



RudeGoose



DIY SEO - Search Engine Optimisation for Non-Geeks

Part science, part art form; search engine optimisation is very big business and the reclusive über geeks whose lives are devoted to deciphering and second guessing the Google algorithm can assure you that being "number 1 in Google" is not a simple matter. But you can make a very significant difference to the search engine traffic your own site attracts without ever having to touch your website and best of all, without spending a single penny.

Before we get started, there are just a few criteria your site must fulfil, or the following will be of little or no use to you. You may need to ask a web designer about these, as they are technical questions. Alternatively, feel free to email me at zoe@rudegoose.com with your web address and I'll check it out for you.

Millions of sites are built in such a way that search engines just can't get in there. If your site uses frames and especially if your text is embedded in images, or your site is a Flash (rather than HTML) site, you may find yourself banging your head against a brick wall if you ever want to receive quality search engine traffic.

So you have a reasonably sound website, an internet connection and a web browser. That's all you need to get started! Actually, not just any old browser will do for this purpose: You either need Internet Explorer (about 90% of people already have this) or Firefox, which is a fantastic browser and can be downloaded free from www.mozilla.org/firefox and works on Macs and PCs.



Now, you need a very handy little piece of kit - the Google Toolbar. Download it free from <http://toolbar.google.com> (notice no www). This will provide you with all of the tools you need to check your site's search engine health. The toolbar should install itself very quickly and easily and is packed with features. The ones we need are 'PageInfo' and 'PageRank', so make sure you can see them in the toolbar. If not, follow the instructions at the Google Toolbar website to find out how to enable extra features.



Assessing your own site

Once your toolbar is installed, you should see a little bar indicating 'pagerank' on a scale of 0-10. If you're still on the Google toolbar page, you should see it's about 5/10, or if you go to www.google.co.uk, it's about 9. Google assigns every single page a rank out of 10 to show how important it is (or not).

For most of us with small businesses, a rank of 3 or 4 is pretty good, but if yours is a highly specialised business, without much competition on the web, a lower rank can still bring you good results. Google's page rank and how they position your site in search results are determined by a complex (and fiercely secret) algorithm. There are many, many factors that contribute to it, but there is one very important aspect that you have a great deal of control over, and that's incoming links. Google treats each link TO your site as a vote of confidence IN your site, so if I link to you from my news page (www.rudegoose.com/news.htm, which has a rank of 4 at time of writing), Google reckons you're worthy of a link from a reasonably important page, and they'll pass some of that rank on to you.

You may now be thinking, "But I can't control who links to me, and why would they even want to?". Ok, you have a point. A link from a page like that with a rank of 4, which doesn't have a million other links on it will be hard to come by for free, but there are plenty of other ways to get links, and a page with a rank of 1 that is relevant in topic to your site, and isn't full of links to hundreds of other sites, may do you more good than one with a higher rank, but hundreds of other links and no particular focus. We'll look at how to get other sites to link to you shortly.

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First though, we need to understand a few more of the tools Google offers us to assess how we're doing in their rankings. Go to your own website in your browser window and from the 'Page Info' button on your Google Toolbar, select 'Backward links'. This should take you to a Google page where the search box contains "link:http://www.yourwebsite.com" (obviously substitute your own web address here) and if you're lucky, some links to other websites underneath.



Web

[Lasting Impressions - Clay Prints](#)

Lasting Impressions create beautifully hand made, framed clay prints that can capture a moment and last for a life time.

www.clayprints.co.uk/ - 5k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Sitemap and Links for SAI Starling Aerospace Interiors ...](#)

Sitemap and links for SAI Starling Aerospace Interiors.

