

# SEO-factors

*Précis*

***“SEO is not a Science.  
There is no set of rules to follow that will guarantee good  
search engine rankings.”***

## ***Glossary***

Back Links – links from an external web page to a web page on your site  
Bot – the software element Search Engines use to index a web page  
Canonical addresses – variants in web addresses that display the same page  
Crawl – the ‘reading’ of a web page by the Search Engine to index it  
Long tail – search terms that you had not expected people to look for  
Organic Search – the non-paid for positioning in SERPs by use of SEO  
Page Rank – a semi-arbitrary value given by Google to pages it has indexed  
Reciprocal links – when two web pages both link to each other (swap links)  
SEM – Search Engine Marketing (paid for positioning in SERPs: eg Adwords)  
SEO – Search Engine Optimisation (non-paid for positioning in SERPs)  
SERPs – Search Engine Results Pages

## Overview

This is by no means a comprehensive list of things that can affect SEO ranking – Google is generally accepted to have over 200 factors and each of these factors can have sub-factors to them; Yahoo, Bing, and other Search engines will no doubt be the same.

I have looked to cover just a few of the factors that affect search engine ranking and included some 'less obvious' items; and covered these first.

The single most important factor for Google is, and is likely to remain, back-links (links from other pages to your target page) – but within this factor there are MANY sub-factors; and getting these wrong could result in the site being 'penalised' by the Search Engines but more likely just have the offending links ignored.

All the following items are things I have learned; BUT where they also appear as advice on Search Engine blogs / forums etc with GOOD reputations in the industry.

Just one published article to consider from one such SEO forum site  
<http://www.seochat.com/>

### Slow Results

*Search engine optimization can be a waiting game. You create pages, invest time in content, build links, get directory listings, but results are not yet showing up. It's been a month... what did I do wrong?*

*Many people will go back, remove links, restructure internal links, work on content, change titles and make all kinds of adjustments. Search engine optimization is a slow process. It takes several months to get results on Google, and those months can be frustrating, especially if you only have one website.*

*When results don't show up, do not worry; give it up to three months. Instead of going back and changing everything, invest time in new ideas, content, links or other domains.*

*Only after learning that what you did does not work should you go back and make adjustments; otherwise, if you did not wait, how do you know it did not work? SEO is a slow process that requires patience. Many SEOs sometimes create a site, throw some content on it, get a couple of directory links, build a few more links and let that site mature. Then they go back several months later for heavier work.*

## *Factors list*

### **Age – established website/domain/pages.**

**When we talk about Search Engine Optimization, Age is:**

- **Domain Age** - Age of your domain.
- **Link Age** - Age of links pointing to your site.
- **Site Age** - When the site was first found by each Search Engine (this is not always the creation date).
- **Page Age** - The Age of the page when first found by a Search Engine (this is not always the creation date of the page).

In addition – both Google and Yahoo are reputed to have ‘sandboxes’ – this refers to the effect where there is a delay in the addition to the SERPs (Search Engine Result Pages) of any new page.

### **Canonical issues**

Web addresses such as “www.hhc-europe.com” and “hhc-europe.com”, although they bring up the same website, are regarded as completely different websites by Search Engines. As a result, this dilutes the value of any links that use the different versions of the web address.

The same is true of all the other versions that were set up to point to the .com site (ie “hhc-europe.co.uk”, “[www.hhc-europe.co.uk](http://www.hhc-europe.co.uk)” etc – even though they all point to the same website they will be treated as separate websites by the search engines)

There are, from an SEO point of view, on-page and server solutions to these that I will not go into great detail about at this time except to say that they are “*301 page redirect*” for server solutions and active script solutions and use of the “*canonical metatag*” for HTML solutions.

However once the work has been done it takes time for the Search Engines to take the change into account.

## **Page load time / Not found / Not available**

It has been intimated by Google that page load times can affect the value of a page. Although it is a little unclear exactly how this is applied, it is generally accepted that a page will NOT be penalised for slow loading; but could get a boost for quick loading – pages less than 100k (including images) in size are generally regarded as 'good'. But this is not a rule – each page needs to be judged by quality of content and look and feel etc as well as page load time.

With regards to pages not found – the more internal links that are broken the worse the site is regarded (external links are not likely to suffer this problem; a site is not normally going to be penalised for actions of 3<sup>rd</sup> parties). It is also (though not universally) thought that incorrect coding of a page could result in poorer indexing as the Bot cannot properly identify the page content or its importance to the page.

Downtime of a site is very bad – if the site is down when the Bot tries to crawl the pages then not only will any changes you have made not be found, but it is possible that the value of the site will be devalued – at least temporarily.

## **Geo-location**

If your target audience is UK based but your ISP's server, that your website is hosted on, has a physical location elsewhere than the location of your target audience (ie the UK) then this can result in lost total site value.

