



Published: March 23 2010

How to optimize your site for Google in 2010

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It's well known to industry experts that the combination of organic and paid search engine results page (SERP) listings not only gives you brand lift; it results in higher click-through rates. Search Engine Land reported that [paid and organic listings equal a 15 percent click-through rate](#), reviewing the findings of a recent study conducted at Penn State. Any marketer would love to get a 15 percent lift in site visitors, right?

However, many marketers depend heavily on paid listings, partly because of immediate results and the ability to fine-tune campaigns on the fly while controlling costs. When it comes to SEO, the initial cost of a campaign is perceived to be high, despite the fact that SEO is very cost effective over time. Another obstacle is that SEO results can take months to materialize. While many marketers tend to favor paid search, they ignore SEO at their peril.

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The importance of organic links

Historically, Google users have indicated they prefer organic listings over paid listings at the rate of 70 percent to 30 percent. Regardless of user preference, [recent research by Google and Enquiro](#) reveals that purchase intent increases with a presence in both top organic and top sponsored listings, even for branded queries.

To be competitive in 2010, marketers need both organic and paid links in the SERPs. Your most important organic presence is in Google, since it owns [76 percent of the U.S. search market](#).

Google has been testing its new Caffeine algorithm since last fall. It's been rumored for months that Caffeine will be launched any day, but Search Engine Land reported recently that Google Caffeine is [months away](#). We know from reports of user testing that Caffeine will focus on the following areas: higher keyword density, faster site speed, fresher results, real-time search content, social media link bait, video listings, and keywords in the domain name. So, why wait? You can start optimizing for Google today. Below are four areas you can work on for more visibility in Google.

1. Ensure your site is up to speed

Late last year, Google's Matt Cutts confirmed on his blog that speed will become a ranking factor on Google. Search engine speed is important to users. It's been reported Google Caffeine clocks at two times its normal speed. That gives Google more of an edge than it has already -- unless others can catch up.

In addition to being faster, Caffeine will provide more results in less time. A new crawling technology allows Caffeine to index more websites, thus providing users with more results on each results page. With all the emphasis on speed delighting users, what do you think will happen when visitors get to your site and find it slow to load? So job one is to ensure that users can navigate your site quickly and easily. Test for speed with multiple browsers.

2. Create real-time content

Last year, Google started serving Twitter real-time search results in its SERPs and started implementing Facebook updates in February, streaming real-time content from across the web. That means users view live updates from social media sites, headlines from news articles, and blog posts published in real-time for relevant searches. Google also added "hot topics" to Google Trends, which shows the most common topics people are publishing on the web in real time. Google's new search technologies enable it to monitor over a billion documents and process hundreds of millions of real-time changes daily in conjunction with its partners, including Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, FriendFeed, Jaiku, and Identi.ca.

Because of the prominence of real-time search content in the results pages, it is now more important than ever for companies to have a social media presence, create new content for relevant social media sites on a regular basis, and optimize that content with SEO best practices.

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3. Create and promote videos

Another prominent presence in the SERPs is video links. People seem to click on videos more than other SERP links, and that's why Google is moving video up in the results. When considering video, plan to create content that is worth sharing and of high quality. Optimize with keywords in the video file name, title, tags, and the URL. Create a brief description using optimized text. Create a video launch page, optimizing content for SEO as usual with title, description, tags, optimized content, links, anchor text and XML site map.

Linking is very important, so create both internal and external links. You can cross link to other videos, tweet your video, promote it on your blog, or link to your Facebook page and other relevant social media sites.

After posting the video on your own site, promote it on video-sharing sites including Google Video, YouTube, Blinkx, Yahoo Video, MetaCafe, Truveo, and Vimeo. Alternatively, you can use a video distribution service such as [TubeMogul](#) for broadcasting to top sharing sites. Embed your video in blog posts and repurpose it for relevant email marketing campaigns.



4. Create and promote link bait

Blogs and social media marketing are excellent ways to create natural links to your site, and this type of content is moving up in the Google SERPs. Before creating your link bait, make sure your site or blog has fresh content that's visually appealing and is well organized with good navigation.

It takes inspiration to come up with a good idea for link bait. Create content that is timely, unique, eye-catching, and memorable. You can blog about hot topics, your opinions, or answers to difficult questions. Write about topics that make people think, thereby encouraging them to respond and share your content.

Make your content visually appealing and easy on the eyes. Create white space by breaking up long paragraphs. Use relevant images for illustrations. Choose an attractive font type and size that is easy to read. Make it fun by adding humor. Make it intriguing by asking controversial questions.

Don't be afraid to be emphatic when you feel strongly about a topic, but don't be outrageous just to get attention. You want it to go viral, but you need to be accurate and factual or people will challenge or dismiss you. Do some research on your topic to see if others have touched on it recently. If so, take a different view. Remember that time is scarce for most people, so edit your content to be concise and complete. And needless to say, check grammar and spelling.

Make it easy for people to share and propagate your content by providing a catchy, descriptive title. Provide a succinct summary paragraph at the beginning of your content so they know at a glance what it's about. Also, provide convenient share buttons to tweet, re-tweet, or share on Facebook.

It's not easy to create viral link bait, but when you're inspired, create that killer content, optimize it, enhance it with images and links, check it over, and then promote it relentlessly.

Conclusion

To summarize, the combination of organic and paid results page listings results in brand lift and higher click-through rates. While many marketers depend heavily on paid listings, they ignore organic SEO at their peril. Four areas you can work on to improve your organic rankings in Google are: site speed, real-time content, video content, and link bait.

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