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Understanding SEO terms

and links to further SEO wisdom

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SEO's have their own language:

“As SEOs, we study algo. correlations, to raise rankings on organic SERPs, reduce bounce rate, increase CTR, dwell-time, and hopefully conversions, in an effort to gain a greater ROI. We do this by using Keyword analysis of Semantic baskets, creating linking strategies and socializing content to encourage backlinking and thus forging conduits for link-juice to flow to our desired target web page.”

Yup, clear as mud. So you either don't understand what this means, in which case read-on, all will be revealed, or you do understand this, and probably want to start an argument, but you can still use this article to give to your clients so they can understand at least half of what you say.

General Terms Used in SEO

Algo. short for Algorithm - this is the process that Google uses to determine the precision that a given web page satisfies a given user query. There are many ranking factors taken into account within the algorithm. The Google Algorithm is thought to contain some 200+ terms, that come into play depending on the type of query that is requested. Google offers a short article: [Inside Search - Algorithms](#).¹

Alt tag - Technically not a tag but text within the image tag.

Example: `` the alt="" should be representative of the image. Used in accessibility for the seeing impaired, also displayed in browsers where images are not displayed and lastly by search engines to index the images in their image search results. Further reading by Catharine McNally: No More Excuses - [The Definitive Guide to the Alt-text Field](#)²

Anchor, Anchor Text or Anchor Hypertext - see Links

Analytics - the presentation of search metrics by a software program, also see GA

Authority and Trust - a measure of the amount of the confidence a search engine has that a web page will satisfy a specific search query fully. This metric is calculated using all the ranking factors in a weighted algorithm. also known as link juice or google love. In this article and sound recording, Darren Dematas interviews David Amerland about [Why Trust and Authority is the Ticket To Brand Visibility in Google Search](#)³

Backlinks or Inbound Links - are links from other web documents to a web page. Search Engine Land explains a bit about [Link Building and Ranking in Search Engines](#)⁴ as explained in the article the Link Quality, the Anchor Text and the Total Number of Links all play a role.

Blackhat - describes SEO workers that use techniques that run counter to the best practices published by search engines. So they're chaotic-evil orc-lovers. Also see "gaming the system" and Negative SEO.

Bot or robot - see crawling, also called spiders or crawlers

Bounce Rate - is the ratio between how many times a result is clicked and the number of times the user returns to search to find a better answer. High bounce rates signal Google that the web page may not be a good result to include in this specific query.

Causation - is the reason something occurs, for example, a result will show up in a SERP because keywords in the title of the linked web page match those in the query. The keyword in the title is the causation of the result showing up in the SERP. Where in the result shows up in the SERP is another story. see also Correlation Here is a video with Mark Traphagen, Eric Enge and Rand Fishkin: [Correlations, Causation, and all that Jazz](#) ⁵

Canonical links - many CMS create multiple links to a single document as a matter of course, like:

1. www.domainname.com/blog/article-about-horses
2. www.domainname.com/blog/categories/horses/article-about-horses
3. www.domainname.com/blog/tag/thoroughbred/article-about-horses

The problem comes because a search engine bot will see these as 3 different web documents and may treat them as duplicate content or merely divvy up the link juice among them thus not giving enough authority to any of the links for it to rise in SERPs. Moz's article on [Canonicalization](#) ⁶ for further reading.

Client side - refers to things that happen on a web page within a browser using the computing power of the user's computer and directed by the HTML, CSS, JavaScript and its derivatives, presented by the web page. See also Server Side

Cloaking - showing different content to bots than to users, like a bait 'n' switch.

CMS - content management system, like wordpress, that contains a WYSIWYG editor.

Content - refers mostly to written articles but can include other web documents like video, slideshows, images and sound files, the totality of which makes up the Content of your web page.

Conversion - this is when a user performs a desired task, like following a link or sending an email. The conversion is said to be the goal of the web page.

Correlation - A correlation is seen when there is a high incidence of Event B occurring when Event A occurs. Unfortunately, this does not mean that Event A is the cause for Event B to occur, even though it might seem like it is. There are many correlations in SEO that are not the causation of higher rankings, there are other factors involved. see also Causation

Crawling - this is when a search engine robot or bot (this is software on a real robot) follows hyperlinks to a web page and makes note of the address and relative keywords contained within the web page. The web page can also be said to have been *indexed*.

