

SEO Basics

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Tue, Mar 26 **Content Marketing (aka The New SEO)**
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Defining **SEO**

Search engine optimization is about making sure people can find your site when they start looking for you, your brand or your products.

SEO is **not** about trying to outrun the search engine algorithm. Search results are basically based on two major factors: authority and relevance to your search terms.

Your Domain is the first way people judge you

We all do it, we make snap judgments about people, brands and websites. The beautiful blonde in the mini-skirt is dumb, the expensive shoes must be better than the cheap ones and the well-designed website can't possibly be a scam.

Choose a domain name that has an easily recognized connection to your business and its keywords. For example **clownshoes.com** would be a great niche site for selling shoes to circus clowns.

An exact match domain isn't as strong a signal to Google as it used to be. For a long time if your domain was clownshoes.com you would rank #1 for the query "clown shoes" no matter how terrible the site was. Now, Google has scaled back the amount of weight an exact match domain (EMD) has.

If you pick a domain like 1918.com you'll spend the rest of your life explaining why you chose it.

On-Page vs. Off-Page Optimization

There are two paths that need to be explored while doing SEO. There are on-page aspects that a site owner has full control over and off-site where you have less control over.

Since on-page optimization is generally easier and more within a normal site owner's control, let's start there.

Page Title is still the king of on-page optimization

The ranking signal that you have total control over is the **title of your page**.

Every page on your site should have a unique and well thought out title. Each title

should include a keyword that you are targeting on that page. If you don't know what keyword you're targeting on a page, consider deleting that page.

For all but the strongest brands, you should have your page title constructed with the title of the page followed by the brand. For example:

```
<title>Web Design Raleigh NC | Professional Website Designers | Click Optimize</title>
```

This title tag is for Click Optimize's web design page, so they list "web design" first and also repeat "web design" and add another keyword that many people search for "professional", and then at the end include their brand name. Perfect.

Your URL

Beyond the domain of your site, the individual pages can have the advantage of a well-formed URL that is easy to remember, has relevant keywords and makes sense.

An example of a good URL would be something like:



www.annasgourmetgoodies.com/gift-basket-of-gourmet-cookies-and-brownies

The reason that URL works is that it's easily understandable to humans and robots as well as rich with keywords that are relevant to the product on that page. The only improvement that might make sense would be to also include a category.

You will want to front-load your keywords in your url. Don't wait until the last word to use the word that is what you want your page to be known for.

Headline and First Paragraph

The title of a page and the page headline should be similar, but do not have to be identical. They should work together.

Also put additional thought into the first paragraph of the page. Google values content near the top of the page more than at the bottom. Try to use the most important keyword in the title, the URL, the headline and in the first paragraph.

It does not need to be the exact same keyword, synonyms or variations are fine to use.

Keywords will help you write better content

Before you begin creating content for your website have a list of keywords you are targeting. Don't do this by yourself. Ask your customers, friends, spouse, parents, kids and anyone else who will answer you. You are not always the best person to know how people will be searching for your business. Sometimes you can be too deep in the jargon to be able to think like an average person.

The question to ask is, "If you were searching for my business, what would you type into the search box?"

Once you have a list of keywords (and phrases) you can start to create a content strategy that will help focus your site. Once you know what's important, all of your content decisions become a lot easier.

Keep focused on your keywords, where they belong and what parts of your site are aimed at those keywords.

Before drafting content consider what keywords are your most important and map out how to create pages to fit each important group of keywords within your site theme and navigational structure.

Great content is **essential**

Have you ever searched for something, find a crappy site with dull content and read it then share it with all your friends? Yeah, neither have I.

If you are tired or don't feel like writing then don't write. If you are incapable of writing something interesting, then hire someone. Don't write crap. Crap content will not convert visitors to customers!

PRO TIP: If the first thing you do each day is consume content, try creating content during that same block of time for one week.

Personalized search

Google especially has been giving you personalized results for some time now. In late 2009 Google went all in and has been giving your more and more personalization. It doesn't matter if you're logged in or not, they know who you are and what you've been searching for. They keep track of you via a cookie for 6 months via your machine and IP address.

