

THESE SEO MYTHS MUST DIE!

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INTRODUCTION

Every day a new search engine optimization myth is born; unfortunately, not every day does an old myth die off. The net result is a growing population of myths. These are nearly impossible to squash because snake-oil salesmen keep perpetuating them — bringing them back from the brink, even. (After all, if they read it on a blog, it MUST be true!)

You can talk at conferences till you're blue in the face. You can develop definitive SEO checklists, or even author a top rated SEO book (e.g. The Art of SEO). You'll still get asked how to write good meta keywords. (Did you know that Google never did support this worthless tag?)

Myths are born when folks mistake correlation with causation. And when they make inferences and draw conclusions without rock-solid data or methodology. Next thing you know a "feeling I've got about this" is espoused as fact.

It's the nature of myths that they aren't easily dis-proven or dismissed. So the myths persist. People seem to miss that SEO is an experimental science.

And as Rand Fishkin so astutely recognized, there is strong incentive for someone to defend a myth if they had advanced that myth previously to a public audience, boss, client, etc. It's self-preservation instinct, to "save face." Consequently, some folks hold on to certain myths for dear life. Their very careers hang in the balance — or so they think.

I, for one, hate misinformation and disinformation, and the SEO industry, unfortunately, is rife with it. I'm going to do my part in fighting this menace and spreading the truth — by exposing some of the more insidious myths in this very white paper.

Feel free to use the material presented below to quiz potential SEO vendors and in-house SEO candidates. If they start talking about how they'll help you rank by optimizing your meta tags, show them the door.

And now, without any further ado, the list...

GENERAL SEO MYTHS

1. **SEO is a black art.** And it's done, usually in a dark room, by some rogue SEO consultant, without requiring the involvement of the client / rest of the company. If SEO were like that, our lives would read like spy novels.
2. **SEO is a one-time activity you complete and are then done with.** How many times have you heard someone say "We actually just finished SEOing our site"? It makes me want to scream "No!" with every fiber of my being. SEO is ongoing. Just like one's website is never "finished," neither is one's SEO. Catalog marketers get this better than anyone else: they are used to optimizing every square inch of their printed catalog. There is always more performance to be wrung out. The "set it and forget it" misconception is particularly prevalent among IT workers — they tend to treat everything like a project so that they can get through assignments, close the "ticket" and move on, and thus maintain their sanity. I can't say I blame them.
3. **Automated SEO is black-hat or spammy.** There is nothing wrong with or inappropriate in using automation. Indeed, it signals a level of maturity in the marketplace when industrial-strength tools and technologies for large-scale automation are available. Without automation, it would be difficult to impossible for the enterprise company to scale their SEO efforts across the mass of content they have published on the Web. Chris Smith paints a compelling picture for SEO automation in this classic post.
4. **Using a service that promises to register your site with "hundreds of search engines" is good for your site's rankings.** If you believe that, then you may also be aware that there is a Nigerian prince who desperately needs your help to get a large sum of money smuggled out of his country, for which you will be richly rewarded. In fact nowadays it can actually hurt your rankings
5. **Registering every room + phone extension in our office building as a separate location with Google Places helped us rank for "generic_search_term_here".** Can you believe an in-house SEO presented this at a conference not that long ago? (*cringe*)
6. **Number of top 30 rankings for your site is a good metric for success.** I've seen so many places that use rankings as the end-all-be-all SEO metric. While that bothers me, sometimes I get that you don't have much more to go off of. That said, I wouldn't attribute value to rankings beyond the top 10. Once you start talking about rankings at the bottom of page 2 or worse, it's largely irrelevant. How often have you seen traffic of any significance to a page based on it ranking #26? Does that mean it's folly to track rankings beyond the top 10? Not at all. It's useful for tracking progress on efforts expended on (what started out as) a poor campaign.
7. **Spending lots of money in paid search helps your organic rankings.** Maybe this one is too old and hoary to include here, but people still ask it. I still hear that all the time. Sometimes I wish it was that easy...but no. The two are unconnected.
8. **It's either SEO or PPC.** Nope, both have their place, and both have strengths and weaknesses.
9. **SEO should be owned and managed by IT.** While SEO implementation has its roots in the web development and IT departments of most companies, it's a marketing discipline more than a web development discipline. Accountability for effective SEO might be multi-departmental in theory, but the reality is that most organizations budget, staff and manage SEO programs as part of customer acquisition, i.e. marketing and sales. Do not let IT lead your SEO programs. IT is the wingman for Marketing when it comes to SEO.

