"There are millions of idiots running around calling themselves Gurus. Evan is different. He goes in and simply gets it done the right way—legally, quick, and smart. Every company I start goes through Evan. I'd be crazy not to use him."
—Peter Shankman

Outsmarting
GOOGLE®

SEO Secrets to Winning New Business

EVAN BAILYN
with
BRADLEY BAILYN

OUTSMARTING GOOGLE®

EVAN BAILYN
with
BRADLEY BAILYN

Outsmarting Google®: SEO Secrets to Winning New Business

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About the Authors

Evan Bailyn is an Internet entrepreneur, speaker, and child advocate. He is best known for being an expert at search engine optimization, having used his ability to rank at the top of Google to build and sell five businesses, including one of the largest children's websites online. His Facebook page, which provides daily inspirational thoughts, has more than 100,000 "likes," making it one of the most popular non-celebrity pages on Facebook.

He has been interviewed on ABC and Fox News and featured in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Post*, *The International Business Times*, and *Crain's New York Business Daily*. He is a frequent speaker and television guest.

In 2010, Evan established The Evan Bailyn Foundation, which awards grants to groups that promote emotional awareness in children.

Bradley Bailyn is an Internet marketing expert and co-founder of First Page Sage. He tracks Google's algorithm on a daily basis, ensuring that clients' websites remain optimized for maximum exposure on Google. He also helps clients tune their websites to convert as many visitors as possible into buyers—a science known as conversion optimization.

Bradley graduated from New York University's Stern School of Business, where he studied accounting, and then went on to Brooklyn Law School, where he did legal work for various government and international agencies, including the United Nations and United States Agency for International Development. He briefly ran his own law practice, and then left to join forces with Evan and pursue a shared dream of building a business that made a real difference in people's lives. He has been profiled in *The New York Times*, *Crain's New York Business Daily*, and *The Daily News*.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to two very special people: my brother Brad, who is my partner in all things business, and my soon-to-be wife, Sasha, who is my partner in life.

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Ma, your love and support means everything to me.

Bear, you taught me to believe in myself—no amount of thanks can equal that.

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As the reader of this book, *you* are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

As an editor in chief for Que Publishing, I welcome your comments. You can email or write me directly to let me know what you did or didn't like about this book—as well as what we can do to make our books better.

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Email: feedback@quepublishing.com

Mail: Greg Wiegand
         Editor in Chief
         Que Publishing
         800 East 96th Street
         Indianapolis, IN 46240 USA

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Introduction

If you own any other books on search engine optimization, throw them out. They belong to the mass of misinformation that has been swimming around for years, keeping people from making their websites truly appealing to search engines. And no surprise, Google loves it.

What I am about to share with you are the real, gritty, tried-and-true tactics that have made my websites consistently show up at the top of Google for seven years and have made me a millionaire. My relationship with Google is love/hate. On the one hand, I am astounded by the brilliance of a company that makes my life easier every day and continues to come out with innovative products that push the level of communication and organization in our society to new heights. On the other hand, they have done everything they can to stymie my efforts to publicize websites that are so content-rich, so original, and by any stretch of the imagination so *deserving* of good placement in the search results.

One thing I should make clear from the beginning: I don't do any black-hat stuff. For those who aren't familiar with search engine jargon, that means I don't partake in unethical schemes or employ any tactics that do nothing more than fool Google into thinking my websites are more valuable than they actually are. No, what I have done is become intimately familiar with Google's rule book—the one they would do anything to hide from the public—and play by those rules *very closely*.

You see, outsmarting Google is not a matter of being a mathematical genius like many of the people they hire. It's a matter of looking at Google's intentions as a search engine, studying the accepted rules of SEO (search engine optimization), and

then patiently trying every method that comports with and breaks each of those rules until you've brewed the perfect concoction. That can take years, of course, but reading this book should take only a week.

I first got started with search engines in 2004 after dropping out of law school to start my own company, a college counseling service. Soon enough, I learned that I had no idea how to acquire customers. Search engines were already pretty mainstream, and it was a fair guess that people were going to use them to find pretty much everything in the future—including college counselors. So I decided to focus on them head-on. Short on money, I spent eight months sitting in front of the computer reading about SEO on an online forum called webworkshop.net. In researching for this book, I see that the forum still exists, but it doesn't have the energy it used to. Back in 2005 when I was on it every night from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m., it was a hive of eager amateurs mixed with some so-called experts all trying to figure out how certain sites showed up at the top of the search results, and others weren't even in the first 1,000 results. The amount of ignorant nonsense that was spewed in that forum could fill the Library of Congress. But a few valuable tricks slipped in.

Instead of racking my brain trying to figure out which information was credible and which wasn't, I spent a lot of my time researching the people on the forum. I would Google their usernames and connect them to their business websites and then see whether those websites ranked for the keywords that they were obviously targeting. Most people's websites, including the moderators of the forum, were either nowhere to be found or hanging around in the top 50 search results. But a couple actually had top 10 rankings. I was on those guys like white on rice. I would go back and read every post they had ever written, trying to figure out what they knew. I looked for commonalities among them. Soon enough, I found a couple: phrases like "anchor text links" and "meta title tags." And I wrote myself a little playbook filled with my best guesses of what made Google happy.

Around that time, I had about $6,000 in the bank, at the bottom of which was a ticket to go back to Long Island, live at home, and start looking for 9–5 jobs. Running out of money was my greatest fear. I had spent $650 buying and developing a website for my college counseling business. I had spent another $500 buying a few other websites to play around with and teach myself about the way sites relate to each other. Having studied the Google founders' original position papers, which established the idea of Google, I knew that they believed that the relationships between websites were the best way to determine the value of each individual online property. That is, if websites were people, who would be the most well liked? Is it the guy who simply knows the most people? Or the guy who has the most powerful friends? It certainly isn't the guy who just moved to town and doesn't know anybody. Soon it became clear that Larry Page and Sergey Brin, who went on to found one of the most successful companies of the last decade, thought of the Web as a big popularity contest.

