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1 Introduction to Google

Before you start optimizing your website, you need to know who you are optimizing for. This simple introduction will get you fully acquainted with Google, the world's most popular search engine.

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Welcome to Google

Google is the world's most popular search engine, receiving more daily enquiries than any other. It has become the clear leader for search on the internet, performing nearly twice as many searches as its nearest rivals.

Google first appeared in 1997 as a very simple search box. Over the years it has retained its simplicity and has concentrated purely on making search more relevant. This is the reason for Google's massive growth and continued success.

Hot tip

To get the most relevant results when searching make sure your searches are as specific as possible.

Google has become an internet icon and in everyday conversations you will often hear people say "Just Google it". This shows the unprecedented impact that this simple search box has had on ordinary people's lives.

Google's core business is search, which it takes very seriously. This business consists of two main elements: natural search and sponsored listings.

Google, like any other business, will continue to grow and mature – an exciting future is open to the world's most popular search engine.

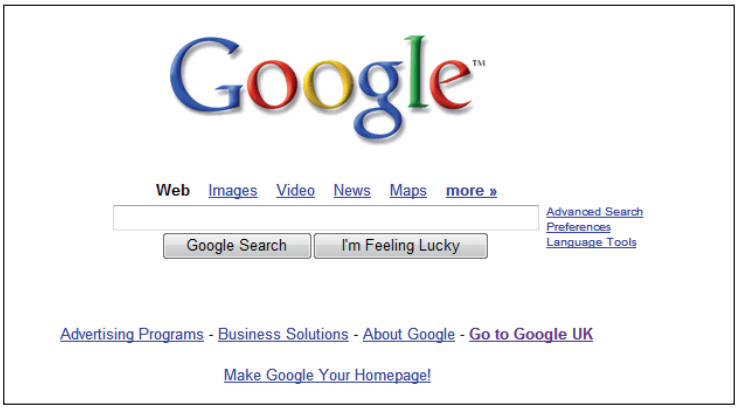
Google is an advertising vertical in its own right. If you use it properly, you'll be rewarded with a rich stream of highly converting traffic.

Businesses have come to learn very quickly that if their websites appear in the top search results of Google, the relevant traffic they attract will be colossal.

Any company can have their website appear in Google as long as it is deemed relevant. The problem most companies have is getting their websites into a position where they can be found.

How Google Works

Google uses an algorithm (See Glossary) to evaluate websites to determine their relevance.



Google's algorithm has hidden criteria, like its secret blend of spices that allow it to determine the most relevant website. The algorithm will weigh up various sites to see how relevant they are, and will score each one to see how closely it matches Google's ideal website before ranking it accordingly.

These points will be scored for details ranging from the title of the web page to the number of inward links it has pointing to it. The overall score is then assessed to see how relevant the page is for the searcher's specific search phrase. This will determine where a website will appear in the search engine's results.

To collect the information contained on websites, Google uses programs called spiders. Google's spiders will crawl the internet, moving from website to website via hyperlinks, and collecting data on their travels. Google will then take the information collected on each website and decide whether it is relevant enough to be placed in its search results and, if so, where.

Google will not automatically enter every website into its search results because this would make them less relevant, and relevance is Google's main objective.

Google's real power can be found in the algorithm which lies beneath its simple search box.

Beware

Google's complex algorithm means that it can and will detect attempts to fool it, and will penalize you.

Getting to Google's Heart

To get to Google's heart and have your site appear in this search engine is not the impossible feat people believe it to be.

There is one sure way to Google's heart and the top of this search engine, and that is through relevance.

Keeping your keywords relevant will maximize your chances of gaining top ranking positions in Google's results.

Google has founded its success upon relevance, and if you follow their simple guidelines, achieving top positions is not beyond anyone's reach.

If you have a well-designed website that contains unique and relevant content, then the chances are Google will like your site.

The main reason people experience problems is that they do not effectively promote their websites to Google. Website owners often misrepresent their sites with non-descriptive titles and headings, and fail to utilize the free tools available.