10. **SEO is a subset of Social Media.** There are plenty of intersections between SEO and social media, but SEO is no more a subset of social media marketing than it is of public relations, customer service or media relations. Working together, effective SEO can boost social network growth and social media can facilitate link building. In this way, they are yin and yang but not super- or sub-ordinate to each other.
11. **SEO is a standalone activity.** Many facets of web design, hosting, and so on can impact your organic results to more or lesser degrees. People tend to think that SEO sits in a silo and other things can go on around it without influencing the work required to increase rankings.
12. **First you get your site launched, then you add all the SEO goodness.** SEO is not some bolt-on, like an outdoor deck you tack on to the back of your home. It's more like the electrical wiring throughout your new home. Sure, you can build the house without the electrical and add it in later, but you'll have to tear out the drywall to do it. Which might be fine if you like tripling costs and needlessly extending out the timeframe. SEO starts well before the site launches: it's reflected in the functional specs, wireframes, mockups, content plan, and so on. And it continues for the life of the website.
13. **I just hired a killer SEO agency; they'll hit a home run for me.** The agency will perform to the incentives you provide it. If they aren't sharing in the upside but instead simply doing dollars-for-hours consulting, then it's in their own best interest to expend as few hours as possible and thus maximize the profit per hour worked. So if it's not in the contract, then don't expect them to do it. One can't blame them, though, as they are consultants, not free advice givers. Still, don't assume because you read three quotes and selected one that that agency will work with your best interests in mind. Some will, many will claim to. Their job is not actually to perform SEO, that's just what they try to do. Their job is to increase recurring billing to build their business. Just like your job is to get more traffic to build your business.
14. **SEO is separate from SEM, social, etc.** Actually, SEO is but one part of a larger overall marketing plan. It's NOT the center, nor should it be. It remains a single tactic. To treat it separately and invest only in it is to run the race with blinders on.
15. **SEO is free.** I wrote about this one several years ago on Search Engine Land. No SEO works for free, whether on your payroll or hired as a consultant, there is a cost. Ditto designers working on CSS changes, IT folks setting up domains and IP addresses, etc. There is a cost to turning the dials and moving the levers of SEO and to think it's free is folly. Yes, it can be cheaper than paid search, but paid search can also convert faster and more frequently than SEO on many phrases, so there you go. Want really stellar conversion rates? Get a good email program running in house.
16. **I can hire someone with a year's SEO experience and they can manage the work as part of their job.** You get back what you put in, at a minimum. Put in less, get back less. The time it takes a neophyte to learn the details that make SEO work will be lost to your company. Add in mistakes and missed opportunities and you could be sinking the ship with your own cannons! Plus, if you don't know SEO, how can you hire someone who does?
17. **Since the advent of personalization, there is no such thing as being ranked #1 anymore because everyone sees different results.** Although it is true that Google personalizes search results based on the user's search history (and now you don't even have to be logged in to Google for this personalization to take place), the differences between personalized results and non-personalized results are relatively minor. Check for yourself. Get in the habit of re-running your queries — the second time adding &pws=0 to the end of Google SERP URL (Google Instant must be turned off in order for this to work) — and observing how much (or how little) everything shifts around. You are unlikely to see a drastic reshuffling of the Google results from personalization, particularly if

