



The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Websites

April 2008

For the busy executive. A summary of the book by the same name.



*"80-90% of business to business transactions begin with a search on the web
-MarketingSherpa"*



"Most businesses don't have a page title on their home page, the single easiest way to connect with search words."

This is a summarization of the book **The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Websites** (*A Primer on Search Engine Optimization for non-technical Executives*), [available now on Amazon.com](#) for \$11.95.

Lead Generation

Dude, where's my customer?

Newspapers are losing their biggest source of revenue, classified ads, as Craigslist™ offers their customers a cheaper and more effective way of selling their goods.

Barnes and Noble is struggling because Amazon.com and other online outfits have seduced B&N's customers with a much more convenient, less expensive alternative. Barnes and Noble have left it too late to respond, believing all along that 'bricks and mortar' would win in the end. Other bookstores have already gone out of business.

"...traditional retailers, which have been paring down store growth and closing shops as they struggle..." - CNN April 2008. Does that sound like your business?

Thousands of less well known companies have fallen victim to web savvy newcomers in this Internet Age. Business-to-business markets (e.g. Business Intelligence software) have been hit harder even than business-to-consumer markets (e.g. Amazon.com). No surprise, then, [MarketingSherpa](#) reports 80-90% of all B2B transactions begin with a search on the web. Clearly, if your business does not appear early in search results, you are losing access to your market.

What exactly does the Marketing Department do anyway?

The most important objective of every marketing department is to generate quality sales leads. It's the sales department's job to turn those leads into customers, the product people's job to create the product and someone else's job to manage the cash, but the marketing department has to generate leads.

This document is about generating quality sales leads.

You can always buy leads, of course. For a few dollars a piece, companies will sell you tens of thousands of names, phone numbers and other details of unsuspecting executives, managers, employees and consumers across the land. You can insert these "leads" into your database and begin the brute strength process of whittling the list down to a fraction of its size, one stony cold call at a time. That is interrupt-based marketing, and it's what we've all been trained to do since we first tried to sell a set of Cutco knives to our neighbors.

Each of the following twelve factors has an influence on how likely a web page is to appear on the first page of Google™ search results. Not all factors are equal, of course, so each has a "diamond" rating beside it. The more diamonds, the bigger the influence. Still, just like a three-legged stool, you need to score well on

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each influence to get to Page One of Google , MSN™ , Yahoo!(tm) or any other search engine search results.

1 diamond = small effect, 5 diamonds = profound effect.

1. Page Title ◆◆◆

The page title (technically known as the Title Tag) is probably the central most important element of a web page when it comes to matching search words with a web page.

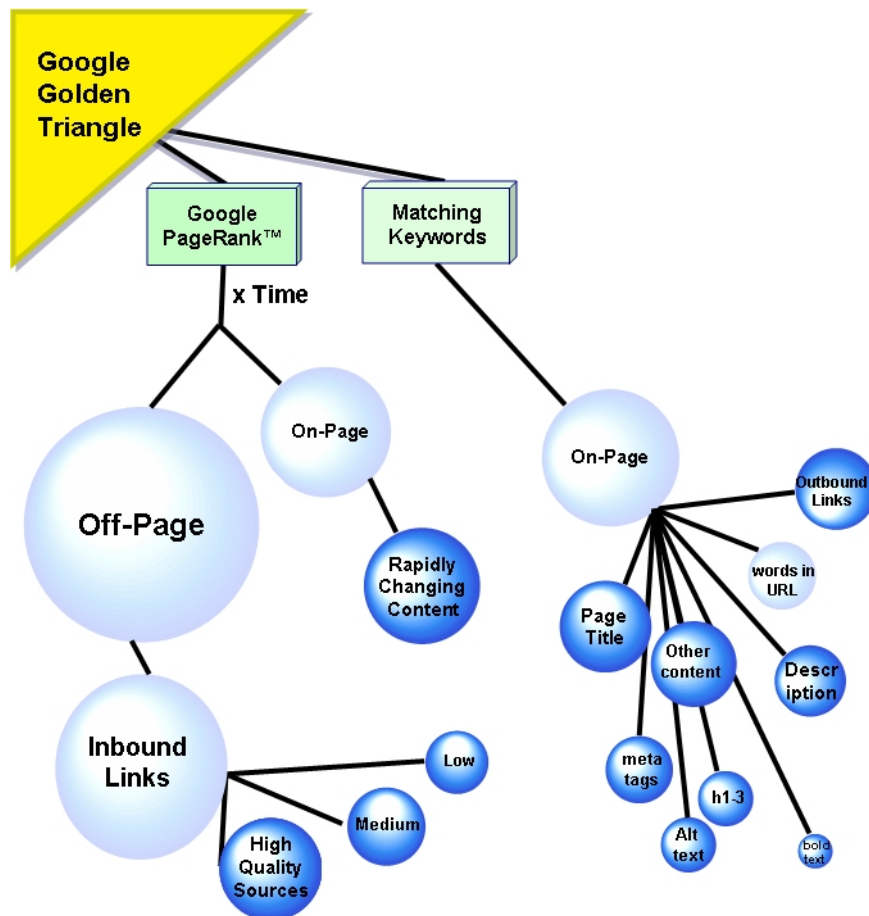
Incredibly, the Title Tag, the most important element of search word matching, is missing from most web pages.

