

Yahoo major update on algorithm (Mexico)

- a. How do you know when a major update has occurred?
- b. RLLD lost ranking on “patio lights”, and “outdoor speakers”. Indicators show up in top keywords by server
- c. Check back links
- d. Check for broken links on outbound links
- e. More weight to freshness
- f. Possible word density ratio change?
- g. using “-asdf” before search term actually pulls in results from a different data center
<http://search.yahoo.com/search?ei=utf-8&fr=slv1-mdp&p=-asdf+outdoor+lighting>
- h. alltheweb and altavista, both owned by yahoo, are showing very different results from yahoo/ “landscape lighting”

Potty Training & Pay Per Click/

- a. **Do search on google for “Parking lot lights” & “Parking lot poles” and pay per click**
- b. Fix images on db

Backward links checker
<http://www.uptimebot.com>

Making all text bold you harm all optimization efforts because search engine considers bold text to be important and you drop relevancy, when unnecessary words are getting into the same tags with your keywords.

Google Introduces Sitemaps

Are you tired of waiting for the search engine spiders to visit and index your website? Do you have a lot of content that is updated frequently? Google has developed an answer. With Google Sitemaps, you can tell the search engine when to visit your site, and what pages have been updated. While there are no guarantees with this beta, it might make life a lot easier for webmasters and site owners.

Up until now, if you wanted your website to show up in the search engines, you submitted your home page URL to the engine's crawler, and then waited for the friendly neighborhood search engine spider to come by and index your site. Sometimes the wait could take months. In some cases, you had the option of paying to get your site indexed; most search engines have moved away from paid inclusion programs, though Yahoo! still offers one. However you slice it, though, it is a frustrating process, particularly for those with little patience.

Solves Problems With Dynamic Websites

It is even more frustrating for those with very dynamic websites. If you have content that changes on an almost-daily basis, and the search engine spiders only visit your website once a week, you're seeing some missed opportunities. Active bloggers face this problem with their sites, but so do firms with websites that focus on news, enthusiast sites that feature fresh content daily, and other commercial sites. It's good to have lots of fresh content, but how do you make sure that search engines get wind of all of it as quickly as possible?

Blogs get indexed faster

Not surprisingly, Google set itself to work on this very problem. As early as May 6, Shiva Shivakumar, Google's engineering director, reported a possible solution in a blog that he wrote on Google's website. In early June, the solution itself became more widely available. It's called Google Sitemaps, and Shivakumar expects that it "will either fail miserably, or succeed beyond our wildest dreams, in making the web better for webmasters and users alike." Though this free service is still in beta, it has already received some positive reviews from bloggers, who are either thinking about using it or already using it — and it isn't just for bloggers, either.

Google describes Google Sitemaps as "an experiment in web crawling." It is a way for those with frequently-updated websites to inform Google as to when and how often they want the search engine to index their content. It is meant to supplement, not replace, the usual indexing of websites that Google already does on its own. Google hopes that it will help it succeed in its never-ending battle to index all publicly available information.

How It Works

Webmasters sign up for the program at the home page for Google Sitemaps (<https://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps/login>). The introduction explains that users need to create a Sitemap in the correct format using the Sitemap Generator (<https://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps/docs/en/sitemap-generator.html>). The generator helps you to create an XML Sitemap. You then place this file on your Web server, and update your Sitemap whenever you make changes to your site. Obviously, you have to tell Google where this Sitemap is, so the spider will know where to go. In addition to the URLs you want crawled, you can include information about the URLs, such as when the page last changed, how often the page changes, and the relative priority of the pages. It is possible to set it up so that Google is automatically informed when your Sitemap changes, so the spider can come by and index the newest version.

Google Site map is open source

One interesting point about the Sitemap Generator is that it is an open source client in Python. And the project itself is being released under an Attribution/Share Alike Creative Commons license, with the idea that other search engines will pick it up to improve their own indexing of the Internet. For those who don't know, Creative Commons is a not-for-profit developing flexible alternatives to the most restrictive forms of copyright — rather like open source licenses themselves. An Attribution/Share Alike license allows users "to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work...to make derivative works...to make commercial use of the work...Under the following conditions: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor...If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one."

