

# Improve Your Search Engine Rankings



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Mountain climbers know that the last few hundred yards ascent to the summit can be the most difficult. After weeks of planning and preparation, they are about to realize their goal, but wind, altitude and exhaustion can make life extremely difficult for those final few steps.

So it is also with Search Engine Optimization (SEO). You've done extensive keyword research to find the words or phrases that you hope will bring relevant visitors to your site. You've made changes to your site and gotten in-bound links with keyword-rich anchor text. Your site has climbed to, say, position 25 for your top search term but now you're stuck. What is it that separates the top 1-10 from the top 10-100?

Remember, we're not talking about sponsored keyword ads here, just organic search results.

### **Get More Clicks to Boost Your Rank**

To answer that question, you have to put yourself inside the mind of a search engine. Remember that Google has risen to its current prominence by focusing on relevance in search results. If searchers find that Google's results are a better fit for what they are searching for, then they will choose to use Google over other search engines, which is what Google desperately wants.

Google uses a complex and secret set of algorithms to determine organic search engine result rankings. Several factors come into play, including on-site use of keywords in the page headings and copy as well as inbound links.

But one often-overlooked factor is this. Let's say your website is all about "wide green widgets" and a hundred people per month search. Of course, most people will click on search results on page 1. It is a well-known fact that the position of your listing is a major factor in determining the percentage of searchers who click on it.

But if a disproportionate number of searchers for wide green widgets scroll down through pages 1 and 2 of the search results and then click on your organic listing on page 3, the search engine records that fact. In essence, the searcher has "told" the search engine that the most relevant search result for wide green widgets is not on page 1 or page 2. It is your listing on page 3.

Obviously, your listing in position 25 doesn't have a prayer of getting more clicks than the listings on page 1. Only a tiny percentage of visitors will take the trouble to even find the 3<sup>rd</sup> page of the search results, let alone click on your listing. But if enough of them do, and if your listing has a disproportionately high click-through-rate (CTR) against other listings on its page, then that sends a message to the search engine that something needs to

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be adjusted. The search engine, in its effort to provide the most relevant results to its users, will soon put things right and move your listing up in the rankings.

Only a small percentage of people drill down all the way to page 3 of the search results. So it won't take too many clicks to justify a boost to your ranking.

More often, the searcher will refine their search. They'll change their search phrase to "wide green widgets on sale," for example. Hopefully, with a more focused search phrase and fewer total search results, your listing will appear in a higher position and get clicked.

But the key lesson here is to get a high CTR no matter which page of the search results your listing is on. So, how do we get more people to click on our listing, regardless of where it is positioned?

### **Listing Copy Matters**

There are three major factors that determine the percentage of clicks on your listing. We've already mentioned the most important one - your listing's position on the page. Even on page 3, the top listing will generally get more clicks than the second one, and so on. But we don't control the position of our listing on the search results page -- the search engines determine that.

The second factor is the use of bold text in the listing. You'll notice that most search engines highlight in bold those keywords from the search phrase that have matches in the listing copy. This makes your listing stand out from the rest of the crowd.

The third factor is the listing copy itself. If the copy is crisp, well-written and benefits-oriented, and has keywords that match the search phrase, then, just like with paid search ads, it will tend to pull a higher CTR than copy that is weak, self-promotional or, worst of all, meaningless gibberish.

Fortunately, we do have some control over our listing copy. The search engines tend to gather the copy from one of several places:

1. The HTML title tag. This is the text that appears between the <title> and </title> tags in most web pages' HTML code. The HTML title tag is still an extremely important place to highlight your target keywords. We continue to be astonished by the number of websites that pay very little attention to the copy within their HTML title.

2. The HTML Description tag. This is code in your HTML that is not visible on your web page. It is structured in HTML as follows: `<META NAME="description" content="your content goes here">`
3. Page headings and body copy. If the keyword phrase that triggers the listing does not appear in your site's HTML title, then the search engines will often use headings and snippets of text from the page to compose the listing copy.
4. Your site's description in DMOZ. DMOZ is the old Open Directory Project directory which still carries some influence in the search engine rankings. Check DMOZ to see if your site is listed and, if so, what it says. Chances are, the copy is old and no longer completely relevant, in which case you should initiate an update. Good luck, though, because DMOZ is run by volunteer moderators and coverage is spotty in many categories and non-existent in others.
5. Anchor text associated with links from other sites. If you have relationships with other companies that link to your website from theirs, make sure the clickable text link or the copy near the URL contains not only the keywords, but good copy as well.

These five sources are listed roughly in descending order in which they are used by the search engines. The most important thing to remember is that the copy should contain your keywords, and that it should be brief and extremely well-written. People who are very good at writing Google and Yahoo ads are often very good at copy-writing excellent title and description copy.

### **What About Clicking Our Own Search Results?**

If you have a listing that appears several pages down in the search results, there is probably not a lot of traffic to that page. Clicking on your own organic listing could help and won't hurt – unless you're so persistent and blatant about it that you trigger an "alarm." Remember, search engines know your computer's IP address and can use cookies to track your searches over time.

Repeatedly clicking your own organic search results listing in an attempt to gain higher rankings consumes search engine resources (processing and bandwidth) in a way that's not consistent with the search engines' mission and could be considered a violation of their terms of service. It's certainly not a "white-hat" SEO technique. You probably won't get sued but be aware that search engines tend to figure out and penalize black-hat techniques eventually. If you still want to try this technique, we urge you to use it only gently and

sporadically. We certainly don't recommend writing a software robot for the task.

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### **About the Author**

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