My $500 bought me three crappy websites, but more than anything, it bought me an education. Apparently, gone were the days when all you had to do to get a top ranking in the search engines was write your keywords a thousand times on your home page. Search engines, especially Google, had gotten much smarter, and now all that mattered was how many times other websites linked to you and how they linked to you, and when, and why. I hadn't the foggiest idea how to make my website show up at #1 in Google yet, but I did know one thing: It had everything to do with links.

That brought on a painful six months of trying every way of linking from my three test websites to my college counseling website. By day, I handed out flyers at Penn Station trying to make up the cost of my office rent, and by night, I linked. In that stretch of life, I linked in big letters, small letters, bold letters, italic letters, invisible letters, and no letters at all. I linked from the top of the page, bottom of the page, side of the page, and not on the page at all. I linked at 9 a.m. each day and every other Tuesday. I linked in plain text, images, and Flash; on every page of the website and on only one; on the home page and in the site map; and from each website to every other website. Damn, was it boring! The worst, and most devilishly clever part of it all was, Google updates its rankings only once per week, so every little permutation of linking I tried required a week of saint-worthy patience. And yet, none of it was working. My website had never—and it seemed, would never—show up in the top 100 results. Every day felt like walking through complete darkness, swinging my arms around in the hopes that I would hit something. I was very near giving up by the time that momentous Monday morning rolled around.

That Monday, just the same as every other day, I typed "college admission essay" (my keyword of choice, given that editing essays was one aspect of what I was attempting to do for a living) into the search box of Google. Thousands of times I had done this, and thousands of times Google had come up with the same search results, a tired collection of established companies and institutions of higher learning. But that day, to my shock and delight, the #1 result was *my* website.

"Oh my god! Oh my god! I did it! I cracked Google!" My neighbors in the tiny office suite poked their heads in to see what the racket was. Annoyed that it was nothing more than an overzealous 24-year-old screaming at his computer, they went about their business as I hugged my brother and business partner, Brad.

From that point on, my college consulting business got a steady stream of customers. And in the following two years, armed with the power to rank at the top of the search results for any keyword, I started lots of different companies. Now, five sold businesses and lots of experience later, I still work side by side with my brother, but we apply what I discovered back then (which I've honed greatly over the past six years) to other people's businesses to make them money. My reputation

as a search engine guru has spread, making its way to the ear of an editor at Pearson Education. And that is how this book came to life.

Now that you know a little of my history, sit back and get ready to learn what Google is dreading you'll find out.

What's In This Book

This book contains everything you need to know—no more and no less—to get your website to rank on the first page of Google's search results. The 13 chapters of *Outsmarting Google: SEO Secrets to Winning New Business* are organized as follows:

- Chapters 1 and 2 explain the system underlying Google's algorithm, TrustRank, and the five ingredients of successful Google optimization. By themselves, these two chapters could bring a novice up to proficiency in this area.

- Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are filled with specific strategies to get your website to rank at the top of the results, discussing links, aging, and the ultimate ranking strategy—the Nuclear Football.

- Chapters 6 and 7 are the technical chapters. They are intended to provide support as you become a more advanced search engine optimizer, covering Google AdWords and Google's search operators.

- Chapters 8 and 9 are all about clarity and contain interesting information about optimizing for Google that will help clear away common myths and misunderstandings.

- Chapter 10 tells you what you need to know to rank on Yahoo! and Bing.

- Chapter 11 is a particularly important complement to search engine optimization, detailing the best ways to convert your search engine traffic into revenue for your business.

- Chapters 12 and 13 cover the role of social media in Google—both now and in the future—and the ways in which social media and search engines will meld together to form a new basis for discovering information, products, and services.

Who Can Use This Book?

Outsmarting Google: SEO Secrets to Winning New Business was written for all knowledge levels—from the casual Internet user to the professional search engine optimizer. More than anything, it was written for people who are seeking simple

and direct information about how to get their websites to rank at the top of Google's results. I have assumed a blank slate and built a picture of the search engine's algorithm from the ground up, using simple language and analogies. I also have tried to keep the book moving along quickly, never getting too philosophical or bogged down with dense material. This book was meant to be like celery—crisp, easy to eat, and nutritious—and yet, even those who have years of experience in the field of search engine optimization should find a fresh perspective in these pages. I hope you enjoy the read.

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2

The Five Ingredients of Google Optimization

By now, I've shed some light on how Google ranks the millions of sites on the Web. As a business owner or marketer, you are on a constant quest to gain Google's trust. And on your quest, you will need to keep exactly five factors in mind. I call them the five ingredients of successful SEO. You already know the most important one: links (the very currency of trust in Google's eyes). The others are keyword selection, meta page title, URL structure, and time. Even if those terms sound like jabberwocky to you right now, I promise they'll be second nature by the time you finish this chapter.

Before we get started, I want to make sure you understand a few basic vocabulary terms that will make your reading of this chapter much easier:

- **Keywords**—Keywords, or search terms (*these expressions are interchangeable*), are the words that are typed into search engines such as Google.

- **Inbound links**—As Google is analyzing its vast database of websites, trying to determine which ones to select as the 10 final, first-page contestants, it puts a high price tag on what's known in the industry as inbound links. Inbound links are links from other websites that point to your website, which hopefully result in your site gaining Google's trust.

- **TrustRank**—We know from the preceding chapter that the more links your site receives from other trusted websites, the higher its TrustRank will be, and therefore the higher its likelihood of showing up at the top of the search results. TrustRank is one of the two main factors Google uses to determine which results to show on the first page for a search.

- **Meta page title**—A meta page title, the other main factor used by Google to determine which results to show on the first page for a search, basically is a short description of what your site is about, which people who program websites put into a special area of the website code. It is like the headline of a newspaper. There is a different meta page title for every page on your site, and Google pays special attention to it.

- **URL**—A uniform resource locator (URL) is the same thing as a domain name, or a web address. It's the http://www.example.com that you type in when you want to visit a website.