Size of website no problem

Several other points are worth noting. First, the Sitemap Generator is intended to work regardless of the size of your website. So whether you have a simple blog site or millions of pages that are changing all the time, Google Sitemaps should be able to help you. Second, using Google Sitemaps will not increase your PageRank. Third, there is absolutely no guarantee, even with this program, that Google will crawl or index all of your URLs; remember, this is still a beta. Finally, as with some (though not all) Google betas, this one has a discussion/support page on Google Groups (<http://groups-beta.google.com/group/google-sitemaps?hl=en>), with 600 members as of this writing.

Possible Issues and Future Modifications & Growth

At least one blogger (Jeremy Zawodny) wondered why Google created a whole new system with XML rather than using ping services like Feedster and Technorati. Another blogger (Nathan Weinberg) believes that Google did so because such services would be woefully inefficient for the growth we can expect to see in the use of Google Sitemaps. Indeed, he stated his belief that many publishers do not like using ping services, or related RSS services, because of the control it forces them to give up, and that, for various reasons, RSS would be useless for Sitemaps.

Many Formats Supported

Interestingly, though, according to Google's FAQ about Sitemaps (<https://www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps/docs/en/faq.html>), Google does support RSS. Indeed, despite creating an XML system, Google supports a number of formats for Sitemap submission, including the very simplest: a text file containing a list of URLs, with one URL per line. This might be inefficient — and indeed, Google encourages webmasters to use its XML system — but it does make the service more all-inclusive, and inclusion is, after all, the point.

In an interview with Danny Sullivan of Search Engine Watch, Shiva Shivakumar answered a question in a way that could raise potential concerns. The question was whether Google needs submitters of URLs to prove in some way that they are associated with the site for which they are submitting. Shivakumar responded that “We accept all the URLs under the directory where you post the Sitemap. For example, if you have posted a Sitemap at www.example.com/abc/sitemap.xml, we assume that you have permission to submit information about URLs that begin with www.example.com/abc/.” I don’t know if it is possible to hack such files, but if it is, this could be a security risk for any site using Sitemaps.

Site Map Spam

Another issue Sullivan raised was spam. Specifically, he wondered how Google would prevent people from using Google Sitemaps to spam the index in bulk. Shivakumar pointed out that Google is constantly developing new techniques for the management of index spam, and that those techniques would continue to apply with Google Sitemaps.

Reporting Tools

Finally, in the same interview, Sullivan wondered about Google’s future plans for Google Sitemaps. Would the company provide a reporting tool eventually, so that webmasters can tell what searches are sending them clicks? Shivakumar’s response was encouraging. “We are starting with some basic reporting; showing the last time you’ve submitted a Sitemap and when we last fetched it. We hope to enhance reporting over time, as we understand what the webmasters will benefit from.” He encouraged users to send the company ideas through the aforementioned Google Group covering Google Sitemaps.

Why Is Google Doing This?

For once, the answer to the question of why Google is doing this seems pretty obvious. According to its own corporate information, "**Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.**" Google Sitemaps is a direct extension of that mission; it makes it easier for webmasters to submit, and for Google to find, fresh information on websites.

But why is Google sharing the technology? Shivakumar stated in his blog that it was "so that other search engines can do a better job as well. Eventually we hope this will be supported natively in web servers (e.g. Apache, Lotus Notes, IIS)." While Google's culture is such that I can believe it values open source, and would even be glad to see other search engines doing a better job, I think the key is getting native support on Web servers. It is well known that Apache is the most popular Web server on the Internet — and Apache is open source. If Google truly wants to see usage of Google Sitemaps spread far and wide, sharing the technology like this is the fastest way to do it.

