

All you need to know about SEO*



NORTHSTAR

*A layman's Guide

Search Engines: Background

The Search Engine's job; is to bring up the most appropriate site that is relevant to your search.

The Search Engines that do it best, get the most traffic, and make the most money.

Google has 49.2% of all searches and is on target to make over £1 billion this year. Followed by Yahoo 23.8%, MSN 9.6%, AOL 6.3 and Ask 2.6%.[†]

No one has time to sit down and review all the sites, so they do it through complex algorithms: 'Robots' are sent out to gather data (Googlebot visits your site hundreds of times every month to see what's changed).

Programmes then assess tons of data about your site, weigh this up against tons of data gathered from other sites, and then rank you on the Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs).

The search engines' prime directive

The big thing to get your head around, is that the Web was designed to be a source of free information (not a source of 'free' advertising).

ASK NOT WHAT THE INTERNET CAN DO FOR YOU;
ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THE INTERNET.

I know it sounds a bit hippyish – which isn't surprising when you consider the internet is driven by people in California – but underneath the tie-dyed shirt, is a pinstriped business suite.

This prime directive is not for altruistic reasons: for the search engines to remain in business they have to bin the rubbish and promote the truly useful sites that are informative, rewarding or entertaining.

Only by keeping their customers happy can they make money.

You will see this thinking running through all the markers that the search engines use to rank your site.



[†] Source: Nielsen NetRatings

How search engines rank your site

Links are the single most important criteria for higher page rankings

In the game of high rankings, links are your trump card.

Think of a link as a vote of confidence from someone out there on the web that your site has something worth reading.

Links also have the knock-on effect of generating traffic – and traffic counts as popularity: and popular sites get higher rankings.

But it's not just the quantity of links pointing your site; quality and type are also taken into consideration.

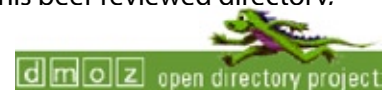


Generating links

If you have original, useful and interesting content, then people will automatically link to your site over time. But while you're waiting for that to happen, there are numerous ways to kick start the process.

Directories are a useful method of link generation; just think of them as hundreds of internet Yellow Pages.

The Open Directory Project (DMOZ) is the mother of all Directories, with stiff criteria for listing and all entries are edited by humans. Google looks highly on this peer reviewed directory, and having a site listed in it offers a great degree of trust.



There are thousands of free and paid directories out there, each one can generate business in its own right and the more appropriate the category the better, but cumulatively they boost traffic = higher rankings.

Social networking – del.icio.us, stumbleupon, digg, reddit, furl are hugely popular sites for people sharing what's hot and what's not on the Web.

These require a little more effort than directories, as they need content: there's no point spreading links to the Welcome page of your Widget Manufacturing site, but if you have a page in your site, for instance '101 things you never knew you could do with a widget,' then you could open the doors to thousands of visitors.

Article directories Write an article related to your trade which is of genuine interest to wider world. The thinking behind article directories is that they are Free Content for anyone to use – the only caveat is that if they use it, they are required to post your link. Get a good article and let other people do the link building for you.

Link values

There is a mass of criteria about links that do effect how it is valued.

The referring site: A link from a hugely popular or credible site, such as the BBC, is given more value than a little unknown.

Referring site with a higher page rank are also given more weight.

Links from college websites (URLs ending in the .edu) are liked because of the assumption that the website's content is educationally oriented. The same reasoning goes for .gov addresses, the assumption is the website's content is of use to the general public and has been passed at bureaucratic level.

Certain sites are given special treatment and can win you bonus points, such as: DMOZ, Wikipedia and del.icio.us

Link context and placement: Where the link appears and on which page is also rated, and again it comes down to common sense. A link on the home page is golden, whereas a link hidden away on the third level is tarnished. They also rate whether the link buried amongst a huge list of external links or placed on its own.



Content: the King of high rankings

If links are the Ace, then content is the King, and the pair of them work hand in hand.

An inordinate amount of weight is given by designers and clients to the look and feel of a website – but it's the words that get results on the search engines.

Because the web is so cheap compared to other media, the common pitfall is not to invest in SEO copywriting.

The result is a waste of money; a site that is scrutinized and approved by the board of directors, and not seen by anyone else.