Ingredient One: Keyword Selection

Now that you understand some of the basic terminology and concepts behind ranking, let's get down to the nitty-gritty of keyword selection. Selecting your search terms (or keywords) is not difficult. All you do is think about what you would like people to type into Google to make your website pop up. For example, I would like it if my personal website, http://www.evanbailyn.com, were the first result when someone typed in *Who is the handsomest man on earth?* This would cause people to believe that I am considered the handsomest man on earth. Why? Because Google says so! People put a lot of trust in Google's rankings.

If I managed the website for a personal injury law firm in New York, I would want that website to show up when someone types in *personal injury lawyer new york*. How did I choose that search phrase? I just thought about it for two seconds and decided that people would probably type it in if they were looking for a personal injury lawyer in New York.

Those phrases, *who is the handsomest man on earth?* and *personal injury lawyer new york*, are *keyword phrases*. I chose them because they seemed like the best searches to bring new visitors to the two websites in question for their respective purposes.

Of course, there are more scientific methods for choosing keywords in addition to the "think about it for two seconds" method. Here they are.

Take an Informal Survey

Ask your friends what they would type into Google if they were looking for the product or service your company sells. If you own a website that sells shampoo for people with dry hair, ask people around you: What would you type into Google if you want to find a new moisturizing shampoo? Their answers might be as general as *buy shampoo,* or they might specifically search for *dry hair shampoo,* or they might start with some research and type, *what are the best shampoos for dry hair?* These are three very different keyword phrases, and it is invaluable to know which of them most people would type so that you can set your strategy.

Use the Google AdWords Keyword Tool

This free tool is the de facto standard for keyword selection in the SEO world (see Figure 2.1). It shows global and local statistics of how many people are searching for the keywords you enter, along with a list of related terms and their search volumes. You can access the tool directly using this link: https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal. Without a doubt, bookmark this tool for future use.
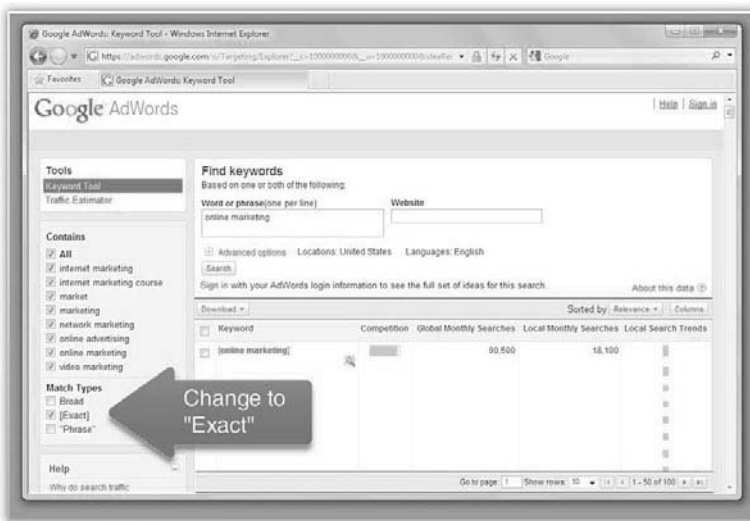
Figure 2.1   *The Google AdWords Keyword Tool. Always change the default Broad match type to Exact.*

BE CAREFUL WITH ADWORDS' SEARCH VOLUME NUMBERS

A crucial note about this tool is that its search volume numbers are inflated. I can't tell you how many clients I've gotten on the phone with who tell me breathlessly that if I can just get their sites to #1, they will get 10 million visitors per month! In reality, the keyword they are referring to will deliver a tiny fraction of that number of visitors. I have learned this lesson firsthand, having optimized my kids' website to the top five results of Google for the term "games" a few years ago. According to the Google Keyword Tool, "games" receives more than 400 million global searches per month. Getting even 1% of that number would make my site one of the most popular game sites online. So how many did I receive the month that I was on the first page of Google? Around 56,000.

To get a more accurate picture of the type of search traffic you can expect from the Keyword Tool, filter your results using the Exact match setting rather than the default Broad match setting. Then look in the Local Monthly Searches column. Take that number and divide it by three. The final number you get is somewhere close to the number of visitors your site would get if it ranked #1 for the search term in question.

Capitalize on Competitors' Work

Your competitors have probably already spent a lot of time and energy doing research on the keywords that make them the most money. Why not take a few seconds and avail yourself of all that work? To do so, simply type into Google what you believe to be your main keyword, and look at the blue underlined heading of each of the 10 results that subsequently appear. The keywords you find in those headings are probably the ones that your competitors have determined make the biggest difference to their bottom lines. Why do I say that? Well, first of all, to have gotten into the top 10 results for your main keyword, your competitors are definitely doing something right, SEO-wise, so it's reasonable to assume they know a thing or two about keyword selection. Second, one of the oldest rules in SEO is that you put your main keywords into your meta page title, which Google ports directly into your site's blue underlined heading whenever your site appears as a search result.

So let's say I sell gift baskets. Is the right keyword for me *gift baskets?* Perhaps it's *gift basket* as a singular. Or perhaps it's *order gift baskets online.* I'm not sure, but I'm going to see what my competitors think by typing *gift baskets* into Google (see Figure 2.2).
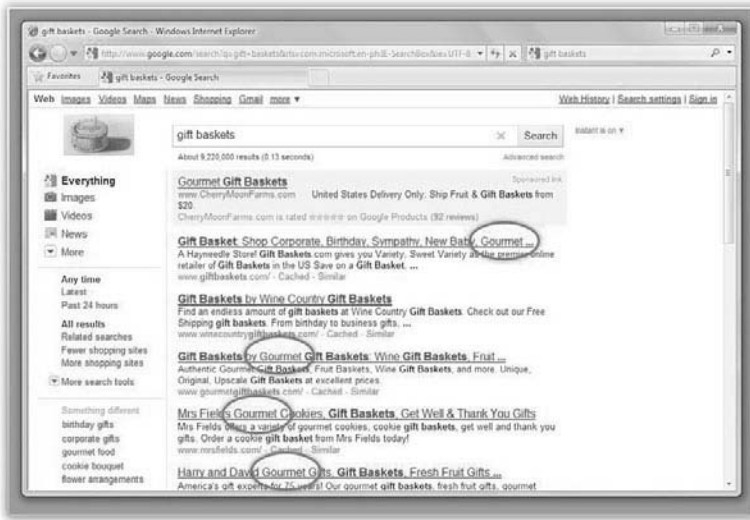
Figure 2.2   *Don't overlook what you can learn about the keywords your competitors deem important.*