this is not a query that you repeatedly make. A single website may shift drastically in a particular SERP when personalization is on. Nonetheless, a head-to-head comparison of a page of SERPs personalized and non-personalized will return mostly the same results with minor shifts here and there. A listing may disappear or be replaced, but we're not talking about a completely different set of results being swapped in and out. Even for such an ambiguous query as "dolphins" (do I mean the football team or the cute sea mammal?), the first page of results doesn't change drastically even if I do a bunch of football related queries first, such as "football", "patriots" and "nfl". I still get mostly animal-related results, with a bit of movement in the lower half of the page. #6 shifted to position 7, #7 shifted to position 8, and #8 shifted to position 6. My point: if you're ranked in the #1 position with personalized web search set to 0 ("&pws=0"), I think you'll find, generally speaking, that you'll be at #1 for the majority of searchers, whether personalization is enabled or not. That said, it is less true than it once was and as such, ranking reports are not nearly as valuable as they were a few years ago. It's better to focus on traffic and conversions and not get too hung up on rankings.

18. **Don't use Google Analytics because Google will spy on you and use the information against you.** This one comes straight from the conspiracy theorists. Google has made numerous assurances that they aren't using your traffic or conversion data to profile you as a spammer. That said, one black hat SEO says he's been burned enough times to know better than to use any Google services (Google Analytics included) on some of his "more aggressive" experimental sites. He continues: "Thank God for Piwik. Some of us don't want Google to learn our IPs and have the ability to make the association between different web properties that we play with. That's why I never touch my client's Google accounts without a proxy."

19. **We have been around for a long time/are really famous, so we don't have to do SEO.** Uhhhh....no. I could write a book on the reasons why, but just...no.

20. **I learned a nifty new SEO trick/tactic from SMX/SES/etc. and now I have the key to victory!** Most of the advanced tools and tactics you learn at conferences and sites like this one only work after you have optimized the basic SEO building blocks of your site. Most advanced tactics build on the basics, not replace them. In fact, most advanced tactics won't even work unless you have the basics in place already. The wider the pyramid base of your SEO, the higher your rankings can go.

21. **Kicking off an SEO program is a slow, many months long process.** This is a self-serving myth that can buy the SEO firm or consultant a lot of time to keep you paying while they aren't performing. "Be patient, just give it more time" can be a great stall tactic. This can be the case, but it doesn't have to be. One can counter this tendency using automation and software solutions.

22. **SEO is a major, time-intensive, costly IT initiative.** Again, this can be the case, but not necessarily. Typically, IT barriers slow the programs down, but they don't have to. There are simple, cost-efficient technological workarounds: server modules, proxies, SaaS solutions, etc.

23. **Can you give me the top 5 things to do to rank better and drive traffic?** For maximum effect, be sure to ask the question before they have had a chance to examine your site. This question is as frustrating for SEOs as "How much does it cost to SEO the typical website?". I'd equate it to the unanswerable question: "How long is a piece of string?" Also, if you're going to ask for the magic elixir for better rankings and traffic (and don't forget "long life"), you might as well base success on the better objective of driving quality traffic — which is only understood through web analytics integration and tying in with post-click behavior metrics.

24. **Because someone is senior in the company, they must understand everything and are making decisions with a broad knowledge base inclusive of SEO.** Case in point: the "CEO list" of keywords, a.k.a. the "trophy terms," which may not be receiving any search volume other than from the CEO him/herself. Chances are there are better words to focus on that can drive a higher business return. Tread carefully here; you don't want to upset the CEO.
25. **SEO is a chess game.** The spammers make a move, the search engines respond, and around it goes. Spam tactics may come and go, but best practices stay pretty constant. That said, SEO is kind of like a chess game where you can move both your own and your opponent's pieces (muahaha!).
26. **SEO is about rankings, not conversion.** Conversion is a critical component to SEO. I'm a big proponent of optimizing the elements that will improve clickthrough from the SERPs — shortening the URL length, getting bolded words (KWIC) into your listing, refining the title and snippet copy to include compelling calls-to-action and value propositions — particularly at the beginning of the title and snippet which are the most viewed pieces of the listing. There's real money to be had in that end of SEO. Personally though, I'd go even further beyond "conversion" and focus on business results. Clickthroughs are not conversions, but they move the ball forward in terms of business results.
27. **Our SEO firm is endorsed/approved by Google.** The following comes from an actual email a friend of mine received from an SEO firm last year: We are...Google Approved, a partner with Google, they endorse us as an optimizer, and their list includes very few partners, and we are one of them!. To find us on their list please go to: <http://www.google.com/websiteoptimizer/woac.html> and select region: United States; scroll to the middle of the page and find National Positions." Hmm.... you won't find them listed there anymore.
28. **There's no such thing as mobile SEO.** Well, there is and there isn't. On one hand, good SEO is good SEO whether users are looking at your site on a desktop or a mobile device. Good links still help you rank regardless of what devices users are browsing your site with. Great content is great content. There are however, usability issues that uniquely affect mobile browsing which Google can now detect. If you don't optimize the mobile browsing experience, Google may well drop your rankings on the SERPs for users searching via mobile.