How you see a web page

Northstar Web Design - Web Design Leeds

http://www.northstar-website-design.com/

Disable Cookies CSS Forms Images Information Miscellaneous Outline Resize Tools View Source Options

Google Search Current Site Gmail PageRank Page Info Check AutoFill BlogThis! Options Highlight

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Northstar Web Design
 Leeds, Yorkshire
 Tel: 0113 284 3668

Web Design Case Studies
 Ann Nussey

NORTHSTAR WEB DESIGN, LEEDS, YORKSHIRE, UK
 You don't have to go to the ends of the earth to find a **web design** company that produces high quality, cost-effective websites.
 Based in a cottage near **Leeds**, I have 22 years' experience working in leading advertising agencies throughout the UK on national brands. It is this marketing knowledge that is applied to the copy, layout and of every website I produce.

WEB DESIGN ISN'T ROCKET SCIENCE
 Anyone can build a website, you just need look on the web to see many shocking examples.
 But to make a website that is noticed and is a useful marketing tool – well, that takes experience.
 Although I live in the country, my resources are world-wide: technical support in Hull, e-commerce providers in Canada and database partners in Australia – it's a 21st Century cottage industry.

WHAT MAKES NORTHSTAR DIFFERENT?

- Advertising principles applied to web design
- Friendly, personal service
- Better value for money, no overheads

A DOWN-TO-EARTH APPROACH
 The internet may have no boundaries or borders, but you can't beat a face to face meeting to come to a quick and clear mutual understanding.
 So although I have clients nationwide, my focus is on working with small to medium sized businesses in Leeds and Yorkshire, with a no nonsense approach of a down to earth style.

Fred Campbell - Website Designer / Web Whiz

oChange
 oChange – change management website launched 22/6/07

Ann Nussey
 Ann Nussey Website
 Ann Nussey Alexander Technique site launched 11/5/07. **Web design**

How a robot sees the same web page

URL: <http://www.northstar-website-design.com/>

Title: Northstar Web Design - Web Design Leeds

Description: Northstar Web Design, Leeds, Yorkshire, provides: website design, web hosting, copywriting, search engine optimization, e-commerce and video services. Tel: 0113 2843668

Keywords: web design leeds,web design company,website design leeds,website design yorkshire,SEO

Text: Northstar Web Design Web Design Leeds header background url images mastheads head index.jpg top left no repeat nav li introduction a color A world class website design company in a cottage in Yorkshire Northstar Web design, leeds, Yorkshire, UK You don t have to go to the ends of the earth to find a company that produces high quality, cost effective websites. Based in a cottage near , I have years experience working in leading advertising agencies throughout the UK on national brands. It is this marketing knowledge that is applied to the copy, layout and of every website I produce. web design isn t rocket science Anyone can build a website, you just need look on the web to see many shocking examples. But to make a website that is noticed and is a useful marketing tool ndash well, that takes experience. Although I live in the country, my resources are world wide technical support in Hull, e commerce providers in Canada and database partners in Australia ndash it s a st Century cottage industry. what makes northstar different bull Advertising principles applied to web design bull Friendly, personal service bull Better value for money, no overheads A down to earth approach The internet may have no boundaries or borders, but you can t beat a face to face meeting to come to a quick and clear mutual understanding. So although I have clients nationwide, my focus is on working with small to medium sized businesses in Leeds and Yorkshire, with a no nonsense approach at a down to earth price. For free advice or a quote, call Leeds Whether it s an existing site that needs updating, advice on how to get higher rankings on the search engines , or a quote for building a website ndash please don t hesitate to give me a call. Firefox is the best, safest, fastest browser for viewing the web. Download Member of . . Technical support . Page Fred Campbell Website Designer Web Whiz ndash change management website launched Ann Nussey Alexander Technique site launched . . VIDEO PRODUCTION A minute video has been produced for Autosave exhibition stand. . . Northstar Web Design Leeds, Yorkshire Tel Web Design Case Studies copy Copyright Northstar Web Design, Leeds, Yorkshire, UK. I I Northstar Creative Ltd. Registered company England and Wales No . VAT No

Number of words: 386

Number of distinct words: 214

Links:

<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/websitedesign.html>

<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/background.html>

<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/seo.html>

<http://www.firefox2006.com/gonz.htm>

<http://www.itprofessionals.co.uk>

<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/links.html>

<http://www.939design.com/>

<http://www.ochange.com/>

<http://www.annnussey.com/>

<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/copywriting.html>

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<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/news.html>
<http://northstarweb.blogspot.com>
<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/contact.aspx>
<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/casestudies/arcusjobs.html>
<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/casestudies/cauldron.html>
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<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/casestudies/sterling.html>
<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/casestudies/ela.html>
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<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/casestudies/idt.html>
<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/casestudies/javeavilla.html>
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<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/casestudies/totalfascias.html>
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<http://www.northstar-website-design.com/map.html>

It's the words that count £

The internet doesn't supply a quick or easy answer to your marketing problems. It is a marketing tool that requires time and investment.