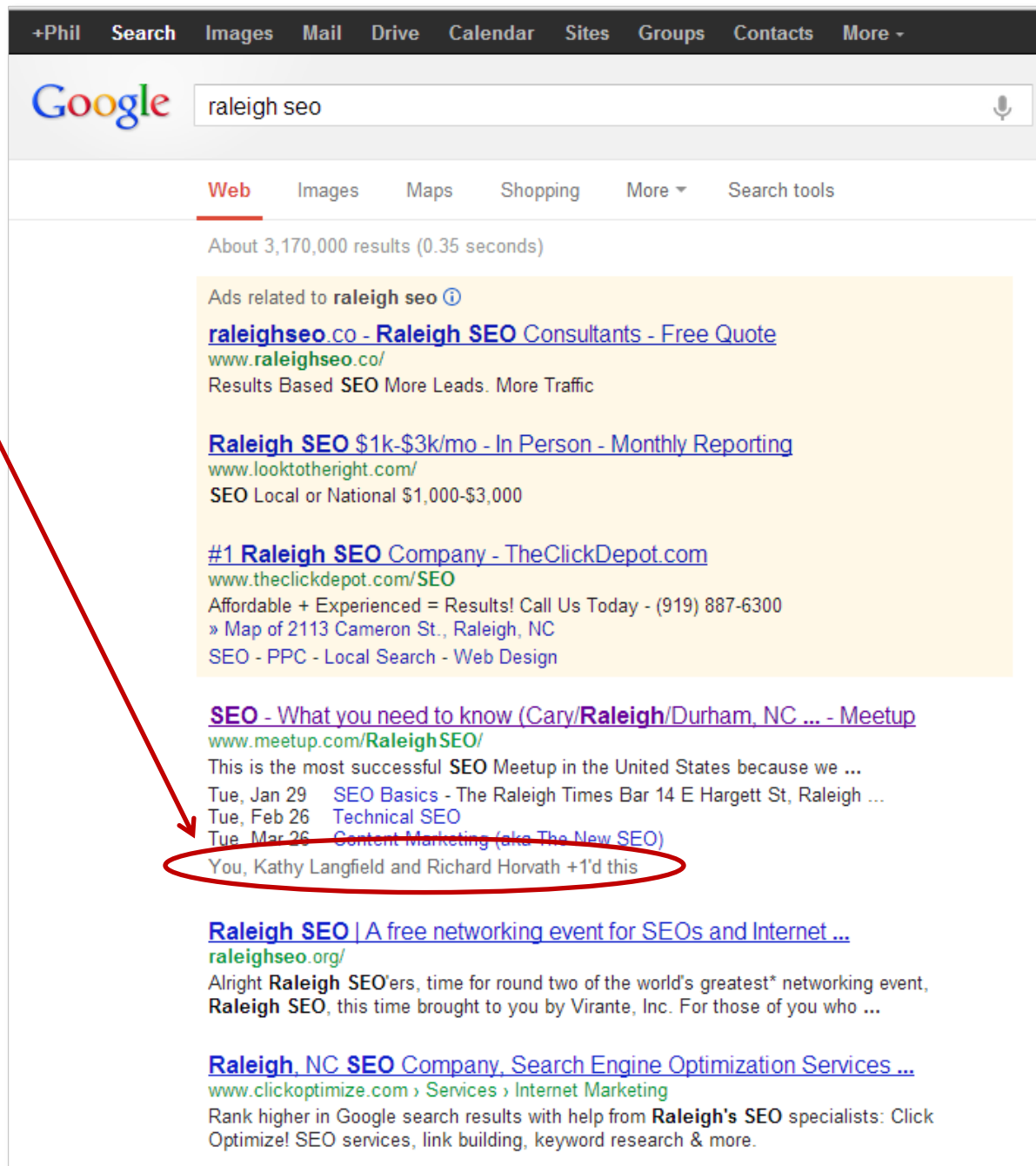
If you are in any way connected to people through Facebook, Twitter, Google+ etc, then those friends will impact the search results you see.

We may see similar results, but we may also see very different results, it will all depend on our social graph and the search we're performing.

Think about people on the opposite side of any issue – abortion, gun control, politics, religion, baseball.

If you are always drawn to sites that are anti-abortion then your search results will show you more of those results, and your friend who is pro-life will see more of those sites in their results.

In some ways this is good, but in other ways it means you are no longer always exposed to things you may have been previously.



The screenshot shows a Google search for "raleigh seo". The search bar at the top contains the text "raleigh seo". Below the search bar, there are tabs for "Web", "Images", "Maps", "Shopping", and "More". The search results show "About 3,170,000 results (0.35 seconds)".