This costly mistake can mean the difference between a top ten placement and coming in at 129th. The first will see your traffic and profits soar and the second will ensure that your site is virtually invisible.

There is another deciding factor that Google uses to determine rank positions and this involves link building from other sites. Google will find out how many links are pointing to your website from other websites and use this information to determine relevance.

Effective link building will increase your chances of a high position in Google.

If Google finds links to your website from other relevant websites and those links use relevant keywords, Google will recognize this.

This is why linking from relevant sites is very beneficial and will increase your chances of being found in Google's search results. This has proved crucial in the growth of Google and the continued relevance of its search results.

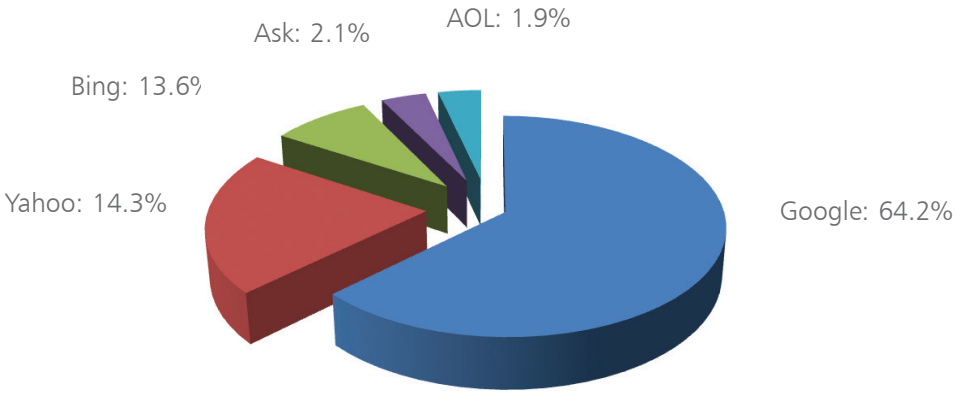
This is why, first and foremost, when creating and maintaining your website you must ensure that it remains relevant to your topic. If you stick to this simple yet effective rule, Google will find it easier to determine the relevance of your website.

Content is what Google wants and the more relevant to your subject the better. Give Google that and top rankings are sure to follow.

Why is Google so Important?

If you could be at the top of only one search engine, the one to choose would be Google. The reason for this is very simple: more people use Google than any other search engine. Google receives millions of enquiries every day – missing out on the targeted traffic that passes through this search engine would be a grave mistake.

In a study of US search trends, Nielsen found that Google accounted for 64.2% of the searches conducted. This is more than half the market, as you can see from the graph shown below:



Source: Nielsen

It is very difficult to bias or cheat your way into Google's clever algorithm.

People therefore find it reassuring to know that Google's results will be highly relevant to their searches. It helps people to build trust in the Google search engine and the websites it displays.

This gives Google the ability to advise people on the best websites to match their specific search queries. You can be assured of a large amount of targeted traffic if your website appears among the top results for your niche.

The best thing about this search traffic is that people landing at your website will be actively looking for your product or service, which means that you can be sure of a high conversion rate.

Don't forget

Ninety per cent of people find what they are looking for online by using a search engine.

Don't forget

Google accounts for over half of the searches conducted on the internet so make sure your website is easily accessible by Google.

Why Not Just Pay Per Click?

Businesses, now more than ever, are using Google to market their products and services as they realize the abundance of targeted traffic it provides.

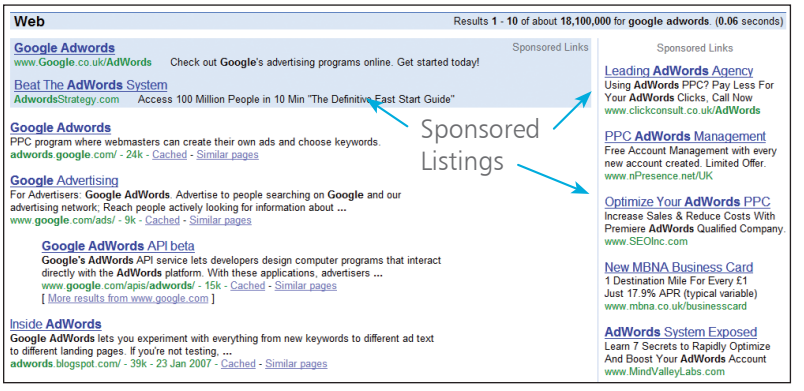
This then poses the question: do you optimize your website to appear in Google's natural search listings or do you pay to be placed in the sponsored listings?

