

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO) EXPLAINED

What is Google?



Google started in 1998 when Sergey Brin and Larry Page, two Ph.D. students from Stanford were working on a project to create a search engine ranking system. They developed a system that ranks pages in terms of their 'importance'. This patented 'PageRank' technology is the driving force behind Google's rise to search engine dominance. Letting a few friends use the site in beta mode, more and more people started to use Google until 10,000 search queries were being answered per day. Today, Google answers more than 200 million search queries a day, indexing over 3 billion webpages.

There are three major types of search engines 'spider' or 'crawler' engines, directories and hybrids. Google is a crawler-based engine.

Crawler Search Engines

A crawler search engine, like Google, 'crawls' or 'spiders' through your website and all its related links. This means that the spider will visit your website then read all the pages and follow all the links. Spiders usually return to your website every month or so to look for changes. Everything the spider finds goes into an index.

The index is like a large catalogue containing a copy of every webpage the spiders find in cyberspace. If your webpage changes, then the spider should find this change and update the index. When you type in a keyword or phrase into a crawler-based search engine the search engine software sifts through the millions of pages stored in the index and gives you the results it believes is most relevant to your search query.

Most crawler-based search engines work in this way with minor changes to software, indexing, etc. That is why if you type the same query into different search engines you can get varied results.

Directories

Directories differ from crawler-based search engines in that you, as a webmaster, submit a short description about your site, which is then categorised by humans. Search results are based on what is in the description about your site.

Hybrids

Hybrid search engines are a combination of the two types of search engines listed above.

Why do we need search engines?

- According to a recent poll by Forrester Research, over 90% of Internet users worldwide use search engines to find the sites they want. Search engine listings are the number one way to generate qualified traffic to websites.
- More people use search engine to finds products and services as compared to phone directory and yellow pages. Potential customers can compare prices online.
- According to a Nielsen Ratings, 9 out of 10 web surfers visit a search engine, portal or community site each month. They also revisit frequently, nearly five times per month.
- According to a Direct Marketing Association poll, search engine positioning was the top method cited by website marketers to drive traffic to their sites.
- 85% of qualified Internet traffic is driven through search engines, however 75% of search engine users never scroll past the first couple of page results.
- According to Forrester Research Media Field Study, attracting a loyal audience to your website is best achieved through top search engine listings.
- 97 percent of Fortune 100 companies had some type of site architecture problem that might give them problems being found by search engines. iProspect, May 2001
- Nine out of ten web users visit a search engine, portal or community site each month. They also revisit frequently, nearly five times per month. Nielsen//NetRatings
- Users looking for products are far more likely to type the product name into a search engine's search box (28%) than browse shopping "channels" (5%) or click on ads (4%) Jupiter Media Metrix & NPD
- Search engines are the number one way consumers find new websites online, used by 73.4% of those surveyed. Forrester
- Search engine positioning was the top method cited by website marketers to drive traffic to their sites (66%), followed by email marketing (54%). Direct Marketing Association
- On average, people experience "search rage" if they don't find what they want within 12 minutes. WebTop Search Rage Study
- Meta tags are the most popular search engine optimisation technique, used by 61% of those surveyed, followed by optimising page titles (44%) and link building (32%). Iconocast
- Contrary to any sales hype you may read elsewhere, there are no software products available, nor will there ever be, that can automate the search engine optimisation process.
- People who actively searching for your products or services are qualified prospects who, in the most part, have already made the decision to buy! Focused search engine optimisation brings the searcher and the supplier together.
- Research shows that most search engine users don't look past the first two or three pages of results returned by a search engine.