The easier it is to use Google Sitemaps, the more likely it is that webmasters will use it. Getting native support on popular Web servers would make Google Sitemaps easier to use. As more websites use Google Sitemaps, it will make Google's job easier, too. As the project continues to develop, and eventually works its way out of beta, it should significantly shorten the amount of time webmasters and site owners must wait before new content is indexed — and that should be easier on everybody's nerves.

Spam Protection Ate My Newsletter!

Spam protection methods can be a huge relief to email users, relieving some of the tedium of deletion. Of course, if you're sending a newsletter, you may wonder how many of your subscribers are really receiving it. Let's take a look at how spam protection can be your enemy or your friend.

With the wide range of how strict or lenient different spam filters are, it's often unsettling to realize that you can't tell how often your newsletter might just get junked before most people see it. You work hard on that newsletter every week, and people need to see it. Subscription email lists can be useful for reminding visitors to return to your site for new content, or inform them of news and events related to your organization or business. Especially for an e-business, subscription mail is integral to the company.

The war on spam can be a war on a business's bottom line, if you don't keep an eye on your mailings. If newsletters don't reach recipients, it's a company that loses. Recently, yourcompany.com found that its own newsletter had been red flagged by a spam watching group. We'll look into this, and we'll discuss what you can do to prevent this from happening to your mailings.

The awful part of spam is that it always finds a way to defy filters. The filters in place do help to sort a lot of spam, but it never does enough. Spammers find more and more ways to bend the

system to get their mass mail into your inbox.

Unlike spammers, legitimate businesses with subscription mass mail get caught in the middle. Spam gets delivered and your mailing list doesn't. Because most businesses don't use shady spammer tricks, they can be more susceptible to spam protection. It's still in your best interest to stick to legitimate practices, however, because cheating the system is unpredictable and can only work for so long.

We'll look at the two things you must do to manage your newsletter and be fairly certain that it isn't recognized as spam. First is checking the on-page content. This will be covered momentarily, but basically you want your newsletter to follow all standards to look as little like spam as possible. Second, you need to keep an eye on off-page elements, which Google can help to simplify greatly.

Optimizing your Newsletter

When an email server receives an inbound message, in most cases it will run a spam check on it. A program scans your message for certain details and keywords. Your mail starts with a score of zero. For each negative detail or keyword, the program adds points to your score. If the score reaches a certain level (specific for the program's settings), it will not be delivered.

On-page optimization is critical because if performed properly, it can keep this score low. One of the best things you can optimize is your mail's subject line. As an example, let's take a look at the subject line of a recent newsletter:

This subject makes it completely transparent what the message is going to be. Use a word to indicate the mail is a newsletter, such as "news" or "newsletter" or "Update." Include the date or issue number in the subject. It also doesn't hurt to include the publishing frequency, "weekly" in this case. Also keep your subject clear of anything that would make somebody scanning think it was spam. Words like "XXX," "free," "penis," "loan," "deals," etc. can quickly rack up points on spam filters. That's why spammers intentionally misspell words or use other characters (like *) in the middle of words. These tricks should always be avoided, as they downright say "this message is junk." What fools spam filters today will be penalized harshly tomorrow. Don't use any tricks.

On the same note, if you distribute a legitimate newsletter with a title like, "Weekly Guide to Cheap Real Estate," rename it. Your subscribers may want it, but it could look quite bad to a filtering program.

Your content is also key here. Not only does real substance help pass through spam filters, but it helps make your readers value your newsletter. If they enjoy your newsletter updates and for whatever reason fail to receive one, hopefully your subscribers will complain about it so you can troubleshoot.

This should be painfully obvious to anyone, but do not type anything in all caps. Your subject line should be mixed case. Your content should also be mixed case. Follow proper grammar rules in this sense. Emails that are all caps are often junk mail.

This is quite important. Always provide an opt-out link or directions within the newsletter. This is both a matter of legality and sensibility. Use words like “unsubscribe” and “opt out” in this part of the email. Spam often uses the word “remove,” so it may actually hurt you more than help depending on the filtering program. Make sure that when a person sends an unsubscribe request it is handled quickly.

