Google Universal Search, Google (and other search engines) now return other relevant results from vertical searches about a query, currently video, books, scholar, news and images, blended within its results. At the foot of the page it may also show related searches. This does initially seem to be limited to more popular phrases such as celebrities, cities, etc.		
Example:	Try this search: http://www.google.com/search?&q=darth+vader.		
Best practice:	1. Maximise the opportunities for a company's digital assets to appear in all types of vertical search engine. Particularly important are images, video (Google Video and YouTube), Google product search (formerly Froogle), news and blog search. See the separate section below on vertical search engines.		
What to watch for?	In a small number of sectors including health and travel, Google Co-op topics allow users to filter results for different topics, for example, see http://www.google.com/coop/topics/Destination_Guides. If you are working in these sector it may be worth reviewing your search performance for these qualifiers and then aiming to perform better for a qualifier, for example for 'nightlife" for a particular destination. Alternatively, you may want to partner with these sites for advertising.		

4.2. How often do search engines update their index and algorithms?

It is important to understand that the robots are effectively working continually to crawl sites and update the index. For websites that update frequently, eg online publishers, a new page or a modification to an existing page will be included within a couple of days, or within hours for a news site.

On top of these continual minor updates there are bigger updates to the **search engine algorithms**, as well as periodic updates to information about interlinking. These changes – as well as competitor actions - are the main reasons why it is necessary to retain SEO agencies (to monitor changes to the approaches taken by search engines, and to adjust your SEO strategy if required).

Ensure search engine specialists are retained to monitor and revise the optimization approach based on changes to search engine algorithms and index updates.

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[7] *http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2007/05/universal-search-best-answer-is-still.html*

5. SEO Success Factor 3: On-page optimization

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

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

When planning and implementing on-page optimization we seek to **create documents which are deemed highly relevant to a particular search term.**

The most basic test of relevance is the number of times the search phrase appears on the page (headlines that include a search term are particularly powerful).

However, there are many other factors that can also be applied. Here's what Big G says:

> *"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".[8]*

So in this section we will look at **ranking factors related to the use of different HTML markup tags / page structure**, as well as the **content** of the pages themselves.

The three key segments we'll look at are:

- Occurrence of **keyphrases** in page body copy including keyword density, synonyms and position
- **Page markup factors** including syntactical accuracy, <title> tags, <meta> tags, <a href=> hyperlink tags and <img> alt tags.
- **Document-level keyphrase factors** such as the inclusion of **keyphrases in the domain** and document file name.

Knowledge of both on-page optimization and link-building techniques are required for the best approach to optimization of a site, so we return to this topic later in the guide.

5.1.1. Who should coordinate on-page optimization?

Organizations that contract agencies to perform SEO are likely to use specialist SEO copywriters for optimization of pages for **strategic keyphrases**, but it is not usually practical (cost effective) to optimize every page by updating the content.

Instead, this effort **should be shared between content authors and reviewers** within the organization. Every time authors create or modify a page they should follow the best practice provided in this section.

8 Google Technology introduction page: http://www.google.com/technology/

Although authors will often be trained in using the CMS or in copywriting for the web, these training courses do not have sufficient reference to the techniques we describe in this section. There are some key rules to follow, and although there is no substitute for experience, even a webwriting newbie can get results by following this advice. They are not mystical, but logical.

Key recommendation 39

Each content author and reviewer in an organization and agency should be trained in understanding these on-page optimization factors.

5.2.   Selecting keyphrases for optimization

Before you start optimizing 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 is important to identify **target keyphrases** for each page, and to **identify strategic keyphrases** that are particularly important for a site or content category.

It is also useful to encourage those completing on-page optimization to consider different priorities for optimizing keyphrases on each page. Ask them to identify the most important phrases grouping according to the emphasis or priority they are going to place on them – primary, secondary and tertiary or priority 1, 2 and 3.

An example is given in Table 15. This approach helps force people to think about the most important phrases and gives them more emphasis. With experience, this approach is natural; it doesn't require too much thought.

Table 15 Example of different keyphrase priorities

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.

The actual primary, secondary and tertiary keyphrases selected for a given page will depend on the volume of searches and intent of searchers against the amount of resource available.

For example, if there are around 100 searches per month on the primary keyphrase in this example, it is probably only worth optimizing all of these phrases on a single page. If there are 1,000 or more, it would be worth **separating out the different keyphrases, with a different page for each**. However, the ease of obtaining theme-specific inbound links to these

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pages would also have to be considered.

More detailed guidelines on applying these different types of key phrases for different elements of the webpage are provided in Search Engine Optimization – Best Practice Guide.

<div style="background:#E8552B">

Key recommendation 40

</div>

Clearly identify different levels of target keyphrase for each page, for example: primary, secondary and tertiary.

Your keyphrase dictionary should specify which page(s) you are targeting for specific keyphrases. You may be able to gain a greater "share of search results pages" if you have two entries for each page as shown in the example for "Suspension files" in the section **Error! Reference source ot found.** on <title> tags. The second entry is for a product guide rather than a product listing. Another approach is exposing more keyphrases on a home page or category pages.

Tip 37

Consider creating different types of content which enables you to gain two entries in the SERPS for strategic keyphrases.

Figure 1 gives an example of where one company has two pages in the listing for a keyphrase, again through using a guide to purchasing which can also help with the customer experience.