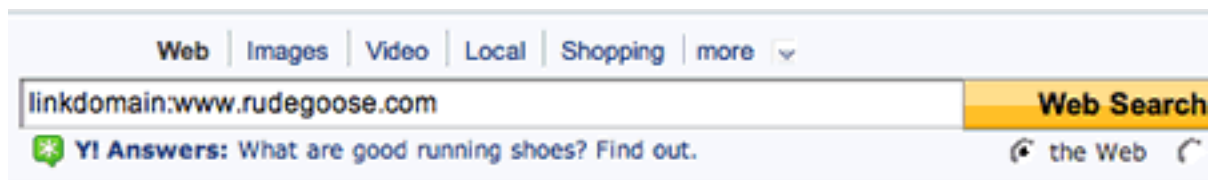
www.fly-sai.com/sitemap.htm - 5k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

[Mist Eliminators, Scrubbers and Strippers](#)

Chemplast UK Ltd. supply a wide range of mist eliminators from low pressure drop knitted mesh pad demisters to the highest efficiency candle filters ...

www.chemplast.co.uk/mist-eliminators/mist-eliminators.htm - 7k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

These are the sites that currently link to you. At least, these are a few of them. There is a strange phenomenon in Google whereby if you put a space between the colon and the address and delete the 'http://', it often reveals a lot more links. Try this in the search box, so you have "link: www.yourwebsite.com". Google actually don't do a very good job with this service, but most major search engines will provide a similar facility. Yahoo! are probably the best. Try going to www.yahoo.com and (note theirs is slightly different) typing "linkdomain:www.yourwebsite.com" in the search box. If there are any other sites on the web that are of any worth linking to yours, they will probably show up here.



You may have noticed by now that you don't actually need to use the button on your Google toolbar to find out who's linking to you. You can do it from any browser using Google, Yahoo! or MSN's websites. There are a few other questions you can put to the search engines in a similar way, and one in particular that is very useful. In your Google search box, type "site:www.yourwebsite.com" (again substituting your own domain). This will show you how many pages from your website Google are holding in their index.

Just because your site exists on the web, doesn't mean Google have found all or even some of it. If your Google toolbar is showing a rank of '0' for your own pages, it may just be that they have a rank of 0/10, or it could be that Google don't even know they're there. If the latter is true, and your site has been around for a while, there may be something wrong. If your site has a Flash intro, or is entirely Flash, or if you're using framed forwarding to redirect a domain to your hosting space, search engines will really struggle to find you, or at least get past your first page.

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If your pages are all there though, Google's your oyster and getting some other sites to link to you could make a world of difference to your search engine traffic.

Building your links

Some of the best quality links will come from real, human connections. Do you have friends who would be prepared to place a link to you on one of their pages? Maybe your business involves selling products, and your suppliers, manufacturers or retailers would be willing to link to your site from theirs? Do you have a mutually beneficial relationship with other complementary businesses who would be prepared to link to you?

If you do have control of your own site, creating a links page gives you much more scope here, as you can offer to link back, giving people more incentive to link to you. If you can't see any obvious opportunities in your existing relationships however, don't worry. Your next best bet is directories. Directories differ from search engines in that they are humanly edited, rather than automated like search engines. Search engines like Google recognise this, and understand that a link from a directory has probably been checked out by a real person and found to be sound and decent!

The best example of this is the Open Directory Project (www.dmoz.org). Everybody who has a website should apply to add it to the ODP. It is the single most important web directory in the world, and a huge number of other directories, including Google Directory (<http://directory.google.com>) use its contents as the foundation for their own. This means that acceptance in to ODP automatically gives you hundreds of links from other directories without you lifting a finger. It's no wonder then that ODP included sites seldom have a rank of less than 3. The trouble here, as with many directories is the time factor. It can take literally months for an editor (all volunteers) to get around to checking your site if at all.

So how do you find these websites that will link to you for free and with no obligation to link back? The process by which you find them can be a very informative one. To make a start, do a Google search for whatever phrase you would like to rank highly. Let's say you're a florist in Farnham. Obviously your first port of call will be "florist farnham".