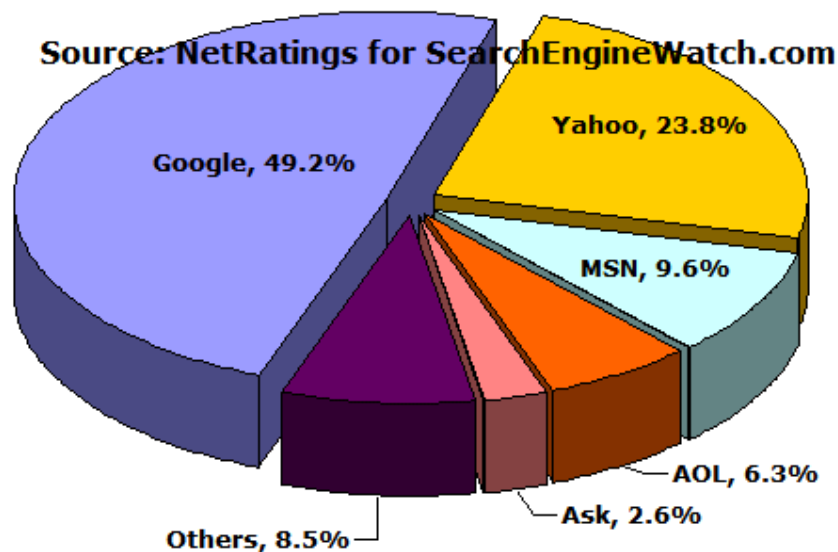
Is Google the most popular search engine?

Nielsen//NetRatings Search Engine Ratings

The [Nielsen//NetRatings](#) MegaView Search [reporting service](#) measures the search behavior of approximately 500,000 people worldwide. These web surfers have real-time meters on their computers which monitor the sites they visit. This metered information is compiled to produce NetRatings results. Below are statistics about searching from NetRatings:

Share of Searches: July 2006

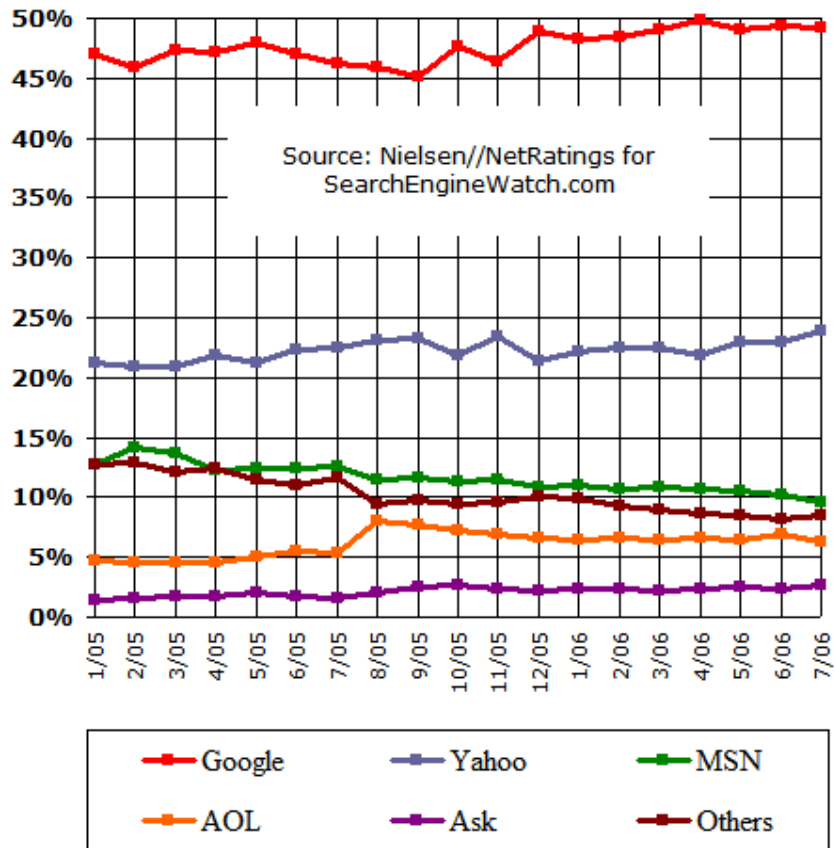
The chart below shows the percentage of online searches done by US home and work web surfers in July 2006 that were performed at a particular search engine. Internal site searches, such as those to find material within a particular website, are not counted in these totals. The activity at more than 60 search sites makes up the total search volume upon which percentages are based - 5.6 billion searches in this month.