The first section is "Ads related to raleigh seo". It contains three ads:

- [raleighseo.co - Raleigh SEO Consultants - Free Quote](http://raleighseo.co)
www.raleighseo.co/
Results Based SEO More Leads. More Traffic
- [Raleigh SEO \\$1k-\\$3k/mo - In Person - Monthly Reporting](http://www.looktotheright.com/)
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» Map of 2113 Cameron St., Raleigh, NC
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The second section is "SEO - What you need to know (Cary/Raleigh/Durham, NC ... - Meetup". It contains a list of events:

- www.meetup.com/RaleighSEO/
This is the most successful SEO Meetup in the United States because we ...
- Tue, Jan 29 [SEO Basics](#) - The Raleigh Times Bar 14 E Hargett St, Raleigh ...
- Tue, Feb 26 [Technical SEO](#)
- Tue, Mar 26 [Content Marketing \(aka The New SEO\)](#)

A red arrow points from the left side of the page to the "Content Marketing (aka The New SEO)" event. Below this event, the text "You, Kathy Langfield and Richard Horvath +1'd this" is circled in red.

The third section is "Raleigh SEO | A free networking event for SEOs and Internet ...". It contains the following text:

raleighseo.org/
Alright **Raleigh SEO**'ers, time for round two of the world's greatest* networking event, **Raleigh SEO**, this time brought to you by Virante, Inc. For those of you who ...

The fourth section is "Raleigh, NC SEO Company, Search Engine Optimization Services ...". It contains the following text:

www.clickoptimize.com » [Services](#) » [Internet Marketing](#)
Rank higher in Google search results with help from **Raleigh's SEO** specialists: Click Optimize! SEO services, link building, keyword research & more.

Social Signals

Search engines are now giving more weight to signals from social media. Bing is using Facebook signals and Google is using Google+ signals mainly, but they both try to get a wide view of what's happening on the social platforms. If you are not active on social media, you'll start to lose ground to those who are similar to you, but are actively using the social web.

Getting Links

Although they are not as important as they used to be, the links pointing at your site are still the biggest single factor in how the search engines evaluate your site.

5 years ago backlinks may have been 85% of your ranking, now it may only be 45% but it is still a gigantic factor. Social links are rated just like traditional links. All links are weighted by who is linking to you, and what they are linking to.

There are a number of ways to get links.

1. Publish something that is so amazing that word of it spreads like wildfire (chance of this happening is 0.001%)
2. Publish something very, very good and use your friends to help amplify it so that it can gain some traction. (chance of this happening is about 5% for an average person)
3. Publish something very controversial that calls out someone who is famous and terribly vain who responds and thus sets in motion a perfect link bait scenario. (chance of this happening is about 5%)
4. Publish something really stupid or funny and start pushing it on sites like Reddit and Digg. (chance of making this work 20%)
5. Publish better than average work on a regular schedule that speaks to your audience. (chance of this working is about 67%)
6. Buy links. (chance of this working is 100%)

Should you buy links?

Probably not. As your mom used to tell you in middle school, “You’re not ready for that type of relationship yet.”

Reason #1 is that is 100% against Google’s Guidelines.

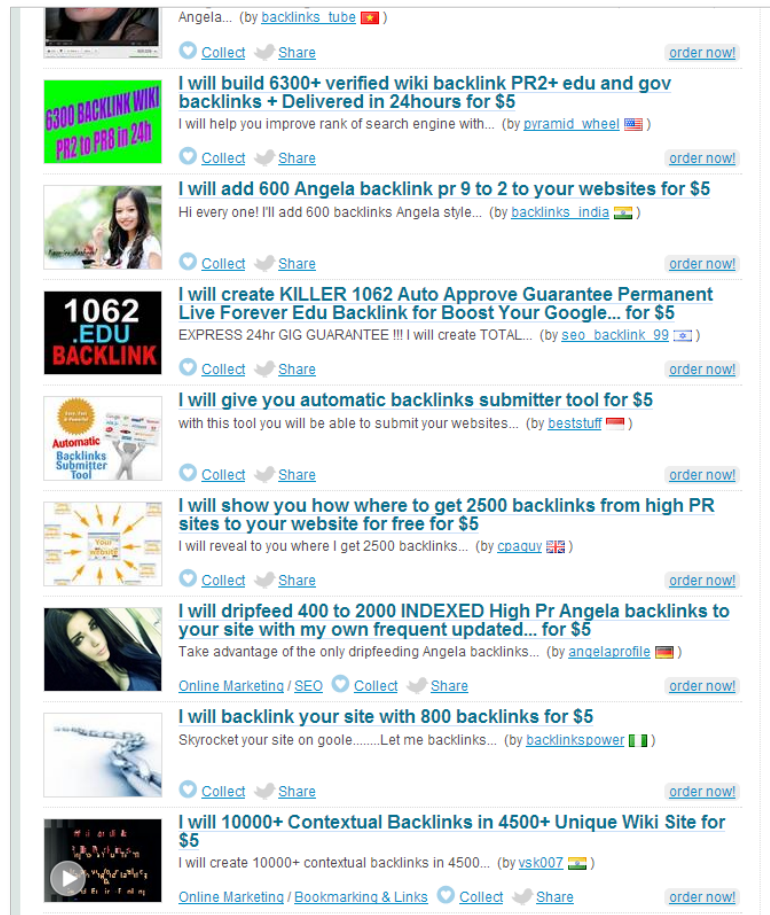
The reason big sites can buy links is because they do it in a way that is almost impossible for Google to catch them. Big, powerful sites can buy links with a budget of thousands of dollars every month.