You can ignore the results at the top, which are highlighted in blue as they've paid Google to be there and that's not what we're all about for now. So your first result (at point of writing) is from a directory called 'britinfo.net'. If you follow the link, you'll find a nice list of florists in Farnham and links to their sites down the left hand side. If you hold your mouse over the links, you should see (probably in the status bar at the bottom of your browser window) something like "<http://www.britinfo.net/cgi-bin/linkref.cgi?idnum=1022783>". This is the link to the InterRose website. What you'd rather see is "<http://interrose.co.uk>", but unfortunately, Britinfo have routed you through their database. This is not ideal as often the search engines cannot (or will not) follow this sort of link to your site, but at the very worst, they still provide web surfers who are looking for florists in Farnham with a route to your site, from a page that is #1 in Google. To add your business to such a page may take a little digging. Often you'll see a link that says 'submit your site', but in this case, we have to click on the britinfo.net link at the bottom of the page, where things are managed from their main site.

On to #2: Lisa's Floral Shoppe is doing pretty well in the rankings, so how's she done it and how can we piggy-back on her success? Obviously as a florist in Farnham, we are her direct competitor, so she may not want to link to us, but we can employ the same techniques we used to asses our own search engine health to find out who's linking to our competitors. Try using your 'Page Info' button, or typing "link: lisasfloralshoppe.co.uk" straight in to your Google search box to find out who's linking to her. Better still, type "linkdomain:lisasfloralshoppe.co.uk" in to a search box at www.yahoo.com.

The fact that this site ranked so highly for our search term ('florist farnham') almost guarantees that somebody has already done the leg work here, and there's every chance if you search through some of the links to Lisa's site, there will be some sites and directories in there that would also be happy to link to yours.

Keywords

Whenever the topic of search engine optimisation rears its ugly head, there is a particular phrase that people seem to perceive to be almost synonymous with SEO. Many people have latched on to the idea of keywords as some sort of magical invisible link between their website and that elusive #1 spot in the Google search of their choice.

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There is some truth there, but it's not just a case of filling in your meta tags with whichever phrases you fancy ranking first for. In fact the keyword meta tag is all but defunct and certainly holds no weight with the likes of Google. What matters is the frequency of these words in the actual textual content of your site (hence Flash sites and text embedded in images are such bad news) and the strategic placing of said words.

This article is intended for those who have no access to or no intention of altering the content of their own sites, but keywords still play an important part in channeling RELEVANT traffic to your site, even when you're just building links. As I mentioned earlier, a page with a rank of just 1, but which is relevant to your own site, will be more valuable to you than a higher ranking page where your link sits among hundreds of unrelated others.

Other than the obvious; that search engines aside, PEOPLE are more likely to click on your link from a relevant page, Google's 'robots' are sophisticated enough to detect the subject matter of your site and that of the site or page linking to you. You will receive greater credit for a link from, say an article about you on a Farnham local news site, or an article about florists that contains a link to you, than from your uncle's model aircraft building enthusiasts site, or from some random page on the web that just links to everybody and their dog (often in exchange for a reciprocal link). That's not to say that you reject offers from the latter. There isn't really such a thing as a bad link, but do focus your efforts on the former.

Where keywords come in to it is in your choice of 'link text'. The vast majority of directory sites and those that have a large link list will ask you for a 'title' and 'description' when you apply for your link. Generally, your title (eg. 'Flowers of Farnham') will also serve as the clickable link to your website. Search engines love text links like this, as the link text really tells them something about the content of your site (hence 'click here' is usually a very bad choice of link text).

The image shows a screenshot of a form with two main sections. The first section is titled "Title of Site:" and has an empty text input field. Below the input field is a warning icon (a triangle with an exclamation mark) followed by the text "Please supply a short and descriptive title." Underneath this are three bullet points: "Always opt for the official name of the site.", "Do not use ALL CAPITAL letters.", and "Exclude promotional language in the title." The second section is titled "Site Description:" and has a larger empty text input field. Below this field is another warning icon followed by the text "Keep the description of your site brief - no longer than 25-30 words."

The description again gives you a great opportunity to associate some key words with your site. Generally you will be restricted to about 200 characters, so do keep it brief and try to vary it a little from site to site - Google will notice exact duplicates and become suspicious!