CSS - Cascading Style Sheet, a text document linked to by an HTML document that offers consistent styling for the HTML tags across a website. Example `#idname{color:red;text-decoration:underline}` tells the browser that the HTML element with `id = "idname"` should have a text color of red and be underlined.

CTR - Click Through Rate refers to the number of times a link to the web page is clicked compared to the number of times the link is shown

Directory - a website that offers business listings by category, like yellowpages.

Duplicate Content - is content that is linked to using different URL's. also see canonical links. further reading: [What is Duplicate Content?](#)⁷ by Moz

Dwell Time - How much time a user "Dwells" on a given web page. A metric used by search engines but not publically accessible by analytics. Longer dwell times may indicate higher relevance for the query. Further reading: Neil Patel, [What is Dwell Time?](#)⁸

Evergreen Content - Content that does not have an expiry date. Example: an analysis of Newton's First Law is a good today as it was in 1960 conversely who Miley Cyrus kissed last night will not matter in 3 weeks, this is time-limited content, its value expires rapidly. Any business has content that will withstand the test of time, it is as valid today as it was yesterday and will continue to be so. This is Evergreen Content. see also Informational Content.

GA - Google Analytics, a code snippet, that sends Google information about the web page, who tracks it and offers it up to the webmaster for evaluation. If interested, Google offers an Analytics Academy where you can learn about GA.

Gaming the System - refers to using practices that work against the best practices published by search engines. The aim is to exploit deficiencies in the search engine algorithm and create a shortcut to higher positions in SERPs. The practice of creating copious numbers of low quality backlinks to a web page in order to make it rank higher, in the days before the Panda update, was considered by some as gaming the system.

Geo-location - refers to the Geographic Location of the trade area of the website and can be set by a meta-tag. Google boosts ranking for some local web pages over others because it assumes you would rather buy the service closer to home, or in the case of mobile, your current location. If you are searching for "auto repair" on your phone and you are located 500km from home, Google tends to return the geographically closest results. [Bill Slawski talks about Local Inter-Connectivity in his article: The Incomplete Google Ranking Signals, Part 1](#)⁹

Googlebot - a robot or bot employed by Google to crawl web pages. see crawling

Google Loving - see authority

Google Review - User generated reviews posted by users on to a business's Google+ business or brand page, usually accessed through the Local Search results presented in Google SERP. Here's a video showing [How to Write a Google Review to Help Local Business](#)¹⁰

Grey hats - SEO's that are chaotic neutral. Sometimes it is just not easy to colour inside the lines, especially when the lines keep changing.

HTML - Hyper Text Markup Language uses tags to denote the elements of a web page. Each element has a different set of attributes. An example of which is <p>Some Text</p>. the <p> element tells the browser that "Some Text" should be treated as a paragraph, the styling of which can be taken care of with CSS.

Inbound links - see backlinks

Inbound Marketing - marketing initiatives that entice customers to visit a web page. It gives customers a reason to visit. Denver Proffit Jr. writes a good article on [What is Inbound Marketing?](#)¹¹

Indexed - this is the process where the search engine collects and stores relevant information about a web page so the information can be quickly retrieved. Google's [Inside Search - Crawling & Indexing](#)¹² has further information on this subject.

Informational Content - content geared to inform users on a topic. Search Engine Land has an interesting article on this and why you want to write it: [The Informational Content Advantage](#)¹³

IR - Information Retrieval, which is the basic function of search engines. SEO's study IR systems to better understand how search engines work, what the limitations are, and the processes used. If you really, really want to know more about IR you can read Christopher D. Manning, Prabhakar Raghavan & Hinrich Schütze: [Introduction to Information Retrieval](#)¹⁴

Keywords - the words the search engine uses to match the query to a web page. Short Tail Keywords are can be a single word like "shoes" or short phrase like "black shoes" both of these would be considered short tail keywords. Long Tail Keywords are keywords that are phrases that narrow the search results in some way, like "black sling-back shoes" which returns 1.5 million results today, whereas the previous search for "black shoes" returned 464 million results. Even longer tail queries cut the number of results down further like "black slingback shoes rome" returns only 293,000 results.

Keyword Density - an outdated metric that is a ratio of a specific keyword to the total number of words in a web document. In the past a perfect keyword density would raise a web page in SERPs.