Figure 1 Search for "current accounts" showing how only one company has achieved more than one entry within SERPs for searchterm.

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5.3.   Occurrence of keyphrase in page body copy

*The **frequency, position** and **emphasis** of the keyphrase in the body copy is very important for optimization. Relevance is also increased by a gamut of legitimate 'tricks' such as including the keyphrase in headings, anchor text in links and with a higher density towards the start of the document.*

Over the last five years or so, keyphrase-related factors have been a battleground between search companies, search engine optimizers and spammers. Because of attempts to influence the SERPs results through keyword stuffing and hiding keywords through text colour, scripting or CSS, the algorithms have been revised to avoid such spamming techniques.

Given these changes, sophisticated SEOs need to have a good understanding of the merits of different approaches to on-page optimization. While client sites can be used as a test-bed, an independent test suite of pages is the best approach (since these can be used to conduct standard control-cell testing to isolate different variables to test their impact).

In other words, you can attempt to 'reverse-engineer' some elements of the algorithms (obviously reverse-engineering the whole algorithm is impossible). Of course, to test the effect of on-page optimization, it is necessary to isolate the effect of page connectivity aspects of the algorithm. And remember: **be ethical**.

Key Recommendation 41

Assess the controlled-testing approaches used by internal/external SEOs to determine their ability to understand the relative importance of different on-page optimization techniques and review changes introduced by algorithm updates.

5.3.1. Keyword frequency, density and document length

The number of times the keyphrase is repeated in the text of the web page (frequency) **was** a key factor in determining the SERPS position for a key phrase. However, this led to **spamming** and search engines make checks for spamming, i.e. that a phrase is not repeated too many times such as *'cheap flights.. cheap flights.. cheap flights.. cheap flights.. cheap flights.. cheap flights.. cheap flights.. cheap flights..'*.

The search engine algorithms then turned to favouring **keyword density**, but this also resulted in some websites being penalised for trying too hard to work phrases into the page. Achieving a **moderate density** is still a positive factor, but don't overdo it.

Table 2: Keyword frequency and density in body copy

SEO Ranking Success Factor 24	Keyword frequency and density in body copy	Applies to: Each page in site (particularly important on homepage)	Importance: 4/5
What is it?	Keyword or keyphrase density refers to how frequently a word appears in a document as a proportion of its length.		
Example:	A keyword that appears twice in a 200-word document (density = 1%) has a higher density than a word that appears four times in 2000 word document (density = 0.5%).		
Best practice:	1. For pages optimized for a specific phrase aim for a density of 5-10%, but don't fixate on this, using natural language blending synonyms and different sequence of keywords is equally important. Of course, generating quality external links is more important still. 2. Penalty warning: Avoid a possible penalty if density too high for particular phrases, i.e. >> 10%. 3. Use synonyms **as well as** identical keyphrases. Google's related searches[9] feature which it uses for a limited number of terms may helpful here 4. Vary use of keywords in target keyphrases; they don't have to be in a consecutive phrase, e.g. for phrase 'uk insurance', variants could be 'insurance for UK drivers', 'UK drivers insurance', etc. The challenge is to use these naturally within the copy.		
What to watch for?	• Reviewers believed that density is no longer a significant factor within the Google algorithm to counter previous 'over-optimization' approaches. Instead, inbound links with an appropriate context for the destination page are more important. • Use this tool which shows the frequency and density of different keyphrases: • http://www.abakus-internet-marketing.de/tools/topword.html • Other on-page optimization factors such as formatting, and page connectivity factors such as **link popularity** and **PageRank** of a page and its **authority** are also very important, particularly for competitive phrases.		

The page length is clearly closely related to keyword density since *increasing page length typically decreases keyword density*. This has led to an approach of optimizers using relatively short pages of **200 to 400 words** for pages specifically created for optimization, but this should not be a hard and fast rule. Many online research papers and articles rank highly, so there are likely to be positive factors in using longer documents that contain keywords throughout, i.e. similar keyword density to a shorter document, but greater length. In this example though, the research papers may be ranking well simply because good content breeds link love.

Additionally, longer pages are more likely to contain a range of keyphrases that may be better at reaching searchers using low-volume search tail keyterms.

Table 3: Document length

SEO Ranking Success Factor 25	Page length	Applies to: Each page on site	Importance: 3/5
What is it?	The length of the page in words. Search engines strip out scripts and code markup, <head> sections, and possibly some parts of the navigation.		
Example:	Use this tool to show page length: http://www.abakus-internet-marketing.de/tools/topword.html		
Best practice:	1. Often recommended to be limited to 200 to 400 words by search engine optimizers to make it easier to achieve density. 2. However, particularly for research topics or scholarly documents there is likely to be value attributed to longer documents with many clear sub-sections that may be judged to be of more value to readers. 3. For longer documents / articles, consider including different versions of documents, e.g. (a) 5 page interlinked documents (b) full document (for printing, possibly without main navigation). ClickZ (www.clickz.com/experts) uses this approach and the print version of documents often rank higher, they do not seem to attract a **duplicate content penalty** since Google will select the page with the highest **link equity.**		
What to watch for?	• This factor combines with keyphrase density. • Longer pages are often found to be more successful in converting human visitors since different alternatives for persuasion are possible. • Remember that for keyphrases with high competition, other off-page optimization factors described elsewhere in this report such as link popularity and authority are also very important – success cannot be achieved through on-page factors alone. • Since the homepage tends to have the highest PageRank of a site there is an argument for making this page longer to enable use of a wider range of keyphrases and internal links incorporating keyphrases.		