After a quick glance at the headings of these results, I can immediately see that my competitors believe the keyword *gourmet gift baskets* is a lucrative one. Two out of the top four websites have the keyword *gourmet* in their headings or descriptions. So I will now add it to the list of keywords I want to optimize for my gift baskets company. It also seems that my competitors like *birthday gift baskets*, *food gift baskets,* and *wine gift baskets.* All three of these keyword phrases will be considered because I know from looking at these websites that they have put a lot of work into their companies, so they probably have a good sense of which keywords deliver the most new sales.

Another somewhat sneakier and more awesome way of capitalizing on your competitors' hard work is using free traffic measurement services to spy on the keywords for which your competitors are already ranking. I used to think that this kind of tool couldn't possibly exist because only I have access to my internal traffic logs and therefore know which search keywords bring my site the most traffic, but then I tried running the tool against my own site and found that it was about 90% accurate.

The best free keyword-spying tool is Alexa. Go to http://www.alexa.com, type in a competitor's website, click the Get Details button, and then click the Search Analytics tab. On the right side, you will see Top Queries From Search Traffic (see Figure 2.3).

Top Keywords from Search Traffic

The top keywords driving traffic to imdb.com from search engines. Updated monthly.

Keyword	Percent of Search Traffic
1 imdb	1.96%
2 megan fox	0.22%
3 avatar	0.19%
4 surrogates	0.14%
5 paranormal activity	0.14%
6 inglorious bastards	0.13%
7 500 days of summer	0.12%
8 imdb.com	0.12%
9 morena baccarin	0.11%
10 district 9	0.11%

Figure 2.3   *Alexa.com's Search Analytics report for imdb.com, showing the top keywords delivering traffic to IMDB.*

Using Alexa or other free keyword-spying tools is one surefire way to know which keywords are actually delivering traffic to your competitors. The keywords from which they receive traffic might be the best keywords for you; however, keep in mind that just because a keyword delivers traffic to a site doesn't mean it delivers *new sales* to a site. If there were a New Sales Spying Tool out there, it would be quite popular. However, the next best thing to a New Sales Spying Tool is a pay-per-click campaign.

Spend a Few Bucks on a Pay-Per-Click Campaign

There is no better way to understand the effect of your website showing up on the first page for a particular keyword than instantly getting it to the first page and seeing how many sales you make from it. This is essentially what you can do with a Google AdWords campaign (http://www.google.com/ads/adwords/). For a few hundred dollars, you can get your website to show up above the regular (organic) search results, in the shaded Sponsored Results area. While the sponsored results are less trusted by the average searcher than the organic results, there are definite advantages to spearheading an SEO effort with a brief Google AdWords campaign.

The most significant benefit of running a paid campaign on Google is that you can quickly learn which keywords produce the most sales for you. In the keyword selection process, this knowledge is invaluable. Not only can you try out the couple of keywords you think would bring the most benefit to your business, you can try out hundreds of keywords at once and not pay unless someone clicks your ad. In doing

so, you might stumble upon the fact that the plural of your main keyword performs much better than the singular; one of your three most obvious keywords outperforms the other two by a wide margin; or some random keyword you never would have thought of is a sleeper, producing numerous sales.

When you gain a better understanding of your best-performing keywords, you can gradually wean yourself off the expensive Google AdWords system and focus on SEO (although there is nothing wrong with keeping a pay-per-click campaign running at the same time as doing SEO, as long as you are carefully watching the campaign to make sure you are making more money than you are spending). Google AdWords can work very well for targeting the lesser-searched keywords in your industry because of the rule that you pay only when someone clicks. I have some clients that use paid search only for those lesser-searched keywords and focus their entire SEO efforts on the three or four big keywords that bring in the most sales; this approach generally works well. I give a full tutorial on how to start a Google AdWords campaign to complement your SEO campaign in Chapter 6, "Google Adwords as a Complement to SEO."

Ingredient Two: The Meta Page Title

Do not skip this section, even if it sounds boring. I promise I won't hammer you with techie-talk. The meta page title is the second most important factor in all of SEO.

When your website was first created, whoever was programming it had to fill in a section of the coding called the *meta page title*. If your web designer knows a thing or two about SEO, he or she will have paid special attention to this seemingly random bit of code that is a part of every website.

The reason this primitive bit of information matters so much is because search engines have, for a while now, considered the meta page title to be the one true description of a website. The meta page title is like the headline of a newspaper story or the front cover of a book. It encapsulates a web page in about 15 words or fewer.

Google's decision to make it such a huge factor in ranking websites is pretty arbitrary. They could have made the meta description title, the meta keywords, or any other section of the website code the defining attributes of a website. But because they decided that this area matters so much, we are compelled to pay attention to it, too.

First off, let's get this out of the way. Figure 2.4 shows what the meta page title actually looks like inside your website's Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) code. I use the code from my website as an example.

