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Five Search Engine Ranking Factors by Trevor Southwold

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There are literally hundreds of different metrics that are used by search engines to determine the potential relevance and value of content to the user. Many of these are kept secret for commercial reasons but there are also many that search engine optimisation companies have worked out through extensive testing. Here are some of the most important ones.

Page level link metrics are among the most important used by search engines to rank content: in other words, the number and quality of links that point to a particular page on a web site. Links on the web are akin to votes of confidence in the content at the destination anchor - through links, the source anchor passes relevance and value to the destination anchor. Search engines count the number of backlinks and assess the quality of those backlinks to determine how likely an end user is to find content interesting.

Domain level links are also very important when search engines are ranking content - in other words, the quality and quantity on inbound links throughout the domain. This is one of the ways search engines are able to rank fresh content on a popular website higher than old content on an unpopular site - even though the fresh content will feature as the destination anchor for very few links, by assessing the number and quality of links that point to the domain as a whole, search engines can develop a better idea about whether users are likely to find a particular piece of content interesting.

Page level keyword usage is another significant metric. Although search engines are getting better all the time at determining what a piece of content is about, they have some way to go before they are able to 'read' and 'understand' content in the same way as a human being. For this reason, it is important to include the key words that you think internet users who are interested in your content will search for. This will leave search engines in no doubt as to the subject matter of your content and this will improve your relevance scores.

Domain level keyword usage is also important. Search engines want to know that your website has a particular topic - websites that are all about marketing, for example, are more likely to host content that is interesting to marketers. Although an article about marketing might appear elsewhere, it is less likely to be interesting and authoritative than an article that is published on a website with a strong marketing focus.

Page level social metrics are also important and becoming more important all the time: in other words, the number of users who "like", "tweet", "+1", "inshare" or apply any other positive social signal to a given piece of content. This is one of the ways search engines identify pieces of content that are going viral - the chances are that if everyone you know is sharing a given piece of content, it is highly likely to be relevant and interesting.

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