

## Factors that Greatly Affect your Page's Relevancy

Nearly all people on the Web visit search engines to find information or Web sites. They enter keywords into the search line of these search engines. Often they enter several keywords, or "phrases," to further refine their searches. Search engines are in the business of sorting Web sites in their databases by the words they contain that match a given search.

How well you incorporate important keywords into your Web site consistent with each individual search engine's ranking criteria will determine your Web site's rank. Since there could be thousands of pages with that same keyword or phrase on it, it's important that you rank near the top of the results to be found.

Generally, each search engine assigns "points" to Web sites or the submission someone made describing that Web site based on some predefined criteria. While these ranking criteria may vary from search engine to search engine, most "grade" the page based on the following general rules:

- Keyword Placement (Area)
- Keyword Frequency
- Total Words
- Keyword Weight
- Keyword Prominence
- Site popularity

### Keyword Placement Areas

The area in which the keyword is found plays a key role for many searches. Having the keyword in the Title tag on most search engines will give more relevance to the page than the same keyword appearing in the body area. To rank well generally requires you have keywords in many of the areas in which a search engine looks. The areas that are the most important will vary by search engine. Examples of "areas" of a page are Title, Heading, Link Text, and Body.

### Keyword Frequency

Frequency is how often a keyword appears on the page or in an area on the page. In general, the more times a keyword appears on the page, the more relevant it will be to that search.

You don't want to go overboard with frequency since many engines will penalize you for keyword "spamming" if they feel you were excessive. In general though, use your keyword in the document in as many different areas as you can, and as many times as is recommended for that engine.

Frequency counts will often vary depending on whether you selected exact matching on the first tab of the Page Critic screen. Frequency will also vary depending on whether you enable partial matching. In addition, if you perform a case-sensitive search by including one or more upper case letters in your keyword, then your frequency count may vary.

## Total Words

This is simply a count of the total words in a given area, not including HTML tags. Some engines may rank pages more favorably based on whether they have a certain number of words on the page. Sometimes the fewer words the better, and on other engines, more words are sometimes better.

## Keyword Weight

Keyword weight is the percentage or concentration of keywords on your page in relation to all other words on the page. A "keyword" can be either a single word, or a short phrase.

Keyword weight refers to the number of keywords appearing in the page area divided by the total number of words appearing in that area. More accurately, the formula our software uses to compute weight differs depending on whether an exact search is done, or non-exact.

Exact Match Weight formula =

(number of words in the keyword phrase \* frequency) / total words in area

Non-exact Match Weight formula = frequency / total words in area

Many search engines consider keyword weight when determining the rank of your page for a particular keyword search. In general, the higher the weight the better, but only to a point. If your weight becomes too high, you may be penalized.

One technique that often works well is to create smaller pages, generally just a paragraph or two long, which emphasizes a particular keyword. By keeping the overall number of words to a minimum while repeating the keyword, you will increase the "weight" of the keyword you are emphasizing. However, there are some search engines that require a page to include a minimum number of words on the page to do well.

**WARNING:** Simply dividing the frequency by the total words on the Page Analysis table will not yield the correct weight when a multi-word phrase and exact matching is used.

For example, if the area had only three words in it:

My Blue Widgets

And the search phrase was "Blue Widgets" using an exact search, and then the following statistics would be displayed:

Frequency: 1

Total Words: 3

Weight: 50%

The reason weight is not 1 divided by 3 in this case, or 33.3%, is Blue Widgets is counted as one word. If we didn't compute it this way when doing an exact search, then a title of:

Blue Widgets

would yield a frequency of one, and a word count of two. However, it's obvious in this example that the weight is not 1 divided by 2, or 50%, but rather 100%. That's because there's no way the above could have a higher keyword weight. 100% of the words in the area are already keywords.

When exact matching is turned off, our software will display a frequency of two and a total word count of two. In this case, frequency divided by total words (2 divided by 2) will equal the keyword weight of 100%. See non-exact matching for an explanation of how frequency is computed in this case.

Compare your keyword weight to other pages that rank higher than you. If those pages have a lower keyword weight than your page, consider increasing the number of words on your page, or decreasing the number of keywords on your page. Either technique will decrease the keyword weight. Just the opposite technique should be used if you wish to increase your keyword weight.

### Keyword Prominence

Prominence is how close to the start of the area that the keyword appears. In general, a keyword that appears closer to the top of the page or area will be more relevant. However, sometimes it helps to have a keyword in the middle of an area, or even toward the end of the area.

For example, a search for keyword "Pre-Owned Electronics" returned the following match:

Pre-Owned Electronics, Inc - Refurbished and Used Apple Macintosh Systems, The independent source for new, remanufactured and used Apple Macintosh computer systems, parts, peripherals and accessories. We offer a full line of refurbished as well as used... 98% <http://www.preowned.com/> (Size 3.1K)

Note that the queried keyword, "Pre-Owned Electronics," is the first word of the site title and InfoSeek returned this site as the first match. Documents that are exactly the same, but with keywords as the second or third word in the Title will often score lower. Prominence also applies to the words within the body of the document, the headings, and other tags.

Prominence plays a critical role particularly in directory-based engines such as Yahoo. Often having the keyword slightly more towards the beginning of the site description or site title will make a large difference in your ranking.

Examples of prominence:

If a keyword appears at the beginning of an area, its prominence will be 100%.

If a keyword appears in the middle of an area, its prominence will be 50%.

If the keyword appears at the beginning of the area, then another repetition appears at the end of the area, the prominence would be 50%.

If the keyword appears at the end of the area, prominence would be 0%.

## Link Popularity

Link Popularity is sometimes called a site's significance ranking because it is believed that one measure of a site's "value" is the number of other Web sites who felt your site was sufficiently important to link to.

If lots of other sites link to your site, chances are your site is relatively important -- or so a good number of other Web site owners thought so. The popularity of the site that links to you can also play a role.

For instance, at least 315,990 Web sites link to the IBM (www.ibm.com) Web site in AltaVista's index (on January 21, 1998). In certain search engines, IBM would achieve better ranking with all other factors being equal. However, this is only one factor, and you can certainly achieve high rankings without being linked from thousands of sites. This is simply another reason why you want to get other sites to link to yours.

Sometimes if you agree to link to them, they'll do the same for you. In Web marketing, this is called "cross-linking," sometimes called "reciprocal linking" and is another way to increase traffic to your web site.

## Other Factors

There are many other factors that can influence your ranking besides those mentioned previously, many of which will be mentioned in the Page Critic advice table.

For example, another factor to keep in mind when building your Web pages is keyword proximity. This refers to the placement of keywords on a Web page in relation to each other or, in some cases, in relation to other words with a similar meaning as the queried keyword. For search engines that grade a keyword match by keyword proximity, the connected phrase "home loans" will outrank "home mortgage loans" assuming that you are searching only for the phrase "home loans".

Therefore, always try to group words together that might be searched on as a single phrase by a user. At least 80% of searches on average will be for two or more keywords.