5.3.2. Keyphrase position on page

The position of the keyphrase on the page seems to have some impact, although is of less importance than frequency and density.

Best practice is to include the phrase towards the top of the document and then regularly through the document. Experimentation is the only real way for you to determine where best to place keyphrases. Think about the inverted pyramid approach to news writing – this applies to online content too.

Table 4: Keyphrase position on page

SEO Ranking Success Factor 26	Keyword position on page	Applies to: Each page in site (particularly important on homepage)	Importance: 2/5
What is it?	There is much anecdotal evidence that increasing the density of a keyphrase towards the top of the document is an indication to the search engines of relevance for that keyphrase.		
Example:	Siebel (www.siebel.com) structured its homepage so that the phrase 'Customer Relationship Management' is above the main header incorporated into a hyperlink. The page www.marketing-online.co.uk, which ranks highly for the search "Internet marketing training" (http://www.google.co.uk/search?&q=marketing+online+training) has a higher density of this keyphrase, formatted in various different ways towards the document.		
Best practice:	1. Include target keyphrases near the top of the body copy of the document. 2. Structure the code of documents forming the page templates of sites so that the body copy appears in the document before the main navigation (if practical). 3. Repeat the phrase regularly throughout document and include at end of document, particularly in hyperlinks to sections to find out more.		
What to watch for?	• Sites can be designed so that one or two keyphrases can be included before the main navigation. • This relates closely to page template and code design.		

5.3.3. Keyword synonyms

The consideration of synonyms and phrase variants is a key differentiator between SEO copywriters who really know their stuff and those who simply crank out pages using a core set of keyphrases.

We have seen how the search engines use *keyword density* as one factor in assessing onpage optimization. We have also seen how this is subject to spamming.

So, to reduce the risk of keyword or keyphrase stuffing on a page negatively affecting relevance, search engines now place great emphasis on **related words**. They conduct a semantic analysis to determine the contents of the document. If you think about it, words related to keyphrases should appear naturally in the course of writing a document.

It is hard to determine how much importance search engines allocate to the use of related words but *Econsultancy believes that this is likely to become a key factor in the months and years to*

come, as search engines try to improve relevancy.

This factor seems to have increased in importance with the Google purchase of Applied Semantics in 2003 and its ontology of related themes.

Tip 38

Use of the tilde (~) Google advanced search syntax operator is useful for identifying what Google considers as synonyms.

Table 5: Keyword synonyms

SEO Ranking Success Factor 27	Semantic analysis including use of synonyms of keyword / phrase	Applies to: <title> tag Body copy	Importance: 4/5
What is it?	Phrases or words that are commonly used as alternatives for the main target keyphrase. Also remember that singular and plural forms of words are treated differently. The target phrase can also be reversed and additional words interspersed between the different keywords of the phrase.		
Example:	When promoting a marketing training course, relevance might be boosted if you refer to related concepts, such as sales or commerce.		
Best practice:	1. Include a range of synonyms within page copy, **meta descriptions** and within **title tags** if possible. 2. Use synonyms when developing copy for product related content in catalogues, or use an attribute table for each catalogue product which describes different features / benefits of a product. 3. An automated approach may be possible where each product has different attributes and these are combined in a table or in sentences with different qualifiers. 4. Publishing search results for a site may help with this since users may enter synonyms naturally.		
What to watch for?	• With decreased importance of keyword density this is an important factor. • This process shouldn't be left until copywriting; ideally it should be part of keyphrase analysis and selection. • Tools for identifying synonyms include Thesauri and Word synonym suggester • The search engine synonyms are not necessarily the same as those in a thesaurus. Google synonyms are suggested in <titles> of SERPs for this syntax: • Use of the tilde (~) Google advanced search syntax operator is useful for identifying what Google as operators. • ~keyphrase –keyphrase, e.g. ~marketing –marketing shows equivalents such as sales, commerce, etc highlighted in the <title> tag. Remember that this is the call-to-action hyperlink in the **SERPs** tag, so it also needs to be effective as a call-to-action. • A relevant Google patent on semantic analysis is: "[Systems and methods for improving search quality](#)" (PDF)		

Tip 39

Also assess homonyms where the meaning of a phrase may conflict with the marketing objectives, e.g. Blackberry fruits and Blackberry handhelds are not the same.

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SEO **Best Practice Guide**

For competitive **strategic keyphrases**, it may be worth a look at how competitors are approaching this. Use a Keyword density tool such as that from Abakus (http://www.abakus-internet-marketing.de/tools/topword.html).

Suggested approach:

1. If available, take a look at Hitwise (www.hitwise.co.uk) for sites which are performing poorly; identify top competitors.

2. Identify pages that perform well through googling ["keyphrase" site:www.competitor.com].

3. Assess their keyword density page using the Abakus tool.

4. Assess links in with link tool.

5. Adjust own copy and links to outperform.

A factor related to synonyms is to consider closely related phrase variants such as misspelling, plurals and z spellings.