Figure 2.4 *An example of how the meta page title appears in a web page's HTML code.*

Feel free to forget that image if it seems complicated. What that code turns into on your website is the words at the very top of your Internet browser, above the address bar (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5 *The meta page text is what appears at the very top of the user's web browser.*

The only other place you will encounter meta page titles as a normal Internet user is when you are looking at search engine results. Those blue underlined headings on the first line of every Google result are simply a direct copy of each site's meta page title, as shown in Figure 2.6.
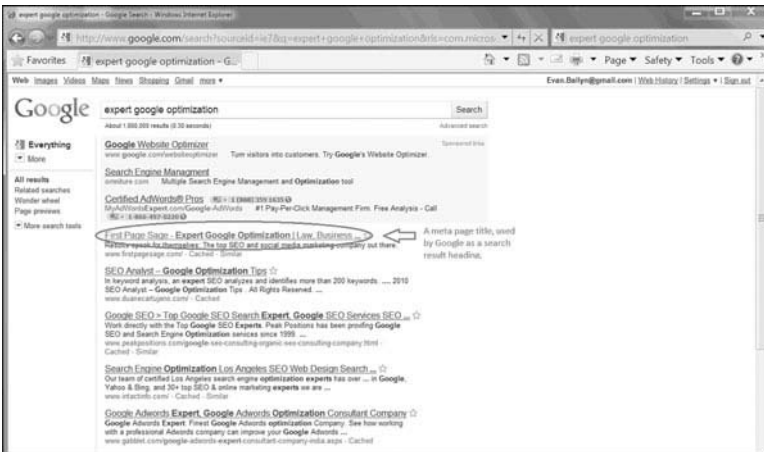
Figure 2.6 *Google also uses a site's meta page title as the heading for its search results.*

It is your job to decide what your page title should be before asking your web designer or tech person to put it into your site's code. But not to fear—when creating a meta page title, you need to know only the following three things:

1. It needs to summarize what your site is about in a simple way for the sake of visitors but also contain keywords so that Google knows which terms your website should rank for.

2. Keep it to a maximum of 100 characters, although Google will show only 65 or so.

3. After you've finished formulating it, send it to your web designer (or anyone who does your web work) and say, "Please make this sentence the meta page title of my site's home page."

Now that you see this meta page title thing is quite doable, let's go into how you can maximize its impact.

Maximizing the Effectiveness of Your Meta Page Titles

The key to a really effective meta page title is including all your most valuable keywords in a human-friendly *and* Google-friendly way. To demonstrate this idea, I will give an example of a long-time client of mine, a criminal lawyer in Los Angeles. He wants his website to show up at the top of Google whenever someone is looking for a criminal lawyer in Los Angeles. After doing his research, he realized that all his keyword phrases contain the words *lawyer, attorney, los angeles, criminal,* and *defense.* In other words, if you combine these words in different ways, you will end up with the various keywords that people type in when they are looking for a criminal lawyer in Los Angeles (for example, *criminal defense lawyer los angeles*). He also wants his website to rank high for searches related to criminal law representation in three areas outside of Los Angeles: Glendale, Pasadena, and Burbank. Add those three city names to the list of words that a potential client might enter into Google to find him, and he's looking at more than 20 different keywords. That's a lot of keywords to stuff into a 100-character title. How will he do it? Well, back in 2004 or 2005, it would have been common for webmasters to simply list their keywords, in order of importance, in the meta page title tag like this:

Los angeles criminal lawyer, los angeles criminal attorney, los angeles criminal defense attorney, los angeles criminal defense lawyer, los angeles criminal defense, los angeles lawyer, lawyer in burbank, glendale, pasadena

That type of meta page title is not only unfriendly to visitors, but would probably get your site labeled as spam and dropped to the bottom of the results. The main thing that this meta page title lacks—other than adherence to the character limit—is the fact that Google can read words in any order as long as they are written one time. So if your three keywords are *red delicious apples, delicious apples,* and *apples,* you could simply make your page title "Red Delicious Apples For Sale."

That would cover all three keywords just fine. With that rule in mind, here is a perfect meta page title for my client, the Los Angeles criminal lawyer:

Los Angeles Criminal Lawyer | Defense Attorney in Burbank, Glendale, and Pasadena

This meta page title incorporates all the words that my client wishes to rank for, and because Google doesn't care about word order, my client is getting credit for every permutation of those words. This means that if someone types into Google *pasadena defense lawyer,* Google will consider my client's website an ideal match. Same with *criminal defense attorney los angeles* or any other permutation of the words in his site's meta page title. We've covered them all in a short, human-friendly way.

So far I've been focusing on just your home page meta page title. But nowadays, especially with Google's newest algorithm updates, it is important to get many pages of your site, not just your home page, to rank. This means you should be specifically concerned with the meta page titles on all the pages of your website, not just your home page. My client, for instance, did not need to construct a meta page title for his home page that covers every important keyword. He could have a specific page that focuses just on criminal defense in Burbank, and the meta page title of that page could be "Burbank Criminal Defense Lawyer | Attorney in Burbank, California." Creating separate pages, all with unique meta page titles for every keyword, is a good idea because it gives visitors a page that specifically suits their search, whatever it may be. It also gives Google lots of opportunities to rank your website's pages for niche keywords. Ultimately, it is the sites that have hundreds, or even thousands, of pages on niche topics that receive the most overall traffic from Google. I discuss this strategy further in Chapter 5, "The Nuclear Football."

If you totally understand how to craft the perfect meta page title now, skip ahead to the "Ingredient Three: Links" section of this chapter. For those who really want this idea hammered home, I have included two case studies.

Case Study One: The Baby Store

A client of mine has an online store that sells clothing for babies and toddlers. Using the Google AdWords Keyword Tool, she found that her potential customers type in the obvious—*baby clothing*—but also use the word *clothes* in place of *clothing* and add the descriptors *girls* and *boys* in their searches. So already she was looking at the following list of keywords:

baby clothing
baby clothes
girls baby clothing
girls baby clothes
boys baby clothing
boys baby clothes

On top of that, potential customers with older kids were also typing in *toddler clothing* and *kids clothing*. So there were at least a dozen more permutations of keywords she wanted her site to rank for. After much thought, here is the page title we came up with:

The Baby Store | Baby and Toddler Clothing | Kids Clothes for Girls and Boys

As you can see, all the words that make up the keywords she wanted to rank for are represented in this innocent-looking page title. It just took a few minutes to arrange the words in a way that seemed natural but was also rich with keywords. As you can see, I'm a fan of the "spoke," the long vertical line that is above the Enter key on most keywords, because it separates bits of the page title neatly.