Whatever text you put in the Title Tag is what appears in the top caption of the browser itself when that page is being viewed.

Use the Title Tag to tell people what you do, in about a half dozen words.

2. Description ◆◆

Another example of little exploited On-Page influence is the page Description. Although this does not actually appear on the web page when viewed through a browser, it is used by search engines to match search words with web page content.



Schematic of the influences on search results position, taken from **The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Websites**. Size reflects relative influence.

“Always include your URL with every posting you make on the web.”

“An active blog on your website is an excellent way of satisfying the rapidly changing content requirement.”

“Make sure every image on your website has an Alternate Text entry that describes the image.”

3. Headers ♦

Section Headers within web pages are recognized by Google and other search engines by the tags h1, h2 and h3. The following example comes from the HTML on the Dodge website. The text “2009 Ram 1500” is given increased importance by being tagged as “h2”.

```
<h2>2009 Ram 1500</h2>
```

Search engines will give these words a heavier weighting than if they were not designated as headers.



4. Bold Fonts ♦

Search engines give more weight to words that are in bold font over words that are in non-bold font, presumably on the assumption that bold words have more importance. Consider making bold those words on your home page that prospects use to search for the product or service you offer.

5. Alternate Text and Image Names ♦

Search engines do not know what is inside images. You can help search engines identify the meaning of images by including an Alternate Text with every image that is used on your website. It is also a good idea to have meaningful image names. People using the web in search of specific images, if they find yours, may end up visiting your site as a result of finding one of your images. Help them find your website by having meaningful image file names. For example, “extendable_fishing_rod.jpg” is more useful than “image300.jpg” if the image is one of your extendable fishing rod products.

6. Keywords in the URL ♦♦

You have already named your company and your domain name and URL using a name you probably cannot easily change. Still, it is worth mentioning that companies that have the exact keywords in the URL of their home page can pop straight to the top of search results. If you are at the stage of renaming your company, consider how powerful words in the URL are. The company name “Seattle Fishing Rods” with a possible domain name of seattlefishingrods.com is far more search engine friendly than a fancy company name like “Bacalexerium” with its associated URL bacalexerium.com, which will never have a match with any meaningful search words.

If a page you are targeting for SEO improvement involves pages beyond the basic domain name, use your keywords when naming it. For example, the page “metal-fishing-rods.html” is more likely than “page2.html” to get picked up when someone is searching for metal fishing rods.

7. Relevant Content ♦♦♦♦

You could have the best looking website on the planet, and PageRanks higher than all of your competitors’ PageRanks, but if the search words used by people looking for your product or service don’t match the keywords inside your website, pages from your website will not appear in the search results when people search for the kind of product you sell.

How do you determine what “relevant content” is for your website?

“Once you know what your keywords are, use them in every piece of online literature and posting.”

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You can use the Google AdWords system to find suggestions, based on your competitors' websites, of what keywords might be most effective for your own website. You don't have to spend money to do this. Just set up a free, Google AdWords account. When it asks for your website, enter that of a successful competitor and it will suggest keywords based on the content of their site and display them to you. The list can be a starting point. Or, if you want to spend a little money on Google AdWords, you can experiment with different keyword combinations and use Google AdWords Reports to see which words are the most effective. That can be an eye-opener, as you discover which words prospects use to search for your product and what ad captions make them respond by clicking your ad.