Under no circumstances should your newsletter have an attachment. This puts up red flags for readers and web servers. It looks suspicious for any mass mail to be sending a package. It also eats up valuable inbox space and takes extra time for you to send. If you need to include images or a file, host them on your webpage server and link to them.

To get through spam filters, you should also send from a reputable email domain and never dupe the ‘from’ address. Especially with technology like Sender ID coming, do not get caught with a forged email header. Sending from your website’s own domain is always the best option.

Next: Check Your Work With an Optimization Tool

There are plenty of guidelines and common sense rules to follow. In case you miss something or do not optimize enough, there are automated tools such as [SpamCheck](#) (visit it online). You must send a copy of your newsletter to the email address that they specify, with a modification made to the subject line. By adding TEST to the beginning of the subject, the program recognizes it as a request for service rather than spam.

Within minutes, you will receive an email that details things that could be improved on your newsletter. It will also give you the score that your newsletter will receive using its spam filtering program.

Yourdomain.com newsletter scored very well. Below is an explanation of the scores and our detailed results.

Your TOTAL SPAM SCORE for your e-mail was 0.4.

How To Interpret Your Score:

The higher the score, the more likely the e-mail will be considered spam by ISPs, which means the more likely it is to get filtered. Levels...

0.0 - 4.5 - nice and clean, no problems except tiny ones below; no action required

4.6 - 7.0 - the strictest may object; clean up the easy-to-find issues (below)

7.1 - 10.0 - getting into dangerous territory; clean up any big issues and the easy-to-find smaller ones

10.1 - 13.0 likely over ISP limits; requires good review and cleaning up

13.1+ major problems; overhaul needed --
Systematically clean, point by point and then re-test (this may require two or three checks).

In order of importance, here are the mistakes that we found

in your e-mail...

(0.1 points) BODY: HTML font color is unknown to us

(0.1 points) An exceedingly large amount of HTML coding is often used to disguise common spam phrases. Consider reworking slightly.

(0.1 points) BODY: HTML font color is blue

(0.1 points) BODY: HTML has a big font

(0.0 points) BODY: HTML included in message

(0.0 points) Asks you to click below

Eliminate mistakes by removing any common "spammer habits" from your e-mail. You'll find it's a useful style check at the same time. We all tend to repeat some words too often. The net result is a cleaner (no-spam-triggers) e-mail that will be opened and read by more people.

If you send the copy of your email with your regular mail server, your score will likely be better than if you just forward it from a client like Outlook or Thunderbird. The spam filter takes off some points if it thinks you are trying to dupe it with a mail program. Of course, it details how many points that adds to your score so you can subtract those points if need be.

Next: Off Page Optimization

There are spam watchers outside of those that watch what comes in on mail servers. Some people have individual clients or use spam databases to help filter mail. These resources are not foolproof.

The easiest tool to check for this sort of a problem is Google. First, choose a newsletter; you don't want to pick the most recent newsletter, since it may take a couple days for an online spam resource to post your mail online. Also, don't count on search engines having gotten a chance to index the page if the newsletter is very recent.

Once in your friendly search engine, type the subject line of a newsletter you mailed in quotation marks ("Name Of Your Newsletter Weekly Update for 2007-07-19" or "Your Name Weekly Update for"). If this returns nothing unexpected, that's good. But try again. Enter a phrase from

inside the newsletter in quotation marks. Enter the email address which sends your newsletter. Hopefully, you've gotten nothing but the mirror of your own newsletter (which you should be posting on your website).

This is how we found the red flag on our newsletter. It was erroneously included in one of these online spam catalogs, [Spam Trace](#). The Spam Trace service includes an email blocker that prevents POP email addresses from receiving mails in its database.

So let's see how to handle the situation if your newsletter turns up in these databases. Any reputable spam tracker will have a contact address, though you may need to go hunting for it. Once you have located it, send a polite email explaining the situation in detail.

Example Letter to Spamtrace

Hello,

It has been reported to us that you have marked our weekly newsletter as spam on your site. Here is a URL: <http://www.spamtrace.info/email/3364/>

Our weekly newsletter is an OPT-IN service, and we offer a clear opt-out at the bottom of each and every newsletter.