Table 6: Phrase Variants

SEO Ranking Success Factor 28	Ensure visibility for similar phrase variants	Applies to: Each target keyphrase on page.	Importance: 2/5
What is it?	Phrase variants are closely related versions of a keyword such as plurals, Z spellings and mispellings, but excluding synonyms.		
Example:	holiday, holidays; siebel, seibel; optimization, optimisation.		
Best practice:	1. Include different versions. 2. Misspellings don't have to be too common unless they are used widely on other sites. E.g. They can be put at the bottom of your 'About Us' page.		
What to watch for?	• Use of these may avoid spamming penalties, so best to use as far as possible. • Can use in brackets.		

6. SEO Success Factor 4: Link-building

6.1. Introduction

*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 six 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.**

If you prefer turn straight to Appendix where we give a checklist that summarises the attributes of a good quality link.

6.2. What is link-building? Why does it matter to SEO?

One of the reasons for the dramatic growth of the Internet is the ease with which related sites and pages within sites can link to each other. This is a natural process and with good quality content, many sites will naturally receive links from other sites whose owners believe the linked content is a good resource for their visitors.

As we will see, the developers of Google realizedd that **link popularity** and **link quality** were a great way of determining the relevance of a page, especially once combined with the keyphrases on that page. Since all major search engines now follow this logic, proactive **link-building** has become a key activity for SEO. While good results can be obtained without proactive link-building through the natural growth of links, to achieve the best position on the SERPs, particularly within competitive sectors, requires proactive link-building to support quality on-page content.

Key Recommendation 42

Ensure a proactive link-building programme occurs as part of the SEO process.

To understand why link-building is so important and to know the success factors for link-building we first need to understand the concept of **Google PageRank** method.

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6.2.1. PageRank's First Principle: more links from other pages to a page increase PageRank

This is the link popularity principle that many people know. It is evident from the PageRank equation since the PageRank of Page A is the sum of the PageRank of all pages T pointing to it PR(T1-n).

Google explains the main principle of PageRank this way:

> *"PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B."[10]*

Table 7: PageRank

SEO Ranking Success Factor 48	More backlinks (inbound links) or link popularity increase PageRank	Applies to: Each web page. Concept pioneered by Google, similar principle used by other engines.	Importance: 3/5
What is it?	PageRank of a page is assessed on a logarithmic scale from 0 to 10. It is dependent on the number of links in from other sites. Most commercial destination sites have a PageRank between 4 and 7.		
Example:	Sites that are typically media owned or portals such the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk) which has a PageRank of 9.		
Best practice:	1. Conduct structured link-building to increase PageRank of a site. 2. Structured link-building should not only target the homepage since the PageRank concept operates at a page level (see our third principle). 3. Do not increase backlinks too rapidly since may be a negative ranking factor. *NB. Note that many other factors are today considered more important in the algorithm than link popularity or PageRank, in particular, the context of the referring link and page.*		
What to watch for?	• Although PageRank is important, it is only one factor used to assess relevance. As we will see, the context of the link for a particular keyphrase is also important. • PageRank can change after algorithm updates as different judgments are applied about the value of a link from a particular type of site. • Other engines such as Yahoo! (Yahoo! WebRank) do not actively publicise the approach probably for trademark and patent reasons but are widely regarded to use such an approach.		

Tip 40

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[10] *Source: Google (http://www.google.com/technology)*

Be aware that penalty factors may be applied by the search engine if too many links are generated too rapidly or are from undesirable sources. Backlink growth should be at a natural rate not significantly greater than past growth.

6.2.2. PageRank's Second Principle: pages with higher PageRank are more valuable

It is important to remember that *not all links are of equal value*. They vary in **link quality**. Links from pages that themselves have a high popularity as indicated by PageRank are rated as being more important.

This is evident from the PageRank equation since the PageRank of Page A is the sum of the *PageRank* of all pages T pointing to it PR(T1-n) (not just the number of pages).

Google explains:

> *"Google looks at more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves 'important' weigh more heavily and help to make other pages important."*

Remember that the formula we have given has been extensively augmented. Given this, and the fixation that some webmasters have with toolbar PageRank, some SEO specialists advise ignoring this. We disagree with this since it is still a fundamental part of the Google algorithm. The value in gaining a link from a site with high PageRank and relevant context can often be seen. We would agree not to stress too much about Toolbar PageRank since this is potentially months out of date.

Table 8: Link values

SEO Ranking Success Factor 49	External link-building implication: Inbound link pages which have a higher PageRank are more valuable.	Applies to: Each web page.	Importance: 3/5
What is it?	Links into a site differ in value according to the PageRank of the page on which they are located.		
Example:	Most commercial destination sites have a pagerank between 4 and 7, but there are a few sites with a higher PageRank. Those sites with higher PageRanks are typically media owned sites or portals such the BBC (www.bbc.co.uk), which has a PageRank of 9.		
Best practice:	1. Structured link-building should target sites with a high PageRank (for their homepage). 2. An attempt should be made to receive an entry on a page with as high a PageRank as possible (often the homepage would be ideal).		
What to watch for?	• Media sites which tend to have a high PageRank (and volume of unique visitors) are themselves more valuable. • Check the PageRank of the page on which your link will be placed, not just the homepage, if requesting or exchanging links.		

When structuring a site for SEO, the PageRank of pages you have optimized for a phrase is important. An indication of the importance of PageRank is provided by Table 15 which shows the top 10 listings restricted to the Econsultancy.com site for the phrase SEO (syntax: http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=search+engine+optimization+site%3Awww.Econsultancy.com).