MYTHS ABOUT CONTENT

29. **Great content equals (i.e. automatically leads to) great rankings.** Just like great policies equals successful politicians, right? It is not a foregone conclusion: great content doesn't necessarily rank because it's great content. The content may deserve to be ranked, but if no one knows about it, or if the site architecture is so atrocious that it repels the spiders, then it won't rank. It's as important to actively promote that great content as to have created it. I'm simply making an argument against that tired old phrase "Build it and they will come." Don't let these comments dissuade you from creating high quality content. Indeed, it's a likely prerequisite for SEO success, especially when the keywords being targeted are highly competitive.
30. **Meta tags will boost your rankings.** Optimizing your meta keywords is a complete waste of time. They have been so abused by spammers that the engines haven't put any stock in them for years and years. As I stated above, Google never did support this meta tag. What about other meta tags — such as meta description, meta author, and meta robots? None of the various meta tags are given any real weight in the rankings algorithm. Note that I did not say that ALL meta tags are a waste of your time. Meta descriptions (not meta keywords) are still worthwhile, even though they won't improve your rankings, as they can influence the snippet that's displayed as part of your Google listing. Also bear in mind, if you meta no-index a page, it will get removed and not rank at all.
31. **If you define a meta description, Google uses it in the snippet.** As I explained in my article "Anatomy of a Google Snippet", this is oftentimes not the case. That said, if the meta description includes the most popular keywords driving traffic to the page, it will more-than-likely get picked.
32. **Tweaking your meta description is the way to optimize the Google snippet's conversion potential.** As I described in my the article above, the snippet content can be cobbled together from data from multiple sources, including the meta description, the HTML source of the page (even from pulldown select lists), or from the Open Directory listing.
33. **There's an ideal keyword density value you should optimize to (i.e. measure keyword densities of competing listings and aim to match them.).** Honing in on a particular keyword density value while editing page copy is a colossal waste of time, a distraction from what really matters. Granted, keyword density measurements can help identify extreme situations — such as where there is no use of the keyword, or the term is being spammed into the page too often. But outside of those outlier scenarios, what is the point? There is no ideal score to aim for. There is no value in benchmarking against competitors' keyword densities. If your SEO consultant tells you otherwise, turn and run!
34. **Placing links in teeny-tiny size font at the bottom of your homepage is an effective tactic to raise the rankings of deep pages in your site.** Better yet, make the links the same color as the page background, and/or use CSS to push the links way out to the side so they won't detract from the homepage's visual appearance! (I am being facetious here, don't actually do this.)
35. **Google penalizes for duplicate content.** I've long stated that it's almost always a filter, not a penalty. It may feel like a penalty because of the resultant rankings drop, but Google's intention is to penalize for inadvertent duplication due to tracking parameters, session IDs, and other canonicalization snafus. That said, Google will penalize in cases of malicious duplicate content.

36. **H1 tags are a crucial element for SEO:** Research by Moz shows little correlation between the presence of H1 tags and rankings. Still, you should write good H1 headings, but do it primarily for usability and accessibility, not so much for SEO. Granted, H1 tags used to be more important in years past, but as of late, they are only a minor signal. Prove it to yourself: try taking a site with headlines marked up with a font tag and turn that tag into an H1 in the template — without changing the copy within the headlines (or anything else for that matter) — and see what happens to your rankings. I think you'll find the result to be not very impressive. If you're getting benefit from H1 tags, consider that it may be because of the headline's keyword prominence in the HTML rather than the fact your headline is inside an H1 container.