Please look into this, and remove us from your spam list. You can contact me directly with any questions.

John Doe CTO

Your Company Inc.

www.yourdomain.com

Two days later, we received this response:

John,

Thanks for bringing this to my attention.

I apologize for this, the process of gathering emails is automatic and the amount through each day is large. We do have processes in place to stop things like this unfortunately this fell through the cracks.

I've checked the full database and your newsletter had 9 entries, I have deleted them all and put code in place so your site should no longer but put in our database.

Regards,

Mike

Always Remember

The popularity of these online spam databases is growing as spam becomes more prevalent. One recent proposal (visit it online) calls for uniting Canadian ISPs under one spam database to help prevent people from receiving junk and tracking down illegal scams that are mass mailed.

Whether it was a cataloging mistake or somebody had submitted our newsletter to the company, we were being penalized for our regular mailings despite them following all the rules. Thankfully, Spam Trace was very effective, and by the time we received that email none of the newsletters remained on their server.

You don't want to be part of this group. Databases such as this exist largely to help law enforcement agencies prosecute senders of the archived mail. If your mail is properly optimized with an unsubscribe link, you should be in the clear. But to avoid any future hassle, keep up-to-date on your newsletter's whereabouts anyway.

The United States' FTC has a similar program that it is starting, which you can visit you can also visit if you click here. It has no stated plans for a spam database, but it's probably not unthought-of. Regardless, not providing proper on-page optimization for opting out or clearly looking like a reputable newsletter may compel a spam activist to turn your mail in. This could result in some undesirable legal situations down the line.

When all these spam services come together and do what they are supposed to, it can be a great thing. It doesn't just help people reading email, it helps people sending newsletters. Granted you spend the time to do a check-up on your letter, it will arrive in cleaner inboxes where it can receive more attention. When you don't have undesirable, impersonal email to compete with, it's always good to help attract some views.

Always keep in mind that using RSS and copying your newsletter to a dedicated page on your website offer more ways to update your readers without losing them. RSS feeds for every one of the sites on the network, which people can post on their own pages or track on their own. These feeds can bring you the attention that mass mailings can not, if your newsletter gets overlooked in piles of spam. Also, having an HTML page of past publications set up is also helpful. Not only can it keep people up to date, but it also can get spidered by search engines.

It may seem obvious, but never rely on cheap tricks to get more readers. One mistake people make is to sign up people to their list automatically. Even if your unsubscribe function works perfectly, your newsletter loses all respect and value when it is sent unsolicited.

Finally, there may be good revenue in mailing advertisements to your mailing list. This should not be done outside of your newsletter, unless it is something subscribers consciously opt into.

Placing an add in the regular mailing doesn't hurt, but becoming a source of "subscribed spam" is only going to hurt your reputation and subscribers.

The war on spam can be viscous to anyone with a mailing list. Clearly, if you work it just right, spam filters can be your friend. If you ignore the details and just try to get content out there, you may suffer for it.

Give The Folks At Google What they Want

Recent developments on the Google front have gotten web marketers and SEO specialists talking even more than usual. What they're talking about is the changing Search Engine Optimization landscape. Some of the traditional assumptions about what gets good Google ranking have been challenged by things Google has said over the last few months -- especially by the filing of their most recent patent application.

A number of sensible suggestions have emerged about good SEO practice. Here is one of the most important:

1. **Don't add links too quickly or all from one or two sources -- Google wants a "natural" linking pattern.**

This is not a new suggestion, but Google seems to be prepared to penalize sites which engage in blatant link buying. Clearly this is targeted at services that sell links by the hundreds (or thousands). So one month a site has no links, and the next month it has 2,000 or 20,000 links from one or two "name" sites. Obviously these links have happened because of link buying.