Keyword Research - is the determination of what keywords to target in web pages in general and in specific marketing campaigns. It looks at many factors like Keyword competitiveness, the value to the client, the current authority of the client, the cost of acquisition and many other factors. See also Semantic Baskets. Further reading by Moz: [Keyword Research - a Beginner's Guide](#)¹⁵

Landing Page - the page a user is brought to when they click a link, it is where the user "lands". Landing pages are important because specific user behavior metrics can be tracked for specific marketing initiatives. Several landing pages can have the same conversion goal but users are brought there through differing web marketing initiatives, in this way the effectiveness of a specific web marketing initiative can be measured relative to the others.

Oli Gardner & Carlos Del Rio write a great article about Landing Pages in [35 Beautiful Landing Page Design Examples to Drool Over \[With Critiques\]](#) ¹⁶

Links - hyperlinks are the foundation of the internet. It was invented by Sir Tim Berners-Lee at CERN in the early 1980's. They are a word or group of words known as an *anchor* or *anchor hypertext* that, when clicked, will open a whole new document. Here is a fuller discussion on [hyperlinks](#) ¹⁷ from Wikipedia. Note the anchor hypertext "hyperlink" in the previous sentence, represents a link to another article on the Wikipedia domain. Also see Backlinks.

Link Juice - see authority

Local Results or Google Local - is a special section of the SERP that is tied to the Google Maps property that lists results geographically close to the user's location. It includes a map with pins marking the location of the business and other information drawn from the businesses Google+ Business Listing. see also Google Reviews. Here is [How to Claim Your Local Listing](#) ¹⁸ by yours truly.

Long Tail - see keywords

LSI - Latent Semantic Indexing - is a system used by search engines to associate certain keywords with other commonly found keywords within a web document. For Example in a query "horses" other keywords like ranch, riding, veterinarian, may also be indexed using LSI. In the absence of additional terms the search engine may return results containing all these keywords in the web page. But add "sick" to the query and the search engine may raise those web pages with the word "veterinarian" in them. LSI has associated horse, sick and veterinarian with each other. see also Semantic Basket. Further Reading by Zara Altair [What is Semantic Writing?](#) ¹⁹

Meta Tags - are located in an HTML document in the head, i.e. between the <head> and </head> tags. They are statements that give information about the document, like description, geolocation, character set, etc. see also title tag. More about Meta Tags by Matt Cutts: [Meta Tags that Google understands](#) ²⁰

Metric - a measurement of something, as in "conversion metric" measures how many times a desired action is performed in relation to the offering.

Mirror - identical site located at a different URL. Often employed by sites that offer large downloads so the different servers can service multiple users at the same time easily and a single server is not monopolized at any given time.

Negative SEO - the process of sending negative ranking signals to competitor websites in order to diminish authority ... and raise one's own relatively. Also posing as a competitor in social media to cast dispersions on the competitor thus lower the authority of the brand in the eyes of the public.

nofollow - a meta tag that tells bots not to follow outbound links from a page. It can also be included as an attribute on a specific link in which case it will only affect that link.

noindex - a meta tag that tells bots not to include this web page in its index. It can also be included as an attribute on a specific link in which case it will only affect that link in that the link will not pass along link juice to the target.

Organic or Organic Search Results: The page returned by Google is cut up into different sections, though this may not be obvious at first. There are advertisements at the top and right-hand side of the page. There may be an “answer box” on the right side. Local Listings (currently a pack of 3) with a map, may dominate position 1 or 2 of the organic results. There may be more ads at the bottom of the screen. What is left over are “organic results.” These are results that are found and returned by the search engine based upon the “best” answer to the query. It should be noted that organic results still get clicked about 94% of the time (see Danny Goodwin: [Organic vs. Paid Search Results: Organic Wins 94% of Time](#))²¹

Page Rank of PR - is an analysis of the links, used by Google, to determine the importance of a web page to a specific user query. The scale is exponential from 0 to 10. Further reading by Bruce Clay: [What is Google PageRank and How is it Earned or Transferred?](#)²²

PPC - Pay-Per-Click Advertising, as in you pay each time your ad is clicked and the user is taken to your web page.