Case Study Two: Games

A client of mine who owns a games website wanted to rank for the keywords: *free online games, fun games,* and *best games*. Let's say his site name was Floofy.com. (I just made that up because it's fun to say.) A good page title for him would be this:

Floofy.com | The best fun, free online games

As with the other two examples I've given, this page title incorporates all the words that make up his three keywords, and therefore would be called forth by Google when someone types in *fun games, free online games,* or *best games*. Because this is a relatively short page title, he could include some other keywords as well. Or he might want to keep it that way because people do make the decision of which site to click on in the search results based on that blue underlined heading, which, once again, is a direct copy of the meta page title.

Ingredient Three: Links

You should now understand the meta page title, but how does it fit within Google's algorithm? Well, if I were an oversimplifying kind of person, I would tell you the following:

When someone does a search on Google, the first thing Google does is locate every site whose meta page title contains the words in that search. It then looks at how many trustworthy links each web page in that result set has and puts the ones with the most trustworthy links on the first page and the ones with the least trust-worthy links at the very end.

So once you've got the right page title, it's all about links.

It amazes me how much I still hear that SEO is about the things that are on your website. In fact, the main service most so-called SEO companies sell is one where they work on your website to cause it to attract search engine traffic. This boggles

my mind because, other than the meta page title, what's on your website barely even matters to Google! *It's all about links*.

Links are to Google what grades and SAT scores are to a college admission officer. Does the admission officer care what you look like on your interview? Sure. But he wouldn't have invited you for the interview in the first place if you didn't have high enough grades and SAT scores. Similarly, does Google care about how user-friendly your website is, what's written on it, and how fast it loads? Absolutely. But they won't even look at it if you don't have the right quality and quantity of links.

That being said, if you have great links but maintain a poorly coded, slow website with nonsense copy written on it, you won't have much luck ranking on Google. Just as you wouldn't have much luck getting into college if you have perfect grades and SATs but show up late to your interview wearing sloppy clothes and making wisecracks at your admission officer.

The point I'm trying to make is this: Links matter far more than any other factor. And if you get the link component and the meta page title component right, you've got 85% of the job done right there.

In Chapter 1, "Trust: The Currency Of Google," I went over how to determine a high TrustRank link versus a low TrustRank link. And in the next chapter, I go over how to acquire links. So for now, let me just explain a bit more clearly what a link is and what makes it valuable so that you know exactly what you're hunting for.

For the purposes of this book, a *link* is anything on a website that, when clicked, brings you to another web page. The granddaddy of links, the one that was there in 1994 when the Internet was still something only nerds cared about, is the *text link* (or, as I like to call it, the "blue underlined link"). Figure 2.7 shows a snippet from my bio on evanbailyn.com that contains two text links.

Evan is the founder of **First Page Sage**, a search engine optimization and social media company with a near-perfect record of getting client websites to rank on the first page of Google, serving celebrity and Fortune 500 clients. He is also the creator of **Digits**, a web

Figure 2.7   *An example of the way links are used inside text: they guide visitors to other web pages to supplement the information on the current page.*

I had my web designer add these two text links into my bio so that people could see my web properties with a simple click. That is generally the purpose of links—to allow people to discover new web pages with a quick mouse click.

Text links are usually blue and underlined, but there are exceptions. Sometimes you'll catch webmasters being creative with their text links. Also the color of a text link usually changes when you click it; this is to remind you that you've already

visited the site that the link references. A clicked-on link will typically be purple, but again, that is up to the web designer. No matter what color it is or what it looks like, if it takes you to another page, it's a link.

The other type of link is the *image link*. As the name implies, this kind of link is in the form of an image but functions exactly like any other link in that it brings you to another web page when you click it. We've all seen plenty of image links; every advertisement on every website is an image link.

You know by now that Google gives your website credit every time another website links to your website. However, certain types of links are more valuable than others. Text links are the most valuable types of links because Google can easily read the words in and around the text link to get a sense of what the link is referring to. An image link has the same magnitude of value as a text link, but without all the description. In other words, an image link is like an overall vote for a political candidate, one that says "I like this candidate." A text link is like a detailed vote for a political candidate, the equivalent of "I like this candidate because of his stance on health care and education." Text links are valuable because they tell Google what a site is about. This information allows Google to decide which specific keywords to rank that website for.

As I explained in Chapter 1, the reason links are so important is because they pass TrustRank. Text links pass highly detailed TrustRank. Image links pass general TrustRank. When asking other websites for links, you should request a text link, but if you absolutely can't get one (for instance, if text links don't fit into the site's aesthetic), you can settle for an image link. Ultimately, your site will rank higher with a mix of both, because Google's engineers have determined that most sites would attract both types of links in a world without SEO.

When requesting a text link from another site, you should usually ask for one that has your keywords inside the linked text. For instance, if I print business cards for a living, I want my link to appear in underlined text reading "business cards." These links could stand on their own or appear in the context of a sentence or paragraph. You do not want a link that simply has your website's address in the linked text. So to be clear...

The three ways you *want* your link to appear on another website:

➡ **business cards**

➡ Print your **business cards** quickly and inexpensively.

➡ Nowadays there are many ways to send people your contact details. A simple email signature can suffice. You could share your Twitter username. And of course, we must not underestimate the old-fashioned convenience of **business cards**.

The two ways you *do not* want your link to appear on another website:

www.yoursite.com

Business Cards

I would be finished writing this section if it were 2008 right now. For the vast majority of Google's existence, simple text links with keywords inside of them have been the greatest weapon in any search engine optimizer's arsenal. But alas, in mid-2009 Google slammed the SEO world with an algorithm update that punished sites that have too many same-keyword text links pointing to them. In other words, if I had been telling webmasters for years to only link to me like this—**business cards**—my site would have dropped way down in the rankings. I wondered why it had taken the arsenal of highly paid Stanford and MIT graduates at Google so long to realize that keyword-rich text links were overused by optimizers and were unnatural looking.