Is Google trying **to discourage all link buying**? I don't think so. Links are just a form of advertising, and Google cannot discourage buying advertising without being blatantly inconsistent. Google itself is one of the primary sources of purchased web advertising, and it would be a blatant abuse of their dominant position to discriminate against smaller advertising networks who are offering a legitimate service to webmasters.

As I read the situation, what Google is trying to do is safeguard the integrity of their search results by ruling out massive overnight link purchases. We're talking thousands of links here. Without these safeguards, search results can be dramatically skewed by the practice of buying large chunks of links. There is clearly something wrong with a system that claims that link popularity is an indicator of site quality if a site suddenly has thousands of inbound links when just a week ago it had none.

This practice makes a mockery of the importance of links. Their only purpose is to exploit the system and make a dramatic impact on Page Rank and Search Engine positioning. Google wants Page Rank and search results to flow from website quality and relevance. And virtually all SEO experts have maintained that quality and relevance come fairly gradually as a site grows and its content develops. The "natural" development of links should happen more or less in lock step with the development of content.

This does not mean that the importance of links has been diminished. Just the opposite. Google is reconfirming their position that the number and quality of links pointing at specific web pages is the most significant indicator of the importance of that web page.

Nor does it mean that a webmaster should never buy links on legitimate websites. On the contrary, it means that links should be acquired and developed consistently and steadily over time, and that the quality of your link partners matters more than ever. This applies whether your links are the result of exchanges, purchases, blogging, article publishing, or any of the other established techniques for building traffic through linking.

When you are looking for link partners you should look at the quality of the sites linking back to you. Ask yourself how relevant is the content in the pages, what is the balance between content and links, how often are these pages updated, how much traffic do these pages get, do these pages link to "authority" sites like Google, Yahoo, eBay, Amazon, Microsoft.

All of these things matter more now than they ever have.

Web Design Blunders That Can Cost You Lost Profits

by Angela Wu

It's hard enough to bring people to your little corner of cyberspace, and once they're there, you have just a few brief seconds to catch their attention. A simple click-of-the-mouse and your site visitor is gone!

Keep as many interested prospects on your site by avoiding these blunders:

1. Multiple Popup and Popunder Windows

Many online business owners swear by the effectiveness of popups and popunders for getting more subscribers, making sales, or generating leads.

At the same time, a large percentage of users claim to dislike popups and popunders. And it's no wonder; many of us have been 'held hostage' by popups that spawn even more popups when you try to close them, until your screen is filled with windows and you're completely frustrated. Most people simply do NOT appreciate multiple popups or popunders!

If you choose to use them, try for a 'happy medium' -- a window that appears only once upon entry or exit. One such script is available for free at DesignerIndex, http://www.designerindex.com/Free_Tools/popupwindow.shtml.

2. Unreadable Text

Certain formats are easier to read than others. For example, it's generally accepted that black text on a white background is the easiest to read. The reverse -- light text on a colored background -- can cause fatigue when reading large blocks of text, and is better used to highlight a portion of the page.

Similarly, text that is too small can cause problems. Although it's possible to change the displayed text size on a browser, many Internet users don't know how.

3. Confusing Navigation

Ever been to a site where it's hard to get around? It's just as easy to leave and go instead to a competitor's site. Make your navigation clear and simple.

4. Trapping Visitors In Your Frames. Search Engines Do Not Read Frames

Improperly designed frames can leave your visitor 'trapped' on your site, unable to use the 'back' button on their browsers to leave. You can bet they'll never be back if you try to force them to stay! BigNoseBird.com has a nice little tutorial on how to get the 'Frames look' without actually using them. Read it at: <http://bignosebird.com/k3.shtml>.

5. Broken Ordering Links!

It sounds silly... heck, it *is* silly. Check your order links regularly to ensure that they still work. Enough said.

6. Splash Pages

You only have a few seconds to catch your visitor's attention.

A big showy graphic that serves no real purpose is an easy way to lose your visitor -- particularly if they're forced to wait for it to load!