37. **The bolding of words in a Google listing signifies that they were considered in the rankings determination.** Fact: this phenomenon — known as "KWIC" in Information Retrieval circles — is there purely for usability purposes

38. **It's helpful if your targeted keywords are tucked away in HTML comment tags and title attributes (of IMG and A HREF tags.)** Since when have comment tags or title attributes been given any weight?

39. **Validating and cleaning up the HTML will drastically increase the speed of a site or page.** The biggest bottleneck to overcome in site speed is not what you think! If you want to be blown away, read former Google chief performance engineer Steve Souders' books High Performance Web Sites (for primarily server-side stuff like caching reverse proxies and Gzip compression) and Even Faster Websites (for primarily client-side stuff like JavaScript optimization.)

40. **Googlebot doesn't read CSS.** You'd better believe Google scans CSS for spam tactics like hidden divs.

41. **Having country-specific sites creates "duplicate content" issues in Google.** Google is smart enough to present your .com.au site to Google Australia users and your .co.nz site to Google New Zealand users. Not using a ccTLD? Then set the geographic target setting in Google Webmaster Tools; that's what it's there for. Note that Google is much more likely to handle this well if the domain is set up on a ccTLD or if it's been set up in Google Webmaster Tools under a common folder that allows for the webmaster to set the country specification.

42. **It's important for your rankings that you update your home page frequently (e.g. daily.)** This fallacy was spread by a fellow panelist who will remain nameless. Plenty of stale home pages rank just fine, thank you very much. That said, freshness can be helpful but generally not required to maintain a high ranking (QDF "query deserves freshness" searches notwithstanding). Particularly if you have strong domain authority, you can maintain a top position in Google for a very long time without updating the page content. Take, for example, the query "anatomy of a search engine page". The top results for that query include pages as old as 2002, 2007, or even back to 1998. That said, I wouldn't dissuade you from keeping your content up-to-date. Indeed, regular updates are good for users and can make a site more link-worthy so that it attracts links at a faster rate than the competition. Just consider that there are a limited number of hours in the day, so your time may be better spent proactively going after quality backlinks than incessantly updating the page content.

43. **Using Flash will tank your SEO. Flash isn't necessarily bad for SEO; it's the absence of text and crawlable links in sites that are constructed with a single Flash movie that creates problems.** Interactive Flash elements can be used without detriment to spice up a website; just don't wrap your important content and navigation within the Flash. Granted, some Flash content can be crawled, but you will lose the semantic clues that HTML provides. If you move from a text-rich site to a Flash-only site, your SEO will tank, as Google's indexing and parsing of Flash is far from optimal.

MYTHS ABOUT SITE ARCHITECTURE

44. **It's good practice to include a meta robots tag specifying index, follow.** This is a corollary to the myth about meta tags boosting your rankings. It's totally unnecessary. The engines all assume they are allowed to index and follow unless you specify otherwise.

45. **You can keep search engines from indexing pages linked-to with Javascript links.** Though Google doesn't crawl all links found in JavaScript, there are many documented cases of Google following JavaScript-based links. Google engineers have stated that they are crawling JavaScript links more-and-more. Of course, don't rely on Google parsing your JavaScript links, but don't assume it will choke on them either. Also bear in mind that other places on the Web may link to the page in question without JavaScript and thus the page will get indexed.

46. **You should end your URLs in .html. Since when has that made a difference?**

47. **Hyphenated domain names are best (preferable) for SEO.** The fact of the matter is, too many hyphens makes your domain look like spam to the search engines. Certainly a hyphenated domain can still perform well in the SERPs. The operative word here is preferable. Although a hyphenated domain can be an acceptable substitute when better choices aren't available (such as a hyphenless .com, .org, or .net), I would never favor a hyphenated domain over its non-hyphenated counterpart if both were available. Years ago I bought information-architect.com, but I would have bought informationarchitect.com instead if I had the choice — for reasons of branding, usability, and SEO. The more hyphens, the spammier the domain looks, and the less desirable it is. To me, the domain san-diego-real-estate-for-fun-and-profit.com is not at all appealing. Caveat: I wouldn't be very keen on the unhyphenated domain therapistfinder.com for a directory of psychologists, for example; I'd rather have the hyphenated version — thank you very much.