Whatever you do, do not buy links from Fiverr or any place else that claims lots of links in a short time. That sort of thing raises every red flag with the algorithms and will get you penalized and possible dropped completely out of their index.

Site Decay

All sites start to get unwieldy after a while. Pages move, links change, priorities shift and your once beautiful site starts to show its age. To keep up with some of that, you need to learn how to use the magical **redirects**.

My friend Karl Sakas was kind enough to be thinking of me on his recent trip up to Maryland where he



301 and 302 Redirects Explained



301 REDIRECT

Search engines are notified of a permanent address change with the 301 redirect. The value of inbound links will be transferred to the new site over time



302 REDIRECT

Use a 302 redirect when a site must be temporarily redirected. Search engines will anticipate the site address being active again and inbound links will continue to point to the temporarily redirected page.

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was on route 301 and route 302.

301 (permanent) redirects are for when pages have changed for good. 302 (temporary) redirects are for pages that will be coming back someday. You can also read up on status code 307 if you want to be cutting edge.

As a rule, you probably want to use permanent (301) redirects. By default, many programs and sysadmins will give you temporary (302) redirects.

You can check what's going on at with sites like Rex Swain's HTTP Viewer¹ or urianalysis.com²



Redirects can be tricky and cause problems. You should take care when you are using them that you don't cause unexpected problems. Always test new redirects immediately to insure that your site is responding as expected.

Canonicalization

The longest word in the search world, and one of the most important.

Canonicalization
01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12 13 14
C14N

Canonicalization in the SEO

world boils down to letting the search engines know which page is the "real" page when you have similar content at multiple locations.

Duplicate content can happen when your site has two pages that are the same but have different urls.

If you find yourself in this situation, you can use a meta tag to let the search engines know which one of the pages is the primary page for that information.

This situation often happens in a situation like this:

1. www.example.com
2. www.example.com/
3. example.com
4. example.com/
5. www.example.com/index.html
6. example.com/index.htm

Although those pages may all appear to be the same thing, they are all different in Google's eyes. Google has become much better at figuring this out, but why ask Google to choose your best structure when you can do it yourself?

Verify your site in Webmaster Tools

Take a few minutes to verify your site with your Google and Bing Webmaster Tools. Both give you some great insights into what's happening in and around your site.

Verification can be a little tricky, but none of them are impossible if you follow the step-by-step instructions each provide.

Verify using Google Webmaster Tools³.

Verify using Bing Webmaster Tools.⁴

Create a **sitemap**

Sitemaps are simple way to make sure your site is crawlable by spiders and humans⁵.

An **HTML** sitemap is a way to allow humans to see the whole layout of your site in one place. This can be helpful when visitors know where they're going or when they get lost. It's also a great piece of data to include on your 404 page.

An **XML** sitemap is for the spiders only. It gives the search engines a way to get deeper into your site and possibly index pages that are deep, but valuable.

Alt

This piece of advice is cringingly simple but one of the most often missed. If you are including an image on a page, make sure you include a good description of it in the alt attribute.