7. Flash Animation, Search Engines Do Not Read Flash

Flash movies are commonly used on websites these days. However, to view them often requires users to download a plug-in, if they don't already have it. It can chew up your machine's resources and make it darn near impossible to get out - even a 'Skip Intro' link is hard to click on if your computer is too involved with Flash! Plus the load time can be far too long for those without high-speed Internet connections.

Of course, there are legitimate reasons to use Flash. But if you use it, make sure visitors have the **OPTION** to view it. A couple of suggestions are:

- Put two links on your entry page: one to view the site using Flash, the other to view it without Flash.
- Move your Flash movies deeper within your site. If your visitor wants to view them, they can simply click on a link.

8. 'Forced' Disclosure Of Personal Information To Enter Your Site Or Buy Your Products

You may have seen sites that ask you to enter an email address, a name, or other personal information before you're allowed to 'enter' the site. Again, this is an easy way to lose a visitor! Without knowing anything about a site, what reason does the visitor have to give up personal details?

Give your visitors the option to sign up for your newsletter, product updates, etc. But let them into your site first. If they like what they see, they'll willingly provide you with contact information. This helps **you** too, by 'pre-screening' the people on your list to help ensure that it contains only interested prospects and not just people who were 'looking around'.

9. S-I-o-o-o-w Loading Pages

Huge graphics and HTML errors are just a couple of things that can affect the load time of your web pages. Many HTML editors will check your code for errors, or use NetMechanic's HTML Toolbox: <http://netmechanic.com/> . NetMechanic also offers a free tool to help minimize the size of your graphics.

10. General 'Unprofessional' Look-And-Feel

A few of the more commonly seen design problems include: spelling mistakes; bright/clashing colors (or too many colors); too many fonts; a sloppy or disorganized look; too many banners or graphics blinking, flashing, dancing, or beckoning from the screen; lots of broken links; and horizontal scroll bars.

Creating a web page is easy. Creating a *good* web page, however, takes a little more thought. A clean, well-designed site is worth the effort. Your bottom line will thank you!

An Introduction to PR

The complexities of Google's PR (Page Ranking) System have grown more difficult to understand since the Hilltop Algorithm was introduced. This beginner's guide to the PR system explains the basics of what PR is, what it does, and how it affects your site's rankings. This revolutionary search algorithm has made it to where the most relevant and popular sites with the best content do the best on Google's search page. Keep in mind, this algorithm is kept secret by Google for fear of it being exploited, but the basics have been released for study.

In a nutshell, Google's Page Ranking is a system devised to rank pages based on their content and popularity and place them accordingly within the search results based on their relevance to the general topic. Or, in laymen's terms, it's a system to make sure sites are put where they need to be, both in search results and in rankings. A site dealing with pet care is not going to be listed in the top 10 when searching for "web design," but depending on its content and popularity it could be well towards the top of the list on "pet medicine" or "sick dog."

PR is on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest ranking possible. Of course, only a very few sites have a PR 10 or even a PR 9 for that matter. PR 7 and PR 8 sites are considered very good sites, with lots of original, relevant content and a great deal of inbound links. You will usually find sites with a high PR at the top of the list under Google's search engine, and many others, since relevant content and lots of links is almost a prerequisite for being placed high in any of the major search engines on any of the major keywords.

PR Spread

PR is set up to "pass on" from one site to another, or one page to another if it is within your own site. As the PR "spreads" throughout your site, you will get less and less utility from it. A link from a PR 5 site to your main page will give you a PR 4 link to your main page. Since your main page will be linked to other pages within your site, any links on your front page (up to 100 pages) will then receive a PR 3 link from your main page. It continues to trickle down, exponentially losing power until it peters out.

Keep in mind, however, that depending on what page linked to you, and how many links were on that page in the first place, your PR could be significantly lower than expected. If a PR 5 page links to your site, but has 300 other links on that single page, you may get anywhere from 0 to 4 PR. Thus it is beneficial to have a limited number of links on your main pages, due to the smaller amount of PR being passed down with the more links it is being passed to. Overall, a small, concise site with lots of inbound links and few outbound links would be the ideal "PR trap," although relevant, original content is needed as well.