Note that the figures are search-specific but not necessarily web-search specific. They include local searches, image searches, news searches, shopping searches and other type of vertical search activity. Also note that some companies own more than one search site. This means searches at different sites may be combined into one overall figure for the company's entire network. The notes below provide more information of what's in each share. Remember, in all cases, only activity by those in the US is measured, even if those in the US go to a site run by a company outside the US, such as [Google UK](#).

Share of Searches Trend

The chart below shows how the share of searches has changed over the past few months, for those search sites with a share of 5 percent or higher:

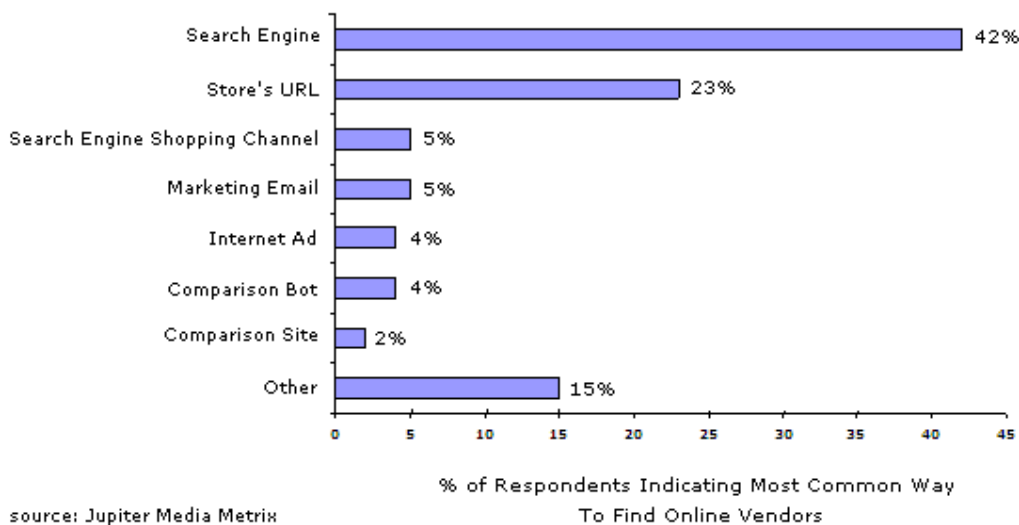


Is it important to be ranked on Google?

The first purpose of search engine optimisation is to be positioned in the places where your customer is. The second purpose is to be positioned better than your competitions in these places. In the world of search engines, better means higher, and higher means a much greater probability that an individual will click on your link. While this figure varies by engine, recent search data has shown that approximately 70% of users, if they click, will click on one the first three listings in a search engine.

In a survey by Jupiter Media Matrix, 42% of respondents cited search engine listings as the most common way they search for products and vendors online. Here are the full results.

How Consumers Search for Products Online



As you can see, it is crucial to be positioned well in the search engines.

However, obtaining top rankings in the search engines is not an easy job, especially for some of the more competitive keywords. It will take dozens, perhaps hundreds of hours of time, and you will have to wait two or more months to begin to see any results whatsoever.

To make a search engine positioning campaign worthwhile, however, you must have the right information and must execute your plan properly. While there is quite a bit of information available on the Internet, much of it is outdated and no longer effective. The dynamic nature of the Internet means that search engine technology, spidering capabilities, ranking criteria, and strategic alliances are all changing rapidly.

What is a hit?

Hits are described as a request from your server. This means that every time someone downloads a webpage, image or file, this is classified as a 'hit'. Therefore, you could have ten visitors to your website who each visit three WebPages pages and download five images.