48. **Having an XML Sitemap will boost your Google rankings.** I heard this one from a fellow panelist in an SEO session at a conference I presented at. Google will use your sitemaps file for discovery and potentially as a canonicalization hint if you have duplicate content. It won't give a URL any more "juice" just because you include it in your sitemaps.xml, even if you assign a high priority level to it. Google goes on record to say on the Google Webmaster Central Blog that "A Sitemap does not affect the actual ranking of your pages." It doesn't get any more explicit than that. One caveat: Until your site is fully or mostly indexed, you won't usually rank as well as you should. Therefore at first you will often see an improvement to your rankings if you have an XML sitemap and/or frequently updated content (and enough links to justify the visits to that content), but this is just due to faster indexing. Once a certain "critical mass" of your site is indexed, there will usually be no further effect. You won't see a difference for established sites, only brand new ones. It's not about the updates (which encourage more visits, and thus more opportunities to index new pages) or the XML — it's the indexing. You can get roughly the same effect (plus link weight and anchor text benefits) simply by doing a link building campaign instead (or in conjunction with).

49. **Using a minimum of 40 tags per blogpost helps to increase your ranking in search engines.** This was from a self-proclaimed marketing guru and SEO expert, if you can believe it.

50. **There's no need to link to all your pages for the spiders to see them.** Just list all URLs in the XML Sitemap. Orphan pages rarely rank for anything but the most esoteric of search terms. If your web page isn't good enough for even you to want to link to it, what conclusion do you think the engines will come to about the quality and worthiness of this page to rank?
51. **Google will not index pages that are only accessible by a site's search form.** This used to be the case, but Google has been able to fill out forms and crawl the results since at least 2008. Note this doesn't give you permission to deliberately neglect your site's accessibility to spiders, as you'd probably be disappointed with the results.
52. **There are some unique ranking signals for Google Mobile Search, and they include the markup being "XHTML Mobile".** Google Mobile Search results basically mirror those of Google Web Search. By all means, create a mobile-friendly version of your site; but do it for your users, not for SEO. That said, location is being taken into account in Google mobile search (but that's also the case for Google Web Search).
53. **The Disallow directive in robots.txt can get pages de-indexed from Google.** As I explained in my article "A Deeper Look at Robots.txt", disallows can lead to snippet-less, title-less Google listings. Not a good look. To keep pages out of the index, use the Noindex robots.txt directive or the meta robots noindex tag — NOT a Disallow directive.
54. **It's considered "cloaking" — and is thus taboo and risky — to clean up the URLs in your links selectively and only for spiders.** If your intentions are honorable, then you have nothing to fear. All the major search engines have said as much. You are helping the engines by removing session IDs, tracking parameters and other superfluous parameters from the URLs across your site — whether it's done by user-agent detection, cookie detection or otherwise. After all, if it were bad, would Yahoo be doing it? Check it for yourself: visit the Yahoo.com home page with the Googlebot user agent string (e.g. with Firefox using the User Agent Switcher extension). You'll notice the "ylt" parameter has been stripped from all the links.
55. **You can boost the Google rankings of your home page for a targeted term by including that term in the anchor text of internal links.** Testing done by Moz found that the anchor text of your "Home" links is largely ignored. Use the anchor text "Home" or "San Diego real estate" — it's of no consequence either way.
56. **A site map isn't for people.** A good (HTML, not XML) site map is designed as much for human consumption as it is for spiders. Any time you create pages/copy/links solely for a search engine, hoping they won't be seen by humans, you're asking for trouble.
57. **The canonical tag is just as effective as 301 redirects for fixing canonicalization** Not. really. Unlike 301 redirects, canonical tags are hints, not directives. That said, the canonical tag can solve duplicate content issues that a 301 redirect can't — e.g. in the case of near duplicates, where you want to keep the user experience intact are not good candidates for 301 redirects.
58. **Flawless HTML validation can help improve your rankings.** Take any popular search term and run a validation check against the top 10 results. Most of them will fail validation. Search engines are much more interested in the quality of the content on the page and are smart enough to overcome most parsing errors in HTML documents.