At the time the keyword-rich text link party was ending and hundreds of search engine optimizers were in their home offices crying, I remained relatively calm. I had outsmarted them before and was determined to do it again. How should I react to Google's rebellion against unnatural-looking link patterns? By adopting natural-looking link patterns, of course. I started linking to my clients in a smattering of different ways. Some links had the keyword a few words away in a paragraph, some had the keyword as only part of the text link, some had the keyword not mentioned at all, and some had the keyword inside the text link exactly the way I did before. Following is my recipe for the perfect "natural" linking pattern for your site. In other words, this is the formula for how other websites should link to your website under ideal circumstances. I have used "business cards" as the example keyword that I am aiming to optimize for.

- 20% links in text *around* your keyword but not *on* your keyword (for example, "When I need business cards, I contact **this company**.")

- 30% links that include your keyword but also include other words in a sentence (for example, "I ran out of my **brand new business cards** today.")

- 30% links that include only your keyword (for example, "I love my **business cards**.")

- 20% image links

In other words, I am saying that, if your site had 10 total inbound links, each link from a page on a different website, it would be ideal if

- Two of those pages contained your keyword but linked to your website from text near that keyword, not from the keyword itself.

- Three of those pages contained your keyword and linked to your website from your keyword in addition to the word or two that is next to it.

- Three of those pages contained your keyword and linked to your website directly from it.

- Two of those pages contained images and linked to your website from those images.

For the professional search engine optimizers among you, this recipe might seem like the cream of this entire book. Why not wait until nobody's looking, rip it out of the book, and stick it in your wallet, right? I must warn you that although this recipe works very well at the time of this printing, remember that Google is always shifting their algorithm. Your best shot to always fall ahead of the curve is to obtain as many natural-looking links as possible in a variety of formats.

Dummy Links

Before moving on to the next ingredient, I must warn you about a certain type of link that passes no TrustRank at all and must be avoided at all costs. I call these types of links *dummy links* because they look just like real links but contain none of the substance that helps your website to rank. You should keep dummy links in mind because there is nothing worse than finding out that some of the links you have worked hard to earn are not actually passing any TrustRank. Here are the two types of dummy links:

- **Redirect links**—If a webmaster is trying to prevent TrustRank from being passed via the links on his site, he can have them coded in such a way that when someone clicks a link to an outside site, that person is first sent to a page on his own site before arriving at his final destination website. This is called a redirect. In other words, there is an intermediate page that the visitors hit before they get to the page they intended to visit. Usually the visitor is on the intermediate page just for a split second so that they never even notice they visited an intermediate page. This is a sneaky way of withholding the site's vote—that is, their TrustRank—from ever being cast. Google gives all the TrustRank they would have given to the outside site to the intermediate page, which is just some random page on the originating site. You can identify this kind of dummy link by hovering your mouse over any link on another site that seems to be going to your site and then looking at the bottom left corner of your screen where the URL that the link is pointing to is displayed. As long as it reads http://www.yoursite.com, you're

good. If it reads something like http://www.othersite.com/ redirect.php?url=www.yoursite.com, it is a dummy link.

- **No-follow links**—The most sinister type of dummy link is the no-follow link, simply because you can't tell that it isn't passing TrustRank without looking at the HTML code of the web page. No-follow links are normal links that have been intentionally crippled via a short bit of code to prevent TrustRank from leaving a web page. They are an invention of Google, created to give webmasters a way to link to advertisers without "voting" for advertisers. For a couple of years, the no-follow link has been a subject of debate in the SEO world. Google holds that they are merely trying to figure out which links are editorial mentions and which are paid mentions. (Google only wants to give ranking credibility to the former.) Many webmasters think that they should not have to change the way they link to advertisers just to please an outside company, even one as important as Google. Naturally, advertisers don't like being labeled with a no-follow tag because that TrustRank is one of the chief things that they are paying for.

When another site links to your site as part of an arrangement you made, ask your webmaster to check to see whether it has a "no-follow tag" on it. If you catch a site linking to you with a no-follow tag, you have license to be very upset with them. The only good use of a no-follow tag, in my opinion, is in the comments of a blog because there are so many spammers who leave comments with links in them just to steal TrustRank from your site. Many sites, includes the *New York Times* website, place a no-follow tag on all comments. If you'd like to check a link yourself for a no-follow tag, find the View Source button on your web browser's menu (often you can access the code by right-clicking the page as well) and do a search for your site's URL. If you see rel=nofollow next to your link, you know that the webmaster is withholding TrustRank from being passed to your site.

Ingredient Four: URL Structure

Sometimes Google is so easy to read that people miss what it's trying to tell them. The role of the URL in SEO is one of those times. Simply put, your main keyword should be in your URL. Preferably, it should be the entire URL. For example, if you own a video-sharing site and your keyword is *funny videos,* the best domain name you could ever get is http://www.funnyvideos.com. If you have many keywords, as most webmasters do, you'll want to make sure that every keyword has its own landing page with the keyword somewhere in the URL. The most standard way to format keyword-specific URLs is as follows:

    http://www.yoursite.com/keyword1.html
    http://www.yoursite.com/keyword2.html
    http://www.yoursite.com/keyword3.html

When I speak about this topic, I always get lots of questions about the best way to include your keywords in your URL. So let me break it down for you. We'll start with the most fundamental part of your URL: your domain name. I'm sure Google has some dusty tablets lying around that define the top-level domains (or TLDs, such as .com, .net, .org) they trust the most, but the most I can do is give you my educated guess.

When choosing a domain name, you should first try to get your keyword in a .com form (for example, http://www.funnyvideos.com). If you can't get that— which you probably can't without paying the spammer who probably owns the domain lots of money—try for the .net or the .org version of that domain. If you can't get either of those, you will definitely be able to find a domain name that has your keyword in it with another word before it, as in http://www.yourfunnyvideos. com. While far less valuable than http://www.funnyvideos.com, a domain name with an extra word in it will give you some extra ranking credibility with Google for that keyword. If you can't manage to find a domain with your main keyword in it, you can either try a hyphenated domain (such as http://www.best-funnyvideos. com) at the risk of looking a bit low quality, or simply use a URL without a key-word in it and optimize a page that is named after your main keyword, as in http://www.yoursite.com/funnyvideos.