Once you know your best keywords, repeat them everywhere you make a posting

If you know your business well, you probably already have a good idea what keywords you should use. If the most profitable products in your fishing supply business are rods, fishing line and bait, you should use the words rods, fishing line and bait, as well as fishing supplies, often in your own online blog (inside your website), in the text on your web pages, in case studies, data sheets or any other content on your website.

An effective way to change your website content rapidly is to have an active blog on it

Over time, this accumulates a dense foundation of keywords that tie into how people will search for your products or services. Google does not differentiate between chit-chat and high-power news. Page content just has to change substantially every day, but come search time, relevant content will mean your web pages are included in the search results. There is little point in having lots of keywords relating to, let's say knitting, if you are in the fishing supply business. That is why relevant content is critical. When they find you, the content they experience matches their expectations.

8. Rapidly Changing Content ♦ ♦ ♦

Rapidly changing content means text on your website that changes substantially every day.

Newspaper websites typically change most of their content every day, so they've got an advantage based on the very nature of their business. (But then, their competitors have the same advantage, leveling the playing field for all in the online newspaper business). Owners of websites in more "static" markets might have a tougher challenge coming up with changing content, but for the same reason, these businesses have an opportunity - most businesses never consider deliberately changing web content every day. It might not take very much to come up with more changing content than your competitors'. Your Fisherman's Boots business doesn't have a lot of new stuff to say every day, but there are ways to get around that.



An effective way to change the content of your website rapidly is to have a blog or some other kind of online user forum on it, and to keep postings flowing into it every day. Many successful websites have an effective and heavily trafficked blog in their website. Create one, and feed it every day. Some blogs seem to

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reach a critical mass all of their own, and before you know it, the community is feeding your blog for you. It is a rare blog that gets populated by volunteers like that, but lucky for you if that happens. Usually a long time with continuous work by you must take place before others join in.

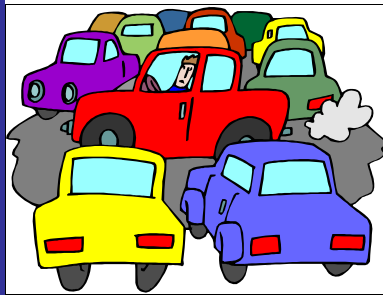
Expect a year of daily feeding for a blog to reach critical mass.

Every business has some aspect of their market that they can use to feed changing content. In our example, we know that fishermen are interested in weather. Weather changes every day; we could paraphrase the national weather summary every day and have it on our home page, making sure to lace the prose with our favorite keywords. For example "Scattered showers expected in the Northwest will be no trouble to the seasoned fisherman dressed in the latest rubber-clad fisherman's boots from Acme Supplies". A little tedious, but this will satisfy both the rapidly changing and relevant content requirements. Do it every day. If you have a corporate blog, make an entry every day in it.

9. Site Traffic ♦♦

This is a bit of a Catch-22 situation. Site traffic increases site traffic much like success breeds success. It's like trying to get a loan from a bank; they'll give you the loan if you can prove you don't need it.

This requirement feeds upon itself. As you do other things to build site traffic, Google sees the increased traffic (or at least, the traffic they send your way) and raises its opinion of your site, which raises the chances of your site traffic



increasing, and so on. Once you've succeeded in getting your site traffic up, it's easier to keep it there than get it up in the first place!

Ask your entire staff to install Google Toolbar in their browser and to use your main website as the default start page of their browser. Google Toolbar sends basic information about the websites you visit and this data helps feed the site traffic requirement. If you have 50 employees and they each open their browser

20 times a day, you can clock up some traffic. Also, when laptops, servers, desktops or other equipment is deployed in your company, make sure the browser for each login defaults to your website. Talk to your QA department and make sure they set up every browser to open up with your corporate home page. It all helps.

10. Inbound Links ♦♦♦♦♦

This is the biggest factor. Links from other websites to your website increase your PageRank.