Also, if you have a '.com' site but you target a '.co.uk' audience; especially if people search on a location specific site, or with a search region option selected this can play a 'small' part in the scoring for or against you.

**i.e.** someone with a .co.uk site being searched for on google.co.uk is more likely to be scored 'a little' higher than exactly the same site with .com or .be (However, as with the other items listed, this is not a be all and end all and for Google in particular you can mitigate this somewhat through the webmaster tools).

## **Content**

The content of a page is not only about Keyword Density, it is also the overall relevance of a page to the search term.

As a result, a page that is deemed wholly relevant to the search terms is likely to be given more value. Though if the search term entered into yahoo or Google was, for instance, enclosed in double quotes the exact search term must appear on the site to be scored highly.

Having said this; ensuring that you are there, or thereabouts, in terms of the number of appearances of a required search term, is usually still advisable (though this can include synonyms and variations).

There is a wide belief also that a SITE with many pages of similar purpose but not of duplicate content is given added value; especially with good internal page linking (see later factor).

With regards to back links, it is now widely regarded that a link from a page with similar purpose to your page will carry more value than a link from a page not of similar purpose – i.e. a page which is scored highly for search terms relating to printers linking to a page about printers will pass more value than a page about the weather would.

It is **strongly** suggested that a web page should have an absolute minimum of 250 words relevant to the subject of the page and really should have 500 or more. (This also helps for long-tail search terms).

## **Content freshness**

Particularly on the home page, content should be regularly updated. Search Engines like to know that the site has not just been abandoned and the home page is usually the best page to let the Search Engines know this.

There are however discussions about content changing too often; and whether this could count against you. At the moment the majority seem to think not, as news sites would suffer greatly in that case. Whereas, in actuality, they seem to be remarkably up-to-date in the Search Engine results pages for the latest news search terms.

Rather, there is the general belief that the regular 'relevant' updates to a page's content can help 'encourage' more regular visits by the Bots. This has the added benefit of also allowing SEO changes you make to be found, indexed and scored more quickly.

## **Duplicated content**

If too much content, either on-site or on external pages, is found to be duplicated by the search engines, then one of the pages will be 'deemed the best' and returned in the Search Results for a given search term. The others, although still in the index, will not be shown. There is no guarantee that the original webpage that had the original content will be the page returned.

Even if the message is to be exactly the same as another web-page it is best to ensure you do not simply reproduce the copy of the first page or use the copy of someone else; but generate your own new content.

## **Internal links**

Although not as important as back links from external sites, it is widely accepted that, the internal links of a site can also play their part in defining the importance of search terms for a given page.

This particularly includes the Anchor text (the clickable text), the information in the alt-tag of an image used as a link, the title tag of the link and also the content of the page that the link comes from (see above).

This ties in nicely in my opinion with regards to the importance of the usability and navigability of a site and I spend a reasonable amount of time thinking and working on making a site easy to use and ensuring that the internal links are used to good advantage.

## **Having the right search terms optimized**

Simply because a search term is thought to be very relevant to a business, especially to those 'in' the business, does not mean that anyone searches for it; or that those that do are your potential customers.

Not only that, but there is the factor of how easily and how well this search term can be put into the web page to be relevant, useful, readable and still FIT with other potential search terms.

## **Back links**

For Google, back-links are the single most important factor; however, just having lots of links is not enough. There are MANY examples of sites with many thousands of links to their site but that still appear much lower in the SERPs than sites with just a few quality back-links.

In general you only want quality links from reputable and relevant web pages. However, if you can't get quality links, any link not regarded as BAD is better than not having a link at all.

### Here are just some of the generally accepted sub-factors for back-links

- Relevance of the page the link is coming from to the page it links to.
- Relevance of the Anchor text (clickable text) or the alt-tag of an image link.
- Age of the page and site the link comes from.
- Trust of the page/site the link comes from (BBC - very good. Link farms – VERY bad)
- Number of links on the page the link is coming from
- Page Rank (PR) of the page the link is coming from (opinions vary here)
- NOT reciprocal (Reciprocal links to the wrong site could get you removed from the search results completely. Google accepts you can't control who links to you; but you do control who you link to)

One important factor often over-looked in considering back links is, that just having the back-link created does not automatically help you. Before it can help (or hinder) your 'value/score' the page with the link on needs to be indexed by the Search Engine AFTER the link is added; and then the page it links to needs to be indexed AFTER the page the link is on has been indexed.

So, if we add a link to a page and that page is not indexed for 4 weeks and then after that page has been indexed, the page it links to is not indexed for four weeks, then we are looking at 8 weeks before any value that link may add to the page is added (it is not unusual for some pages to go longer than 4 weeks without being indexed).

In some cases, where links are added to link farms etc they may never be indexed; as the Search Engines have labelled them as link farms and not worthy of indexing.

Also, if a webpage is deemed by the Search Engine to have been created solely for the purpose of adding value to a page it links to, it will be made valueless for SEO purposes even if it remains searchable.