Visitors = 10

Hits = 50

What is a page view?

Page views are the 'webpages' that are viewed by visitors to your website. If 1 visitor went to 5 pages you would have:

Visitors = 1

Page Views = 5

Is search engine optimisation a once off process or does it have to be done regularly?

The answer to this quote simply is it can be both, depending on your industry. In a non-competitive space, once off optimisation may work

If you are in a non-competitive space with a small number of competitors, then once off optimisation may very well work for the next few years, or until the search engines change their algorithms.

In a highly competitive market, competition is much higher with many new websites coming online each day and others being optimised and updated regularly. This means that there is more focus on updating the site and making sure it is optimised as well as it can be.

If you play in a competitive market, we recommend on-going SEO production.

What does on-going mean?

- Monitoring of the website to ensure rankings are constant
- An ongoing link building campaign – This works best when the client is included
- An understanding that search engine optimisation takes time. This is not something that will impact a site in weeks. It takes months for some changes to take affect
- An understanding that search engine optimisation should be part of an overall online marketing strategy that can drive traffic to the website
- Increasing the amount of targeted traffic to your site is the ultimate goal

What are some SEO secrets?

Keyword Research

This is one of the most important aspects of SEO. Knowing what consumers are typing into a search engine to find your product or service is essential. There are many tools to help you discover which keywords are profitable and help you decide which terms to optimise your website for.

Most SEO firms will guide you in determining the correct keyword terms. One of the best ways to find out is to ask a user when they ring your company. "How did you find us?" If they say Google, ask them what words they were putting into the search engine. Another way to identify keywords is to type your product or service into a search engine as if you were a consumer and analyse the websites that are listed in the top ten. Alternatively, you can choose to use tools such as Google AdWords' Suggestion Tool or Overture. Just remember, what would your customer type into a search engine to find your product? If you are not listed under that keyword term then you may want to consider SEO.



Linking Strategies

A major contributing factor to higher search engine results is links to your website. Do not be fooled into thinking quantity is king here, quality is far better for rankings than volume.



For example, if you sell lounge chairs and a webpage that is ranked number one in Google for "lounge chairs" links to your site, this will be much better than 100 websites linking to your site that have nothing to do with lounge chairs.

Likewise a site that uses the wording 'lounge chairs' in a link to your website will be superior than using just your domain name. Another way to build links to your website is to create unique content that is valued by readers. One of the methods to do this is to provide regularly updated content, online newsletters, blogs and podcasts. If you create information that is helpful, informative or a valuable resource, other site owners may link to it therefore increasing your rankings. Most SEO firms will make recommendations about the types of site you should approach for linking purposes.

Page Titles, Meta Data and Content

Another aspect to consider when analysing your website is the page titles and meta data that is displayed on your pages. Page titles are the names of the pages on your website like Home and About Us. If your company was to sell teapots in London, it would be more beneficial for your homepage to be named "Teapots for sale London" as opposed to "Home".

Meta data are keywords that are added to the code of a webpage. Internet browsers do not display this information but search engine spiders use this data to learn more about the page it is crawling. Using keyword-rich meta data can assist in achieving higher rankings however, make sure extensive keyword research is conducted to find the keywords of most value. These are some of the basic aspects of search engine optimisation that can have a positive effect on search engine rankings.

Content is extremely important considering many search engines are starting to bring Latent Semantic Indexing into the mix. LSI means that search engines will hold more weight to pages that have related terms in the content than one term repeated many times. Relevant, timely and unique content naturally gets linked to as well, you will find if you provide this type of content on your website, you may not have to chase links as much as you would if your content is a re-hash of other info on the net.

Ultimately search engine optimisation is an ongoing process. Rankings rise and fall with the ebb and flow of the Internet. Competitors will change content and optimise their own website; search engines will change the algorithms that drive their results.