There are three different classes of inbound link:

Basic link to your website ♦

This is where another website has a direct reference to your website. For example, there might be a list of URLs within a list of links that includes your URL. For example: <http://www.siteleads.net>

Link with Anchor Text ♦♦♦

This is a link that is displayed as a piece of text, not a URL. For example: [Get Great Products Here](#) (with the URL of your website linked from the text). By reading the text itself, the search engine has extra clues about what the link is

for, so it is graded higher.

High quality source ♦♦♦♦♦

A link from IBM's corporate website is worth a lot more than a link from Joe Mc Schmuck's website. A link from a website with a high PageRank is worth more than a link from a website with a low PageRank.

If you are a small company that has a significant partnership with a large company, especially if they have a higher PageRank than yours, work with that partner to get a link from their website to your website. It might be in the form of a customer success story on their website that shows you and your partner in a favorable light. Do a little homework on their website and make a note of which of their pages have the highest PageRanks; they are the pages that will give you the best value to have a link from back to your website.



Reciprocal links: Swapping links - getting other website owners to create a link to your site from theirs while you add a link to their site from yours - is another opportunity to increase your inbound link count, but it is considered "gaming the system" or "Black Hat", and Google frowns therefore upon it. I recommend you avoid reciprocal links unless you see a specific value to your customer from doing it.

In very small companies, "mom and pop" businesses as they're called, reciprocal links are not as big an issue as they are in bigger

companies because, well, Google doesn't really have the time to worry about such small businesses.

My guess is that Google looks at the percentage of your inbound links that also have an outbound link to the same website. They might even ignore all inbound links from a site to which a given site has a link out to. I'm not sure about that, though.

How many inbound links do you need? A rule-of-thumb I use is at least ten inbound links for every employee. If you have 50 employees, aim for a minimum of 500 inbound links.

11. Outbound Links ♦

Outbound links are links from within your website to outside your website. For example, a link from your Fisherman's Boots website to the national weather center website. Outbound links are easier than inbound links to put in place of course, because you have full control over the content of your own website so you can add them whenever you wish.

Still, it is best if the links you add to your website add real value to your visitors' experience. There is little point in having a link from your Fisherman's Boots website to the World Knitting Federation's website. The better your outbound links are for your visitors, the more likely visitors are to bookmark your page for viewing later.

If you have on your website a list of customers or clients your company has done work with, make sure each has a hyperlink from your website to their respective website.

12. Time ♦♦♦♦

Even if you could somehow get all other factors done in a month or so, by definition, the Time factor cannot be rushed. Google and other search engines factor in time as a multiplier of all the other work you have done and rapidly changing content, for example, must continue to be just that, rapidly changing content, every day. You need to be patient, working the project every day forever, letting the Time factor do its part.



Track growth of PageRank and your position within search results. If you execute against the first five factors every day, you might begin to see technical effects emerge in two to three months. It's like being pregnant. It won't be obvious, but there are ways to check. Make a record of the PageRank of your home page every week. Also, run the exact same search on Google every week and make a record of the search results page number your web page appears. That will be the first thing you will see change. Moving from page 49 to page 43 is of little value to you, but it is a measurable step in the right direction and will help you

report back to your team about the progress you are making towards the Big Hairy Audacious Goal of arriving at Page One of search results.

It is unusual for competitors to have significantly different PageRanks. They are almost always within a one or two point range of each other.

If you are starting today with a PageRank of zero, it takes nine months to a year to get to a PageRank of about 6. If your competitors are already at that higher number, that is how long it will take before their phones begin to ring less and your phones begin to ring more. An increase in daily sales leads from the web happens almost from one day to the next - it happens because you have arrived on Page One of search results - and you can begin to predict when it happens only a few months into your SEO project. The reason it happens almost overnight is, you either appear on Page One of search results or you do not. Best PageRank + Keywords = 1st place. All else being equal, once your PageRank overtakes that of your competitors' PageRanks, it will be like flipping a switch. It just might take a year, if you are far behind.

More Reading...

Read the full text of [***The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Websites***](#) Executive Edition or [***Web Traffic Magnet***](#) by clicking the book image to the left.





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Because they execute the majority of searches on the web, I use Google as the search engine of choice in this document, but the same basic rules apply for any other major search engine on the web. Best practices on the web work equally well for all search engines.

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