There is a disparity in perception between the belief that people don't have time to read, and the reality: which is people read now more than ever before because of the internet - but with so much choice, they are not going to hang around and read rubbish.

And what counts with your potential customers, is even more important to the search engines.

Search engines don't appreciate pastel shades or a beautifully rendered photograph – all they see is words, and the code in which they are written.

Search Phrases (key words)

Any page can be optimized for 2 or 3 search phrases – it's the selection that is the key your success. To do this you have to:

1. Think up a load of phrases that you expect people might be searching for if they wanted to find your business
2. Research how many people are actually using those search phrases. (There are numerous tools that can tell you exactly the number of times a specific phrase has been punched-in over the past month). You can guarantee the more popular the phrase, the harder the competition will be.
3. Research the competition, and see how many other pages out there are optimized for those search phrases. Asses the quantity and quality of the competition: how many links do they have, how well optimized are their sites, how many pages etc.
4. When you have all the facts at your fingertips you can decide on which phrases to optimize the page for – niche or mass market.
5. Then it's a case of assessing the results over time, seeing what's working, what can be improved and amending accordingly. The web is in a constant state of flux and what might work today, could change tomorrow.



YAHOO

How the key phrases are coded on the page – in order of priority to the search engines

- No 1: **Title tag:** Almost irrelevant to the human reader, but to the search engines, this is like the 4 foot high letters on a 48 sheet poster
- No 2: **Description:** Again, invisible when you are on the website, but key to the search engines and their first choice for information to display on the SERPs
- No 3/ish: **Keywords:** These have been so abused by spammers that they have been devalued by the search engines, but are a good indication to see if you are on the right track
- No 4: **H1s:** If the Title tag is the headline, H1 tagged phrases are the sub headlines. Followed by H2s, H3s
- No 5: **Anchor text:** This is text within the page that links to another page
- No 6: **Alt / Title tags:** Images carry no weight, but their invisible Alt and Title tags do. Strange but true
- No 7: **Bold / Underline:** This is the one case where what you see on the page is also recognized by the search engines. No major weighting, but important
- No 8: **Text:** At last, the copy you see on the page! It's important to have an overall easy reading index and a weighting of the key phrases that's between 5% and 10% of the overall word count

Quality and quantity

OK, so you have idea of what phrases are given weight and where, and then those pesky search engines also have guidelines on how many there should be. Some of this is based on the mechanics of what can be viewed on their Search Engine Result Pages, others are based on word count and reading complexity.

Title tags: 60 characters, including spaces.
 Descriptions: 120 characters, including spaces.
 Key words, 250 characters, including spaces.
 Body text: 250 words (ideal min).

Well written and structured text and meta data, takes time and effort, something you can guarantee spammers cannot be bothered with. For these reasons it is rewarded by the search engines.

Spread betting – how big should your site be?

If you have individually optimized pages, then the bigger the better: each page is a unique opportunity to catch searchers and generate traffic.

It's a case of seeing how many cards the competition is holding, sneaking a peak at how strong their hand is and beating it. If you're pinning all your hopes on one card, you can bet you are going to lose against someone holding a full deck.

Link baiting

Another method that is mixed in with the general quality content theory, is link baiting. The phrase is new, but the theory is old fashioned common sense.

It runs like this: you have your website which is essentially offering the same stuff as all your competitors. So you write an article which gives a unique angle on your product / manufacture / area of specialization. This is a definitive piece of work, a source of reference and referral for other websites.

It generates links as it propagates over the web, and potential clients who may find it, get reassurance that you know what you are going on about.

The added benefit is that an article like this, is not only embedded in your site and a passive potential for traffic, but it also can be actively submitted to Article Directories and Wikipedia.



What's in a domain name?

Quite a lot actually. In the ideal world your domain name should also have the key phrase of what you do, but this is just an added nicety.

However, your domain age is a real factor, and the older the better. This is again search engine reaction to the spammers who jump in on a given opportunity, and leave as soon as things start hotting up. If you have a new domain name you shouldn't expect to see any results for at least 6 months, although it can happen a lot sooner. If you are really serious, you should look at buying a domain that has been registered and established for years.

For this reason, buying a domain name for 2 years should be the minimum, and 5 years is even better. The search engines like to see commitment, it gives them reassurance about who you are, and the honesty of your intentions before they jump into bed with you.

Updates - the rewards of the constant gardener

The search engines also track how often your site is updated and what changes are made to each page.

A well tended website should have constant changes: pruning the meta data, planting new key search phrases, and weeding out unwanted information. It all shows that someone cares and the search engines reward them with better results.

Leave your site untended and it will go to seed, and sink off the search engine rank pages.