Don't forget about your keywords if you're asking for a link directly, eg. if you're emailing somebody to request a link, rather than filling in a form. Rather than just giving them your web address, present them with your preferred link text and description. They'll probably thank you for saving them the effort any way.

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Good Things Come to Those Who Wait for Google

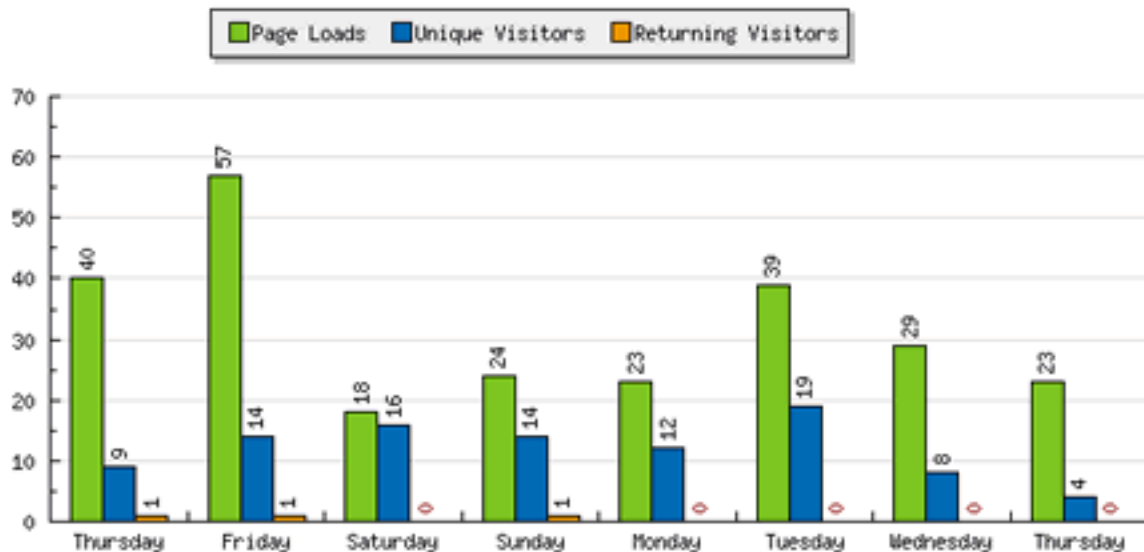
The aim of this article is to help the average website owner, who has no access to their website or no knowledge of how to alter it to improve their website's search engine performance.

Free link building in order to boost page rank is known as organic search engine optimisation. It costs nothing but your own time, and the results should last for at least as long as the links remain in place, and in fact should improve with time as your site becomes more established, and hopefully the incoming links continue to grow.

It is not a quick fix! If you manage to secure some good quality links, search engines will hopefully pick them up fairly quickly and with a bit of luck, will follow them through and be more inclined to index more pages, deeper within your site than they otherwise would. If you're lucky, you will hopefully see some increase in search engine traffic to your site within a couple of weeks, but the real eureka moment, when you first notice that your own page rank has increased, can take 3 months or more. This is deeply frustrating when you have spent hours working on your link building, but is well worth the effort in the long run.

Analytics

Having invested all this time and effort in your search engine performance, you ideally would like to be able to see the results. It could be that you already have access to your website statistics, either provided by your hosts, or by a third party. If not, it is fascinating and very informative to be able to see who your visitors are, where they come from (geographically and on the web) and what they searched for to find you.



There are several very good, free services available for this purpose. Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics) is extremely comprehensive and Statcounter (www.statcounter.com) very easy to follow, but limited to details of your last 100 page views only. Both unfortunately require code to be pasted in to each of your web pages, so if you can't do it yourself, it may be worth asking your web designer to do it for you. Do remember that the service itself is free, so you shouldn't have to pay a fortune to access it.

And finally

If you've made it to the end of this article, congratulations. I hope you found it informative and easy to follow. It is intended for non-geeks, so if you don't understand anything that I have said, please do email me at zoe@rudegoose.com, and I will attempt to clarify the article.

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