This shows that the top pages returned tend to have a higher PageRank of 5 or 6 than those further down the list. They also tend to have more external links or more internal links. But if you look closely you will see that other factors are at play include *the density of occurrence of the phrase* 'SEO' within the *title tag*, and *body copy*, and the *date of publication*, and *last major update*.

Some recent items such as 4, 5 and 6 ranked highly at the time of writing since they had recently been updated. Note that this compilation does not return the homepage for 'SEO' since the decision has been taken to place more strategic priority on the phrase 'search engine marketing' for which the site occurs higher in the Google list.

This type of keyphrase test is a good test to run for your most strategically important keyphrases for yourselves and your competitors.

Tip 41

Test the importance of PageRank in determining your site listings for a phrase by using the search syntax <phrase> site:www.domain.com to review the PageRank of the sites returned.

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7. SEO Success Factor 5: A structured process for SEO

Introduction

In the previous sections of this report, we have recommended best practice for index inclusion, on-page optimization and link building. In this section we unite these areas by making recommendations on the main approaches to SEO.

This section is deliberately shorter than the previous sections since it is intended for managers reviewing current and planned SEO approaches. Links are given to link back to the detailed success factors earlier in the report.

Our starting point is that we are managing SEO for a new or existing site for which we have completed a keyphrase gap analysis and identified target keyphrases. How do we approach SEO in a structured way? The first section describes a range of classic approaches to SEO and then more detail on some of these is given in subsequent sections.

7.1. Classic approaches to SEO

While it may not be realizedd by all client-side marketers, it is almost inevitable that effective SEO will involve changes to site structure since new types of content will likely be required to improve results for strategic keyphrases.

We have identified 10 classic approaches to SEO which are part of a typical SEO project. The ten processes or activities are:

1. **Improve index inclusion.**
2. **Revise site architecture and linking strategy.**
3. **Internal linking strategy**
4. **External link-building.**
5. **Improve page template effectiveness.**

7.2.   Improving index inclusion

This is arguably the most cost-effective approach to SEO and it is where most optimization companies will start. They will check that the index coverage of pages on the site and seek to maximize the number of pages crawled and so included in the index.

With most large organizations having worked on refining their SEO approach and especially index inclusion for several years, it may well be that index inclusion problems have already been solved. Typically there are either very big improvements through this stage of the SEO process or they are relatively limited. Given this, our coverage at this point on this topic is brief and you are referred to Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – Best Practice Guide, which deals with index inclusion and coverage in more detail (the chapter on 'Index Inclusion' is also available also available as a standalone guide, much like this one).

7.3.   Revise site architecture and linking strategy

In their classic book *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web[11]*, Rosenfeld and Morville (2002) highlight the importance of well-designed **information architecture**:

> *"It is important to recognise that every information system, be it a book or an intranet, has an information architecture. 'Well-developed' is the key here, as most sites don't have planned information architecture at all. They are analogous to buildings that weren't architected in advance.*
>
> *"Design decisions reflect the personal biases of designers, the space doesn't scale over time. Technologies drive the design and not the other way around."*

The quality of the information architecture of a site has such a tremendous impact - both on the quality of user experience and SEO. It is unbelievable to see analysis / design for information architecture and SEO being treated as separate tasks (this remains common).

With the right partners it must be possible for specialists to work together when a new site is created or redesigned, rather than a calling in a SEO company at a later stage (when it will be much more difficult for SEOs to influence the overall architecture).

Key Recommendation 43

Ensure that site information architects, site designers and search engine optimizers work together during a new site or redesign.

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[11] *Rosenfeld, L. and Morville, P. (2003) Information Architecture for the World Wide Web. O'Reilly, Sebastopol, CA. Second edition.*

7.4. External link-building

We explained earlier that it is very important to gain external links, particularly in competitive sectors. We have included this after internal link-building since we believe internal link-building is more controllable and often neglected. However, external link-building has the greatest role in increasing a site's PageRank and authority.

The topics that we covered are the six main strategies for external link-building are:

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**

7.5. Improve page template effectiveness

Each site redesign involves changing the layout and style of different pages on a website. So for a retailer, separate template layouts will be created for the *homepage*, *category pages*, *product pages*, *search pages* and a general template for other content types.

These templates will be united through a common look and feel of page colour and typography, using cascading style sheets (aka '**CSS**') for best practice. Pages will also have a common **primary and secondary navigation** scheme and as we have seen from the section on internal link-building, this will have major implications for the effectiveness of SEO.

7.6. Improve SERPS effectiveness

This is an often neglected aspect of SEO and website design, so we wanted to emphasise it.

SERPS effectiveness is based on the quality of the summary of your site within the results listings of the search engines. There are two reasons why this is important – one obvious, one less so.

First, what the entry in the search engine listing says about you is a **call-to-action** which, if effective, will encourage searchers to clickthrough to your site.

Second, it is widely predicted that Google and other engines use analysis of the click behavior of searchers to help assess the relevance of the content and so use it as a positive ranking factor.

Let's look at these separately...

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

8.1. 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 meet the marketing objectives of a site.

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 e-mail 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.

8.2. What is conversion efficiency? Why it matters?

Conversion efficiency is a measure of how well a website or website page converts visitors to achieve the different outcomes or objectives required by marketers.

We will look at different forms of objective in a moment, but typically they involve conversion to a **lead** or **sale** or a **change in perception** about a brand or its products.