MYTHS ABOUT LINKS

59. **Trading links helps boost PageRank and rankings.** Particularly if done on a massive scale with totally irrelevant sites, right? Umm, no. Reciprocal links are of dubious value: they are easy for an algorithm to catch and to discount. Having your own version of the Yahoo directory on your site isn't helping your users, nor is it helping your SEO. Building a massive reciprocal link network comprised of irrelevant sites is at best a waste of time and, at worst, an invitation for a penalty. Generally speaking, reciprocal links aren't necessarily worthless, but they sit pretty low in the food chain. There are of course exceptions. Nevertheless, I'd always steer clear of link farms and link exchanges. I wouldn't turn my nose up to a relevant reciprocal link from a trusted site, but my preference would be for a one-way link from that trusted site. Make sense? That said, if the trades are strategic, with quality sites, and don't look run-of-the-mill, then they may be of some help, particularly if part of a broader strategy (rather than being the entire strategy).

60. **Home page PageRank on a domain means something (important).** As in: "I have a PageRank 6 site." In actuality it means nothing. Toolbar PageRank is misleading at best, completely bogus at worst. Furthermore, a high PageRank on one's home page doesn't necessarily equate to high PageRank on internal pages. That's a function of the site's internal linking structure.

I admit I'm being a little bit provocative here. This isn't to say that toolbar PageRank is completely useless. At a minimum, PageRank scores have entertainment value. Seriously though, I just wouldn't bet my business on that little green meter. And since when is describing an entire site by a page-specific metric such as PageRank somehow accurate? As an indicator of domain-wide importance/trust/authority I'd take domain mozRank and mozTrust scores any day over a single page's (truncated, possibly randomized) PageRank score. A home page's PageRank score can't indiscriminately be extrapolated to internal pages. It's not a given that a PageRank 4 will lead directly to a PageRank 3. The PageRank dropoff could be abrupt and marked if the site architecture is a mess. It's a sad state of affairs when a high-PR home page stands alone among an army of low- or no-PR internal pages, but it happens. Another key point about PageRank: the higher the integer score, the more seriously you can take the score (thanks to the logarithmic nature of PageRank). A toolbar PageRank of 8 is way more meaningful and less likely to be off by several integers from the true PageRank used for ranking purposes, versus a PageRank of 4. Minimally, if the page registers some amount of toolbar PageRank, it is 100% guaranteed to be crawled, and most probably it will be indexed too. Nowadays Toolbar PR is better as a historical measure, as Google has stated that it may NEVER update it again.

61. **Outsourcing link building to a far-away, hourly contractor with no knowledge of your business is a good link acquisition solution.** And a sound business decision... NOT! As it is, the blogosphere is already clogged enough with useless, spammy comments in broken English from third-world link builders. No need to make it worse by hiring them to "promote" your site too.

62. **Linking out (such as to Google.com) helps rankings.** Not true. Unless perhaps you're hoarding all your PageRank by not linking out at all — in which case, that just looks unnatural. It's the other way around, i.e. getting links to your site — that's what makes the difference. In my experience, the benefit of an external-pointing link is minor to nil. I am not alone in this view. Major caveat: I'm assuming there isn't anything abnormal going on in your link neighborhood. If, on the other hand, you're hoarding your link juice, or linking out solely to low quality sites, or your site's nothing but broken links, then by all means correct that with some quality outlinks and I bet you'll see an uplift. When you do link out, it's ideal if you link out to sites with equal or higher mozRank as your own.