It can sometimes seem an easy option just to pay for results, but is it really the right decision?

In a recent study, Google found that searchers were 72% more likely to click on a natural listing rather than a pay-per-click ad. This shows that although you can pay to get your website seen at the top of Google, it is not as effective as having it appear there naturally.

Searchers look for relevance in the ads they click on, in the same way that Google looks for relevance in the websites it shows in its natural listings. This is why natural search offers a much greater conversion rate: people know that the natural listings will tend to be more relevant to their search as they cannot be bought, only earned.

You can distinguish between Google's natural and sponsored listings as Google separates them in the following format:



The main benefit of natural listings is that they are free to earn and maintain. There are no click prices or fees as with pay per click. This is not to say that pay per click is not worth doing, just that natural listings are deemed more relevant and cost-effective.

Don't forget

Pay per click can seem an easy and fast way to achieve results but it is not always the most cost-effective option.

Hot tip

Naturally-ranked websites are more highly regarded than sponsored listings. Therefore, optimizing your site using relevant keywords and a user-friendly structure will be far more beneficial and will create more targeted traffic than pay per click would.

Beware

Approximately 65% of people never click on paid results so you must ensure your website is listed prominently in Google's natural listings.

What is Organic SEO?

Organic Search Engine Optimization, or Organic SEO as it is commonly called, is the process of optimizing your website to appear higher in the search engine's natural listings.

A dictionary definition of the word "optimization" is:

> "An act, process, or methodology of making something (as a design, system, or decision) as fully perfect, functional, or effective as possible; specifically: the mathematical procedures (as finding the maximum of a function) involved in this."
> *Source: Merriam Webster Online*

This is exactly what you need to do to your website to give it the prominence in the search engine that it deserves.

Search engine optimization involves the optimization of many different elements and, to optimize your website effectively, we will need to look at and optimize each of the following:

- Keywords
- Meta data
- Content
- Inward links
- Header tags
- Alt tags
- Internal links
- Website structure
- Website theme
- Website code

Once optimized, websites will stand a much greater chance of being found for their desired keywords. This is, after all, the whole reason for having a website.

There is no charge for appearing in Google's natural search engine listings, unlike other forms of advertising such as pay per click. This makes organic search engine optimization a very cost-effective method of advertising.

Don't forget

84% of searchers will never make it past page two of Google so you must ensure your website is listed within the first two pages of results.

Hot tip

It costs nothing to appear in Google's natural search results so ensure you make the most of this free advertising method.

The World as Google Sees it

Google sees the internet differently from the way searchers see it and it is important to understand this when designing your website, both initially and when optimizing it.

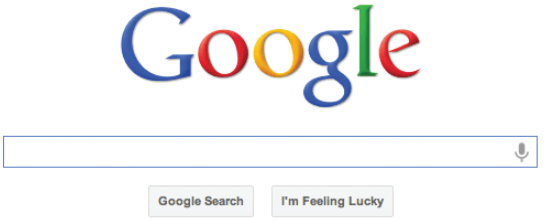
Paying attention to the coding of your website can often help when trying to find problems that are holding you back in Google.

Websites can often look fine at first glance but when you look at the world as Google sees it, by viewing the source code, you can see where the problems lie.

Hot tip

When optimizing your website, view it as Google sees it – look at the source code – as this can make it easier to identify any errors in the coding.

Website as we see it:



Hot tip

To view the source code select View from the toolbar and then select Source.