In some cases, the outcome is simply connecting the site visitor with the information they need. For example, a consumer might want to research a holiday online, but prefer to book it in store or over the telephone.

Conversion efficiency is a challenge, because we see on many websites that **conversion rates** are low (*typically less than 10% for new site visitors*)[12].

[12] http://www.davechaffey.com/Internet-Marketing/C7-Service-Quality/Conversion-rates-E-commerce

9. Appendix 1. Copywriting for SEO – a guide for content owners and reviewers

A step-by-step training guide for content owners and reviewers

In this example, we are creating a themed page about saving money on phone bills for landline phones.

9.1. Step 1. Aims

What type of visitors do you want to attract to the page:

Example: People concerned about their phone bill

Which messages do you want them to read before and when they reach this page

Example: Best value. Establish credibility of supplier.

We say before, since the meta data you use to describe your document will be visible in the Search engine results pages and searchers will start to form an opinion of your brand and you can encourage clickthrough.

What do you want to achieve when they visit this page.

Example: Engage with site, go through to sign-up page.

9.2. Step 2. Identify keyphrases

These may have been identified in a structured keyphrase analysis for site.

If not, think about the phrases users are likely to type into search engines when looking for this content or service.

If you have time, use these tools for your country, to find the most important phrases:

Overture (http://inventory.uk.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion). Doesn't require log-in, has searches for whole month, best for low volume searches. May contain automatically submitted searches.

Use the Google Keywords tool.

10. Appendix 2. SEO Performance Audit template

A template showing the main activities needed to review a site for SEO Performance against its competitors.

We have designed this high-level checklist for agencies to compare against their approach and for internal teams to assess their SEO performance and capabilities.

SEO Audit Step 1. Business Objectives

Purpose:
- To ensure SEO is aligned with business goals of generating leads, sales and branding
- To identify specific objectives in terms of visitor growth from SEO

Covered in report section:
- 1.2 Setting goals for search engine marketing
-

What to check for?
- What are the target audience(s) for the site? Are any a priority for SEO?
- Which products or services are the priority to feature through SEO?

Best tools to use:
- It is useful to complete preliminary keyphrase research before asking these questions, e.g. review competitor sites and phrases targeting in meta name="keywords"
-

Deliverables:
- Summary of business objectives and KPIs

SEO Audit Step 2. Marketplace analysis

Purpose:
- To understand competitive business marketplace and online marketplace

Covered in report section:
- 1.5 Competitor benchmarking

What to check for?
- Identify additional online competitors for keyphrases, e.g. affiliates, media sites, blogs, etc
- Assess performance of traditional and online SEO competitors (this will happen for each of the stages of audit in this appendix)

Best tools to use:
- Alexa (www.alexa.com)
- Hitwise (www.hitwise.com)

Deliverables:
- Marketplace map of visitor flows – see main report

SEO Audit Step 8. SEO Resourcing and process analysis

Purpose:
- To assess how SEO is managed within a company

Covered in report section:
- 1.8 SEO Resourcing and process analysis

What to check for?
- Responsibility for SEO management, i.e. in marketing, IT and PR
- Knowledge of SEO within content owners and editors (have they been trained in copywriting for SEO?)
- Process for updating content and generating new content, e.g. what triggers content, regular content update procedures, especially for news and blog content. How does SEO related to e-newsletter, e-marketing activity.
- Previous usage of SEO agencies and specialists within agencies to advise on different aspects of search, e.g. index inclusion, on-page optimisation, internal and external linkage
- Knowledge of SEO within PR or online PR agency
- Integration of SEO with PPC and affiliate marketing

Best tools to use:
N/A

Deliverables:
- Summary of resourcing

Analysis:	Recommendations:

11. Appendix 3. SEO Ranking factors quick reference summary

Our at a glance summary of the main factors which affect SEO performance in order of their importance.

For each ranking factor we have included our assessment of the relative importance of the ranking factor. These assessments have remained similar since v1 of the Econsultancy Best Practice Guide.

For comparison, the importance assessment from the SEOmoz panel of experts (www.seomoz.org/articl/search-ranking-factors). See also http://searchengineland.com/070403-145435.php for a summary. There is generally a good agreement between these ratings.

Table 9: On-page optimization ranking factors

On-page Optimization Factor 79	Title HTML tag <title></title>	Applies to: HTML Header	Importance: ⬛ 5/5 SEOmoz rating: 4.9/5
What is it?	The title of each web page appears at the top of the browser window and is indicated in the HTML code by the <title></title> keyword. It is also very important since typically forms the text underlined within the search results page as a call-to-action hyperlink through to the destination website. If it is an effective call-to-action that demonstrates relevance you will receive more clicks which equals more visits. *Example: <title>Econsultancy.com: Internet Marketing Strategy | Training | Online Marketing Research</title>*		
Best practice:	1. Use target keyphrase(s) and keywords to left of tag, brand / site name on right. Example <title> Internet and online marketing and e-commerce best practice: Econsultancy.com</title> 2. Make unique on each page to avoid rating as **duplicate content**. 3. Minimise **keyword density** – typically less than 10 to 15 keywords.		