If you have multiple very important keywords and have time and money, buying multiple URLs, one for each keyword you care about, is a strategy I've seen work quite well for clients. But keep in mind that each URL will need its own website with unique content. If you try to throw the same website on multiple URLs, Google may penalize all but one of them for having duplicate content.

There are probably many people reading this book who do not have the option of deciding how to integrate their keywords into their domain names because they already have a website or need to use the names of their companies as their domain names. If that's your situation, you should focus on having an excellent URL struc-ture for all the pages on your site. And in this case, excellent means simple.

Determine your keywords in advance and have a separate web page for every key-word that has the keyword as the full name of the page, as follows:

    http://www.yoursite.com/funnyvideos
    http://www.yoursite.com/sillyvideos
    http://www.yoursite.com/crazyvideos

Remember what we went over in the "Ingredient Two: The Meta Page Title" section of this chapter: Your meta page title should contain the keyword that your page is

about, as well. A content management system (CMS) like WordPress will automatically create these kinds of URLs for you. They call them SEO-friendly URLs, and they work quite well. Some CMSs, on the other hand, create dynamic URLs that look sort of like this:

http://www.example.com/article/bin/answer.foo?language=en&answer=3&sid=98971298178906&query=URL

These types of pages, although readable by Google, are not as helpful to your site's Google rankings as simple, static URLs such as the ones I listed previously. When executed correctly, a page on your website designed to attract searches for a particular keyword should look like the site in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8 *A website with a recommended URL structure and meta page title when the keyword being targeted is* pregnancy.

This page is targeting the keyword *pregnancy,* and so its URL is correctly formatted oh-so-simply as http://www.fornewmoms.com/pregnancy. Note that the meta page title also includes the word *pregnancy*.

After you have your keywords together, links to your website, proper meta page titles, and the correct URL structure, you've done an excellent job impressing Google. Like a well-prepared prom date, you have shown up to meet your date's parents looking your best, armed with compliments, polite manners, and diplomatic answers. And you've succeeded: The parents like you! But you haven't earned their trust quite yet.

Ingredient Five: Time

Like the prom-goer who has impressed his date's parents on the first meeting, you will be in great initial shape to rank high on Google if you've implemented the first four ingredients correctly. Now it's up to you to continue this good behavior. Bring her home at 4 a.m. on prom night, and you are *out*, buddy. Bring her home before midnight and keep exhibiting good manners in the coming weeks and months, and you're building real trust. Google is just as unforgiving as a pair of protective parents; they can handle imperfections and a few awkward missteps, but cross a line that violates their trust, and you will not be welcome inside Google's house again for a long time.

In a website's first month, it cannot rank for any competitive keyword. I've heard about websites that were just released and immediately hit the top of Google, but I've never seen one; and the times I *have* seen sites that claim this meteoric rise, they were ranking for wholly uncompetitive keyword phrases such as *turkish cotton substitute*.

Google intentionally imposes a ranking delay on new websites. This tradition originates back in the days when Google was still combating spam sites, which were threatening to take over their index. These spam sites, most of them automatically generated blogs made up of paragraphs of senseless content to fool Google into thinking they were legitimate websites, had found a way to rank on Google for hundreds of thousands of keywords. The situation had gotten so bad that it was threatening the relevance of Google's results. I remember this period well; although the search experience on Google was not awful, for most searches you typed in you had about a 10% chance of clicking a site that seemed to be written by a lunatic. The new ranking delay (which used to be more severe—preventing most sites from ranking for up to one year) stopped the spammers cold in their tracks. No longer could they throw a website up, get it to rank in a week, make a few bucks from ads or identity-theft schemes, and then disappear. Now they had to stick around and prove their worth for a while, a task very few of them seemed eager to take.

Nowadays, a website gets its first real opportunity to rank for a competitive keyword around the two-month mark—just as long as it has lots of high-TrustRank, natural-looking links. And yet Google still keeps an invisible rubber band around its waist, holding it back from reaching its full potential. A website *can* rank after two months but will be playing with a handicap for about four years in progressively smaller degrees. If I had to guess the amount of "holdback"—that is, inability to rank—a website suffers from its inception to its fourth birthday, the chart would look like what's shown in Table 2.1.

Another way of expressing this chart is that, in month one, the TrustRank of your site's links will have no impact on its Google rankings because your site is completely held back. In month six, however, every link gets about half credit for the

TrustRank it should be conferring on your website. By the 3-year mark, your links receive almost the entire value of their TrustRank, and therefore your website can rank quickly for any term for which it has enough links. That slow-release system is the reason why it is extremely advantageous to buy an old website that already ranks for some of your keywords rather than starting a brand new site. For example, if I sold fortune cookies, instead of simply registering http://www.evansfortunecookies.com, I would type *fortune cookies* into Google and try to find a site that ranks on the first five pages or so that the owner is willing to sell. Although it is difficult to find sellers willing to let their sites go for a reasonable price, if I were to buy an old website that already ranks for my main term, I'd be skipping the entire holdback period and saving myself a ton of time and money.

Table 2.1   Estimated "Holdback" Placed on Sites by Google

Month	Holdback
1	100%
2	75%
6	50%
12	25%
24	10%
36	5%
48	0%

Time is not just a friend of your website; it is a friend of your website's *links*, as well. Confusing as it may sound, a high Google ranking is not just dependent on site age, but also on link age. That is to say, if you have a very old website, and thus experience none of the holdback period whatsoever, you still wouldn't rank high for the keywords referenced by your links if those links were only a few days or weeks old. Google likes to make sure that your links are there for the long haul, not just rented for the month to see whether they will boost your site's rankings (a common situation among buyers of commercial links).

In summary, time will be kindest to websites that have waited long enough and whose links have been there from the very start.

Congratulations on having made it through this chapter. It is, by itself, a record of everything that causes a website to rank on the first page of Google. If you feel like you understood most of the information discussed, you officially know more about Google optimization than the vast majority of Internet business owners. Now it's time to deepen that knowledge.

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