The reason is simple. Google doesn't (yet) know what your image contains. Take a typical logo on a site:

```

```

To Google this is an image no different than any other image on the site. Adding some additional attributes can make a difference. At the very least add an alt attribute so a screen reader will know what it is and so the search engines have some context. Maybe even use a better file name.

```

```

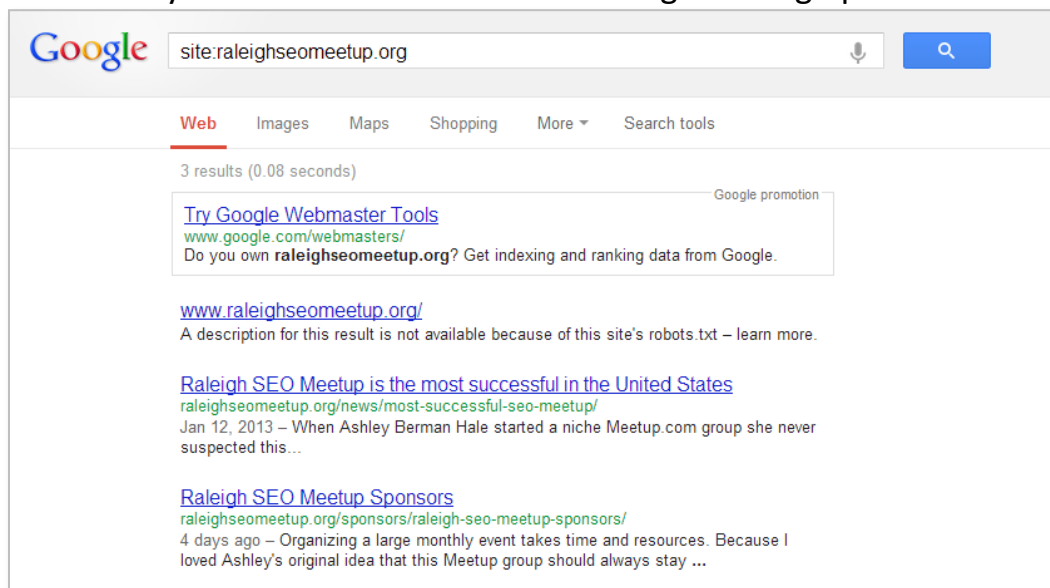
If you are also using the image as a link, like many sites do with their logo, it's even more important to use the alt attribute so that there is some anchor text associated with the link.

Not seeing your site in the search results?

There are some things to check before you conclude that Google hates you.

1. Do a **site:domain.com** check. Go to the Google search box and type in `site:yourdomain` and see if it returns anything. Tip: There is no space after the colon.

Even a fairly new site should have something showing up.



2. If nothing showed up in the above scenario you may have shot yourself in the foot. Let's check two common problems. The first is that you may be blocking robots from crawling your site in your robots.txt file⁶. The second is that you have set your pages to noindex using a meta tag⁷. Both of those things are fairly common and cause a site to disappear (or never appear) in the search results.

If none of the above is a problem, it could be any number of things causing the problem. One place where you can go is the Google Webmaster Forum⁸. It's free and staffed by super smart volunteers who have been hand-picked by Google.

Things that **don't** matter or are not true

You will hear a lot of chatter about things that people have done that they swear helped them in the SERPs. Some of the following have edge cases, but I will make them black and white.

Spending money on Google's Pay-Per-Click advertising will improve your organic rankings⁹. **FALSE**

Adding meta keywords to your pages will not help your rankings¹⁰. **FALSE**

Google endorses certain SEO agencies. **FALSE**

Your PageRank (as reported by Google's toolbar service) is highly correlated to your Google rankings. **FALSE**

You should make sure that your pages have a minimum keyword density of 4.5%. **FALSE**

Creating great content is all you need to rank well. **FALSE**

This presentation and the handouts were made for the benefit of the 1,440+ members of the most successful SEO Meetup in the United States¹¹.

Previous handouts are available to members of the Meetup at any time through the website:

Raleigh SEO Meetup page: www.meetup.com/RaleighSEO

Raleigh SEO Meetup website: raleighseomeetup.org

Raleigh SEO Meetup Google+ page: plus.google.com/111491713729451390364

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Raleigh SEO Meetup Organizer: Phil Buckley

email: phil@1918.com

twitter: twitter.com/1918

linkedin: [linkedin.com/in/pbuckley](https://www.linkedin.com/in/pbuckley)

website: 1918.com

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.rexswain.com/httpview.html>

² <http://urianalysis.com/>

³ <http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35179>

⁴ <http://www.bing.com/videos/watch/video/bing-webmaster-tools-how-to-add-and-verify-a-site-in-bing-webmaster-tools/1iinurn66>

⁵ <http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=156184>

⁶ <http://www.robotstxt.org/robotstxt.html>

⁷ <http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=93710>

⁸ <http://productforums.google.com/forum/#!categories/webmasters/crawling-indexing--ranking>

⁹ <http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35291>

¹⁰ <http://support.google.com/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=79812>

¹¹ <http://raleighseomeetup.org/>