Website as Google sees it:

```
<html><head><meta http-equiv="content-type" content="text/html; charset=UTF-8">
body,td,a,p,.h{font-family:arial,sans-serif}
.h{font-size:20px}
.h{color:#3366cc}
.q{color:#00c}
--></style>
<script defer>
<!--
function sf(){document.f.q.focus();}
window.clk=function(b,c,d,h,i,j){if(document.images){var a=window.encodeURIComp
</script>
</head><body bgcolor=#ffffff text=#000000 link=#0000cc vlink=#551a8b alink=#ff0
function qs(el){if(window.RegExp&&window.encodeURIComponent){var ue=el.href,qe=
function togDisp(e){stopB(e);var elems=document.getElementsByName('more');for(v
function stopB(e){if(!e)e=window.event;e.cancelBubble=true;}
document.onclick=function(event){var elems=document.getElementsByName('more');i
//-->
</script><table border=0 cellspacing=0 cellpadding=4><tr><td nowrap><font size=
.cb{margin:.5ex}
--></style>
<span name=more id=more style="display:none;position:absolute;background:#fff;b
```

When your website is designed, make sure it is done in such a way that the page will validate (see p60-61), so that it looks good to searchers and so that Google can crawl it more easily.

Google takes information from your website code, not from the images we see, to assess your website. This is why it is important to ensure that your website code validates so that Google can find the information it needs.

Personalized Search

Over the last few years Google has been changing the search results and showing different people different results.

At first Google were only doing this to users that were signed into their Google accounts, but recently even non-signed-in users have been seeing personalized results.

Google is Personalizing results based on a number of factors including:

- Google+ activity
- Localization
- History

The effect of this is that essentially every users search could be unique and therefore different results could be seen for each user.

This is not to say that every search will be different, and in most cases the difference is very minimal.

An example could be that you do a new search for "widgets" and the top three results are widgets 1, widgets 2, and widgets 3. But if you were to do this search a few times, and click on widgets 3 the majority of the time, Google would begin to move that result higher up the list.

This is because when you search for the term "widgets" it knows you are more likely to be looking for that specific result based on your history and search behavior.

To combat personalized search website owners need to:

- Develop brand loyalty
- Make pages more accessible
- Ensure they are using the right keywords
- Create good, engaging website copy
- Increase website traffic

This can cause issues when you are checking your rankings, as the positions you see may differ slightly from what others see, but it is still an important metric.

Personalized search can result in you seeing different results when you check your website's rankings.

Ethical Optimization

There are two ways of optimizing your website to appear higher in the search engine's natural listings: the ethical way and the unethical way.

These are also known as "white hat SEO" and "black hat SEO". We will only cover the ethical way, using white hat SEO, as this is the only sustainable, long-term optimization technique.

To optimize using unethical methods can seem an attractive proposition as the results can be gained quickly, but these are often short-lived. The minute that Google realizes what you are doing, your website will be removed and your domain blacklisted.

This can cause immeasurable damage to your business as studies have shown that Google can blacklist the domain indefinitely. This could mean you would have to start with a new domain name and a new website.

It is important that when you are optimizing your website for Google you adhere to some simple, ethical rules to ensure that what you're doing is not against Google's code of practice. This will avoid future problems and ensure that everything that you do will be helping your ranking and not harming your site.

It is important to familiarize yourself with Google's webmaster guidelines as they will help you ensure you are not breaking any rules. These rules can be found on Google's home page by navigating to the About Google section. Once you have familiarized yourself with Google's guidelines, you will be in a much better position to decide on the ethical approach you wish to take to market your site, keeping Google's rules in mind.

It is very important that when optimizing websites you only use ethical search engine optimization and stay away from so called "black hat SEO" techniques. Using black hat techniques will ultimately prove beneficial to no one. Potential clients will be drawn to your site under false pretences, believing your site to contain content relevant to their specific search, but when arriving at your site will find this information non-existent.

This is the reason Google will penalize you for using such activities: the site would be irrelevant and so would jeopardize the quality of the search results.

Hot tip

To ensure you avoid any problems, familiarize yourself fully with Google's rules before optimizing your website.

Beware

If you decide to go against Google's rules and employ unethical techniques your site can be penalized and even removed.