Query = the words typed into the search box - this is where it all starts

Ranking Factors and Signals are weighted terms used by the Search Engine Algorithm to rank the usefulness of a specific web page against a specific query. There are 2 main groups of ranking factors, **On Page**, which takes into account the way a web page is structured, and **Off Page**, which takes in many factors that are not in direct control of the SEO workers but, none-the-less they try to influence. This is where most of the SEO work is done. Pawel Grabowski has written a good article: [30 Most Important Google Ranking Factors a Beginner Should Know](#)²³

Redirect - the redirection of a user from one URL to different URL. This is done for many legitimate reasons. Often this is done in the .htaccess file of a website, known as a 301 permanent redirect. This can be employed when a web site is moved from one domain to another or if the website is re-coded in a different language, i.e. moving from HTML to PHP the URL changes but the SEO does not want to lose any of the authority of the original web page. A 301 redirect seamlessly redirects the client to the new webpage and passes most of the link juice along with it. A 302 redirect indicates that the redirect is temporary and will at some point switch back to the original. JavaScript redirects can also be employed in a similar fashion but are usually in response to an action, or series of actions taken by the user on a website.

robots.txt - a file on a website that tells bots where they can and cannot go.

ROI - return on investment, for example the cost of ongoing SEO work vs. the benefit gained by higher rankings.

SE = search engine like Google, Yahoo and Bing

SEM - Search Engine Marketing. The whole enchilada, the combined efforts of various initiatives to raise search engine traffic to your website. SEO is part of this, as is PPC and the creation of sales funnels on the landing page of the web site.

SEO - Search Engine Optimization is the process of rising a web page or website to higher visibility in the natural, or unpaid search results. Why? Because the top 5 results get about two-thirds of all the clicks in any given search.

Semantic Basket: Groups of related keywords around a keyword concept. David Harry explains this and how it can raise the relevance of a web page for a specific query in [Understanding Semantic Search and SEO](#) ²⁴

SERP = search engine results page which is the page that is returned by the search engine to the user after they type a query. This usually consists of a number of advertisements, and 10 "blue links" to web pages that will hopefully satisfy the user query.

Server Side or Backend: things that happen which use the computing power of the server hosting the web page code, located somewhere in cyberspace. These actions are usually invisible to the user and to robots. They are usually controlled by programming languages like PHP and ASP. See also Client Side. CodeConquest writes a short article on the subject [Client Side vs. Server Side](#) ²⁵

Short Tail - see keywords

sitemap - a text document that tells a bot all the links to all the pages on a website. It defines the link-structure for the website in an attempt to make it easier to understand. This is a free service for generating sitemaps: [Sitemap Generator](#)

SMM - Social Media Marketing - marketing initiatives using Social Media. Jay Baer offers advice on [How to Fix Your Social Media Marketing Strategy](#) ²⁶

Spider - see bot

Splash Page - a landing page with pizzaz, usually engineered to elicit an emotional response from a user. Attention must be given to splash pages so they do not hinder bots from crawling deeper into the website. Also graphics must be formed so that social shares of relevant images for the splash page are available. It make no sense to create a beautiful page, often at great cost, that shares through social media as a plain blue hyperlink.

Static Page - a web page that has no dynamic content. Good for SEO purposes.

Time-limited or Time-sensitive Content - The opposite of Evergreen Content. Content whose value expires quickly. Example: Celebrity News Stories.

Time on Page - see Dwell Time

Title Tag - arguably the most important tag in a web page document. It tells search engines and users alike what the document is about. It shows up as a link to the web page.

UI - User Interface, which is basically the web page itself.

URL - Uniform Resource Locator, basically a web address where a web document is located. further reading on Wikipedia: [Uniform resource locator](#) ²⁷

User-generated Content - content that has been created by the users of a website, Wikipedia is a stunning example of how this can work well. here is what they have to say about it [User-generated Content](#)

UX - User eXperience, which is a determined by a combination of the CTR and Dwell Time, see [Web Development, Measuring User Behaviour.](#) ²⁸

White Hat - describes SEO workers that use techniques that are inline with the best practices published by search engines. White hats colour inside the lines. In D&D terms these guys are lawful-good.

WMT - Web Master Tools, a Google console that offers data to the webmaster about the website.

WYSIWYG - What You See Is What You Get. Usually refers to content editors where the visual editor and the final product look pretty much the same, like in wordpress.

A bit about me:

I am a website developer, that likes to look “under the hood” of websites, to see what makes them run. It follows that I like to know how search engines work - you can read more of my stuff about [search engine optimization - SEO](#) here. I became interested in how search works about the time that Google released the Panda update, and Hummingbird followed closely behind. This time will be remembered as *The Golden Years of SEO* because the ability to “game the system” has been severely curtailed and Marketers and SEO workers must use a set of Best Practices to have their websites show up on page #1 of Google...

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