PR's Effect on Rankings

The effects of PR are plainly viewable to anybody with the Google Toolbar. Simply search for a keyword, and look at the PR rating of the top 10 sites. The highest PR will usually be on the top of the list, depending on content. If a PR 8, however, has a keyword that does not match their content, they will most likely be ranked lower than a PR 6 on the same keyword with more relevant content on the subject matter. A site with high, relevant, and original content, along with matching keywords and a multitude of links from related sites, will place extremely high on searches containing their keywords. A site with old content that is not updated often with links from non-related sites and keywords that do not relate directly to their content, on the other hand will probably not show up within the top 100 sites on the same search.

So basically, PR is what drives listings on the Google Search Engine. How to optimize your site to take advantage of this system, however is the real challenge.

Utilizing PR

To make proper use of the PR system, many different things must be done to assure your website is "acceptable" within their guidelines. Basically, making your site more relevant to your topic will have a great effect on your PR

ranking, especially if you are "popular" among those sites, or have many links coming from related sites. Each site on the internet has a Page Rank, assigned by Google, based on their content and popularity. To view the page rank of each site, download the Google Toolbar from their site. It will automatically show you the rank of the page you're on with a small counter on your task bar.

Now, obviously a "good" site links to you, it will have a better effect on your website's popularity. Say, for example, a PR 3 website puts a link on their links page to your main page. That link will be considered a PR 2 link to your site (PR - 1), giving you a PR of 2 on your main page. If, however, a PR 0 site adds a link to your site, there is almost no change. A link from a grayed-out site, which means they have a negative PR, will actually be a detriment to your PR, as they have been deemed a site not relevant to anything (or relevant, but banned) by Google. Of course, a link from a PR 7 site to your own will be drastically more effective in boosting your PR than even 20 PR 3 links would.

Getting Good Links

One of the most important things to remember about getting a high PR ranking is to get links from "good" sites. These include sites that are directly related to your own site in some way, and preferably sites with a high PR of their own. Good examples include award pages and directory listings. With relevant links coming from related sites with a high PR, your site will not only gain PR fast, but will gain in real popularity. High PR sites traditionally have high traffic due to their link volume and content. If there is a link to you, it is a sign that you have a good site on a related topic with good content as well, attracting visitors who didn't find exactly what they wanted. More visitors means more PR, which in turn gets you more visitors. You can see how important good links can be.

Try to steer away from sites with unrelated topics, as these will probably not help much, if any with your traffic, and may actually bring a penalty to your PR. Other sites to steer away from when trying to work up your PR would be FFAs, or Free For All link programs. These sites allow browsers to enter their link into a huge list (sometimes of thousands of other sites). Usually you will find that these sites have been "grayed out," or given a negative PR effect by Google, bringing your PR down if you have a link from them.

Doorway pages are another thing to avoid. These are shorter, shallow sites that are created simply for putting as many keywords and links as possible on their pages in order to "farm" PR for higher rankings on Google. These, in general, once they are found are "grayed out," as well as sites they link to. Enough links from these will assure that your site will not show up on Google's search at all.

Getting Good Content

Good, original content is not as hard to obtain as some might think. By writing articles for your site you can provide pages of completely relevant and unique content, as long as the articles are on subject. A few articles will give you plenty of original content to get a fairly good "relevance rating" with Google, which contributes to your PR rating, and it will not trigger the dreaded "duplicate content" tag that will doom your site to obscurity.

In addition, if you can get enough relevant content together, you can eventually become recognized as an "expert" in the field. With that status, you will get enough traffic to boost your PR even more. People are always in need of information, and if you provide good enough information, you will find yourself getting links from all over the internet.

PR in a Nutshell - an Overview

Basically, with enough unique content and relevant links, you can have a high PR site and be ready to take on the internet. Overall, things to keep in mind are to stay consistent with your main topic, both in links and in your content, and stay away from the "no-no" sites mentioned above. If you can do these things, you can gain a high PR and a good ranking with Google in a relatively short period of time.