On-page Optimization Factor 80	Meta description meta tag	Applies to: Each page on site	Importance: ▮▮▮▯▯ 3/5 SEOmoz rating: 2/5
What is it?	A meta tag is an attribute of the page within the HTML <head> section which can be set by the content owner. The "description" meta tag denotes the information which will sometimes be displayed in the SERPs when a web page is found if relevant 'snippets' cannot be used from within the body copy. *Example:* *META NAME="DESCRIPTION" CONTENT="Learn how to improve your internet marketing and e-commerce strategy. Econsultancy.com has expert advice, research and guides to help you develop successful internet marketing strategies and effective online marketing campaigns.">*		
Best practice:	1. Create a unique meta description for every page where practical, otherwise Google may display a **snippet** in the SERPS that at best you have little control over and at worst is gobbledygook. For product catalogues and larger sites, the meta description can be automatically generated to include the product keyword name plus a summary of the value proposition of the site. 2. For your homepage and pages targeting strategic keyphrases, create a powerful meta description that combines a call-to-action and summarises your differential proposition and encourages clickthrough on SERPs as in the example from Capital One above (although this is a little long). Purists may disagree with this and suggest that just a straight description of page content is more in keeping with the spirit of the W3C standard and accessibility guidelines. However, this is a guide on search engine marketing best practice. 3. Remember that just 15-20 words (150 characters) of the meta description are visible within the SERPS of Google – make sure your key message isn't truncated. Often less is more – a succinct description may be more powerful. 4. Limit to 2-4 keyphrases per page. 5. Do not use too many keywords or use too many irrelevant filler words within this meta tag since this will reduce **keyword density.** 6. Avoid undue repetition – 2 to 3 times maximum, otherwise may be assessed as spamming. 7. Incorporate phrase variants and synonyms within copy. 8. Vary on all pages within site. 9. Make different from <title> tag since this may be a sign of keyword stuffing. It also helps if it is complementary to the title to appear more relevant to the searcher.		

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12.   Appendix 4. Checklist for quality links

SEO, PR or digital agency or internal staff involved in gaining links are often not aware of the nuances involved with gaining links. This is a checklist which describes 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 contains 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: Company name specializing 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 home PageRank of 4 or above is most valuable

13.   Appendix 5. Search engine patents

We recommend that SEO specialists review the main patents of Google and the other search engines to determine the processes used to identify relevant documents and filter out SPAM documents.

Many of the recommendations in this report are based on careful analysis of the many Google patents. We have referenced some of the patents within the report.

<div style="background-color:orange;color:white;">

Key recommendation 57
</div>

SEO specialists should review the patents from Google and the other search engines to understand approaches used.

Google has a patent vertical search engine to help you.

http://www.google.com/patents

You can search on patents where Google is the assignee.

http://www.google.com/patents?&as_pasgnee=google

It is limited to the US and doesn't include all applications.

Stephen Arnold has a good compilation of Google patents with copies held on his site easier to access:

http://www.arnoldit.com/lists/google-patents.asp

14.   Appendix 6. Example Request for Proposal template

This RFP template covers all the areas you should include when asking SEM agencies to site a proposal including background to your organisation, measuring success and the requirements from the SEM agency.

14.1.   Background

[Explain your business and the role the website plays in it. What have been the successes. What are the big challenges. What work has been recently undertaken. What is in the plan. Why are you now looking at SEO?]

[Give a sense of the rate of change and dynamism of the site.]

[List countries, languages and geographies relevant to this RFP.]

Business Measurements

[Most SEO activities will focus on hard acquisition and conversion measurements. To the greatest extent that you can share hard business data and targets with the agency. Give the agency a real sense of why your website exists and what it is about.]

- Revenue.
- Traffic.
- Conversion to sales/sign-ups/leads/orders.
- Cost savings.

Success Measures

[Consider using some of the below measurements as success for this project. If you don't have current benchmarks for SEO consider asking the agency to propose them for you and/or compare them to other techniques– esp. PPC]

If successful this project will:

- Increase visitors from natural search from X to Y unique users by [date] – Great for sites seeking awareness exposure / increased presence.
- Deliver a cost per click of <£X per visitor.
- Deliver a cost per sale/acquisition of <£Y per visitor.

15.   Appendix 7. 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 valid. 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.

>>

Vertical search engines

Vertical search engines are specialist search engines which cover a particular vertical industry sector such as travel, consumer retailer or business vertical. Alternatively vertical search engines may focus on a particular type of media like video, audio, images, blog content, news etc.

Viral marketing

Online viral marketing involves generating word-of-mouth – sometimes called 'word of mouse' – using e-mail to circulate links through to a website which includes a viral agent such as a video clip, game, competition or other content. Traditional word-of-mouth too helps spread the news about the content.

Web analytics

Techniques used to assess and improve the contribution of E-marketing to a business including reviewing traffic volume, referrals, clickstreams, online reach data, customer satisfaction surveys, leads and sales. Web analytics tools used in SEM include browser-based using Javascript and image tags and server-based transaction file log methodologies.

Web 2.0

A significant trend in digital marketing and media consumption which involves technologies which facilitate user participation through user content generation such as blogs, reviews and social bookmarking and social networks or communities. Richer, interactive content such as audio and video streaming is available and more interactive web services are developed which include data exchange or mashups between websites.

White-hat SEO

An approach to SEO which follows an ethical approach of what is generally agreed as acceptable best-practice within the industry. cf **Black-hat SEO**.

Widgets

Widgets are different forms of tools made available on a website or on a user's desktop. They either provide some functionality, like a calculator or they provide real-time information, for example on news or weather.