63. Getting a link from a high PageRank domain will increase my PageRank and rankings. While this isn't entirely untrue, as it will earn a level of "authority"...While the overall PageRank of a domain matters, the authority of the page you are getting a link from is more important, along with a whole range of other factors.
64. **Google gives extra weight to links from a few certain, more trustworthy top-level domains (TLDs) — specifically .edu, .gov, and .mil.** Matt Cutts went on record on the topic of .edu links in an interview with me: "There is nothing in the algorithm itself, though, that says: oh, .edu—give that link more weight. It is just .edu links tend to have higher PageRank, because more people link to .edu's or .gov's." In my view, it's because .edus tend to be in pristine link neighborhoods that these links are so valuable.
65. **I've got lots of links, so I don't need to build more.** Most engines look at several factors related to links, including age. Old (established) links tend to indicate authority, whereas new ones tend to indicate freshness and relevance. You can get by with either, but it's best to have both authority and relevance.
66. **You can keep all your PageRank/link juice by not linking out.** Fact: While keeping most/all links internally can help increase the overall PageRank of a site, the way the original PageRank formula works forces every site to give out link juice whether it does so explicitly or not.
67. **Google cannot detect artificial link schemes such as three-way links, viralinks, link wheels, blog link networks, etc.** Natural link structures follow specific statistical distributions and so do artificial ones. Google and other search engines employ a small army of advanced mathematics PhDs (can you say "graph theory"?), and they can – and do – identify artificial link schemes and usually penalize everyone involved.
68. **That any agency can truly offer SEO without including some form of link building effort.** There are many agencies (perhaps the majority) claiming to offer superior SEO, and do not engage in link building. With links thought to account for more than 50% of the algorithm, link building is crucial!

Now it's up to you, dear reader, to do your part in spreading the truth. Whenever possible, stand with your SEO brothers and sisters united against this damaging SEO mythology. Let's all be SEO mythbusters.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stephan Spencer is author of [Google Power Search](#), co-author of [The Art of SEO](#), and co-author of [Social eCommerce](#), all published by O'Reilly.

Stephan founded [Netconcepts](#) in 1995 and grew it into a multi-national SEO agency before selling it in 2010 to Covario. He's the inventor of the pay-for-performance SEO technology platform GravityStream, now part of the [Rio SEO](#) toolset.

Stephan's recent SEO clients have included such retail giants as Zappos, Sony Store, Quiksilver, Best Buy Canada, Bed Bath & Beyond, and Chanel.

Stephan is a Senior Contributor to [Practical Ecommerce](#) and to [MarketingProfs.com](#), and a columnist for [Search Engine Land](#), [Multichannel Merchant](#), and [The Huffington Post](#). He's also been a contributor to DM News, Catalog Age, Catalog Success, Building Online Business, Unlimited, and NZ Marketing magazine, among others.

Stephan is a frequent conference speaker on SEO and other online marketing topics for the American Marketing Association (AMA), Direct Marketing Association (DMA), Shop.org, Internet Retailer, SMX, IncisiveMedia (Search Engine Strategies), O'Reilly/TechWeb, PubCon, ECMOD, IQPC and IIR. His thousands of speaking gigs have taken him around the globe – everywhere from Berlin, London, Toronto, Santiago, Sydney and Auckland, to New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and places in between.

Stephan is an avid blogger. He blogs at [Stephan Spencer's Scatterings](#), [NaturalSearchBlog.com](#), [BusinessBlogConsulting.com](#), [ChangesForGood.org](#), and [Google, I Suggest...](#)

Stephan is on the board of [Impact Network](#) and on the advisory board of CrowdGather.

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Stephen Spencer Bio:

Praesent a commodo nunc. Mauris non congue mi. Aenean sit amet magna varius, pellentesque erat sed, lobortis lorem. Fusce dictum, massa sit amet aliquam euismod, turpis justo dictum eros, in faucibus quam diam eget massa. Phasellus vitae eleifend ante.

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Fusce sed accumsan

Sample Company

"Vestibulum ut tempus sem. Aenean lobortis ornare consectetur. Phasellus lobortis vestibulum mauris non feugiat. Aliquam erat volutpat."



Aliquam Erat

Sample Company

"Donec vitae sollicitudin leo. Mauris egetas sem sed turpis euismod auctor. Vestibulum rhoncus dignissim sodales. Phasellus ac maximus dui."