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WHITEPAPER

Google's Quality Score – How it will affect your Website

Google lays down the law on Internet Marketing

'Content is King'



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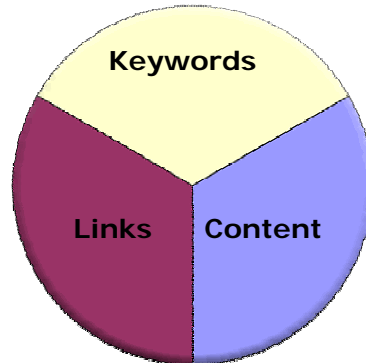
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Executive Summary

The vast majority of internet users, whether for business purposes or not, use search engines to find what they want. Your visibility to these users depends on your ability to get listed high up in the search engine listings. Traditionally this involved getting the necessary balance between your Keywords, Internal and External Links and Site Content. The relative importance of each depended on the sort of industry you were in and the type of site you had. Over the years, Internet Marketeers developed stratagems to maximise their listing positions and in response, the search developed increasingly sophisticated algorithms to identify these stratagems and counteract them if they felt that amounted to sharp practice. For instance building links or peppering website content with keywords purely for the purpose of boosting your listing position, rather than enhancing your users' site experience, is frowned upon by the search engines and lead to delisting in some circumstance.

This whitepaper examines the differences in the approach of the major search engines in determining which site winds up on top of their listings, and in particular focusses on how Google is using its dominant position to drive out bad practice in internet marketing, and how this will impact on web design generally.

Google, Yahoo and MSN all differ in how they list your site.



Keywords, content and links are important to all, but how they are assessed can be different and indeed are changing all the time, necessitating constant vigilance on the part of webmasters and site owners, large and small.

Inbound link quality is the only factor with the same relative influence across the board. The engines look at a target site to determine the influence and reputation of each inbound link.

At Google, inbound links rank in the following order: quality, relevance, title keyword, anchor keyword, quantity. Further down the list, site factors such as title keyword, anchor keyword, body keyword, content relevance and title content weigh into the equation.

Yahoo places the most importance on inbound link quality. To a lesser degree than Google, it looks at inbound links for relevance, anchor keyword, title keyword and quantity. Further down in organic results priority, are general site characteristics like title content, title keyword, anchor keyword, body keyword and content relevance.

Inbound links rank at the top of MSN's equation as well, but are ordered differently. Inbound links are looked at for quality, anchor keyword, relevance, and title keyword. Inbound link quantity is weighted, but not quite as heavily. The search engine then looks at title keyword, body keyword, anchor keyword, content relevance, and title content.



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Just when you thought you understood it.....

Google, which is the overwhelmingly dominant force in UK search engine marketing terms, has now added a potential complication with its new Quality Adwords Score. According to Chris Clark of Clark Marketing, one of the country's leading authorities on the subject, it purports to assess the quality of a website's page 'quality'.

Its main application at present is to enable Google to assess the quality of the website pages to which its pay per click adverts are directed. It uses the information to determine how much to charge its Adwords clients, the theory being that the better the 'Quality Score', the less you have to pay to keep the same position in the list of ads on the right hand side of Google's pages.

Google claims that the introduction of the Quality Score is consistent not only with its emphasis on website content but also its determination to drive out bad practice, and given Google's market dominance for those dependant on AdWords for business, it is a wise advertiser that plays to the new rules.

Equally wise would be to take on board the Quality Score's criteria for website construction and content generally, because it cannot surely be that long before Google applies similar rigour (or at least a variation of it) to its Organic listings. Indeed some claim that it is already doing so, and certainly, as stated above, Google is very keen to promote the philosophy that '**Content is King**'.

Google's approach is consistent in that it has always believed that the content of a website is the overriding characteristic that its users are interested in. By all means, create sites that are aesthetically pleasing and use the latest technology to increase the attraction and 'stickability', but do not lose site of the content.

So what is Google's Quality Score...

Definitive information on the Google Quality Score is still fairly thin on the ground, but it has obviously been vigorously debated in internet marketing forums throughout the world and this represents a summary of the latest thinking. Of course, it could change, and if it does, watch out for further whitepapers in the future.

Bearing in mind that it is currently directed at Adwords advertisers, much of it relates to the relationship between the advert and the landing page to which it is directed. However, in targeting its advertisers, Google offers general advice on website construction and design which are commonsense, but which are often ignored by website designers, and could in due course affect your website's listing, whether you use pay per click advertising or not. The main points are:

- **Make a site with a clear hierarchy and text links. Every page should be reachable from at least one static text link.**
- **Offer a site map to your users with links that point to the important parts of your site. If the site map is larger than 100 or so links, you may want to break the site map into separate pages.**
- **Create a useful, information-rich site, and write pages that clearly and accurately describe your content.**
- **Think about the words users would type to find your pages, and make sure that your site actually includes those words within it.**
- **Try to use text instead of images to display important names, content, or links. The Google crawler doesn't recognize text contained in images.**



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- **Make sure that your TITLE and ALT tags are descriptive and accurate.**
- **Check for broken links and correct HTML.**
- **If you decide to use dynamic pages (i.e., the URL contains a "?" character), be aware that not every search engine spider crawls dynamic pages as well as static pages. It helps to keep the parameters short and the number of them few.**
- **Keep the links on a given page to a reasonable number (fewer than 100).**

Summary

Although the principles behind Google's stance on internet marketing and website design and construction may be laudable, there is no doubt that to ensure compliance requires an ongoing pro-active approach from designers and web owners. The days of complacency, where you thought that by merely having a website with the regulation keywords, a few links and a bit of content that could be left unchanged for months or years are long gone. Few Small to Medium sized businesses possess the skills in house to ensure that they can keep up with the increasingly sophisticated requirements to maintain an effective internet presence

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About WSI – We Simplify the Internet

With our headquarters based in Toronto, Canada, WSI has been developing profitable Internet Solutions since the mid 1990s. Our network of certified Internet Consultants and Marketing Specialists is the largest of its kind and we're ranked the #1 Internet Services Franchise in the world by industry-leading *Entrepreneur* magazine.



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WSI is committed to improving the profitability of our customers through the use of leading-edge Internet technologies, delivered by knowledgeable and service-oriented **Internet Marketing Consultants**. As more businesses realize the importance of the Internet to their continued success and growth, WSI is ready to serve their needs with affordable Internet Marketing solutions.

In support of our mission, WSI holds memberships with the Canadian Marketing Association and SEMPO (Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization). These industry associations give our Internet Marketing Consultants access to cutting-edge training and resources and share in our belief of following responsible marketing practices. When you work with WSI you can be sure you're working with true SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) industry professionals.

Thanks to the trust and support of our customers over the years, our network has grown to over 1,500 Internet and Marketing Consultants serving small- to medium-sized businesses in 87 countries worldwide.