They are often placed in the left or right sidebar, or in the body of an article.

WHOIS record.

A record of the geolocation and owner of a **domain**. The WHOIS server (www.whois.sc) can be queried manually and is also queried by search engines to determine the country where a server is registered.

Sample only, please download the full report from:

http://econsultancy.com/reports/search-engine-optimization-seo-best-practice-guide

16.   About Econsultancy

Econsultancy is the leading source of independent advice and insight on digital marketing and ecommerce.

Our reports, events, online resources and training programmes help a community of over 75,000 registered marketers make better decisions, build business cases, find the best suppliers, look smart in meetings and accelerate their careers.

Econsultancy is an award-winning online publisher of reports covering best practice, user experience benchmarking, market data and supplier selection aimed at internet professionals that want practical advice on all aspects of e-business.

Econsultancy also operates a highly popular training division, used by some of the world's most prominent brands for staff education, both in-house and via public courses. We provide training across all areas of digital marketing and at all levels from one day courses to diplomas to Masters in Digital Marketing.

In addition, we host more than 100 events a year, such as The Online Marketing Masterclass, regular Supplier Showcases and Roundtables, an annual Future of Digital Marketing event, Digital Cream and a range of social events.

The Econsultancy site now attracts 175,000 unique users per month where they access research, read the blog and take part in discussions in the forums.   And as a portal to the digital marketing community, Econsultancy members can also link up with other members and digital suppliers through our directories, as well as find a new job or new digital talent using the job listings.

Some of Econsultancy's client-side members include: Google, Yahoo, MSN, MySpace, BBC, BT, Shell, Vodafone, Yell.com, Dell, Oxfam, Virgin Atlantic, TUI, Barclays, Carphone Warehouse, IPC Media, Deloitte and Touche, 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 +1 212 699 3626 or contact us online.

Sample only, please download the full report from:

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17. About the lead author

Dr Dave Chaffey (www.davechaffey.com) is a specialist Internet marketing trainer and consultant. Dave is proud to have been recognised by the Chartered Institute of Marketing as one of 50 marketing "gurus" worldwide who "have shaped the future of Marketing". Dave works for Econsultancy as an analyst and trainer. His previous reports include: *Managing an E-commerce team: Integrating Digital Marketing into your Organization* (http://www.Econsultancy.com/publications/managing-ecommerce-team/).

Over the last 10 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, Actel, Bank of Scotland Corporate, BP, CIPD, CMP Information, Euroffice, HSBC, Siebel Systems and Tektronix. He is a prolific E-business author whose books *include "Internet marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice", E-marketing Excellence, Total E-mail Marketing', and E-business and E-commerce Management*.

Internet marketing pioneer, Jim Sterne, chairman of the Web Analytics Association (www.webanalyticsassociation.org) and organiser of the annual E-metrics summits (www.emetrics.org) comments: *"Dave layers a keen understanding of marketing with in-depth technical and heuristic knowledge about doing business on the Internet. Top down or bottom up, Dave has an astonishing grasp of strategy as well as tactics."*

17.1. The expert reviewers

Dave compiled this report with the aid of an expert team of contributors and reviewers ranging from clients, search agencies, consultants and digital marketing agencies to ensure the recommendations reflect current best practice. Dave and Econsultancy are very grateful for the detailed input provided by many contributors. The expert reviewers are:

Name	Company	Company background/Experience
Mario Muttenthaler	Net-a-porter www.netaporter.com	Online Clothing retail Mario is online marketing manager
Tony Barker	MobileShop.com www.mobileshop.com	Tony is marketing manager
Edward Cowell	Guava www.guava.com	Full-service digital marketing agency including team from SEM Agency Guava. Teddie is SEO director.

Vince Coyle	Universal McCann www.universalmccann.com	Vince is Search Manager, Universal McCann London. He was previously online customer acquisition manager at Euroffice.
Joe Friedlein	BrowserMedia www.browsermedia.co.uk	BrowserMedia offer SEO and paid-search advertising services
Jonathan Stewart	iCrossing http://www.icrossing.com/	Full-service search engine marketing agency Jonathan is Head of NaturalSearch
Steve Johnston	Google Consultant – www.searchjohnston.co.uk	Specialist in Google optimization since 2003. Founder of SEO consulting practice Search:Johnston."
Ken McGaffin	Linking Matters www.linkingmatters.com	Specialist on link-building and online copywriting.
Caroline McGuckian	LBi http://www.lbi.com/	LBi is a full-service online marketing agency Caroline is Global Media Director
Mike Page	Fuse Optimisation www.fuseo.co.uk	Fuse Optimization is a natural search specialist with full search agency capabilities - Mike is a company founder and Lead SEO Web Developer
Phil Robinson	Clickthrough Marketing www.clickthrough-marketing.com	Full-service search engine marketing agency Phil is Director
Tim Peck	Tektronix www.tektronix.com	Business-to-business test and measurement equipment Tim is Online Marketing Manager
Mike Rogers	Optimize www.optimize.co.uk	Full-service search engine marketing agency Mike is Director

Alun Williams	First Choice www.firstchoice.co.uk	Alun is Head of E-commerce
Allison Wightman	The Post Office www.postoffice.co.uk	Allison is E-commerce Commercial Manager
James Zigrino	Bigmouthmedia www.bigmouthmedia.com	Bigmouthmedia – The Full Search Agency Technology Manager