Chapter 1: Executive Summary

Digital advertising methods have made a substantial impact on traditional media and advertising in recent years. Advancement of technologies and consumer preferences, such as handheld device usage, social media, and online news, is driving marketers to choose digital media platforms. This is causing a huge dislocation for traditional media, which is particularly hard hitting to print and TV based advertising. Digital has made everything so cost effective and quick responsive that the demand for traditional advertising is replaced by digital advertising.

Advertising networks, exchange media, real-time bidding (RTB) platforms and mobile ad solutions represent the primary channels for digital advertising. The role of Big Data and Augmented Reality in digital advertising is rapidly growing. It is expected that the users of AR alone will jump 333% by 2018 as the technology experiences a rapid growth phase.

The key features' of this report include:
- Digital advertising agency is simultaneously growing where all companies are vying in order to sustain in long run to be the market leader
- Programmatic is growing at a fast pace in developed advertising market
- Real Time Bidding (RTB) is getting popular all over the world as people are more concern about online advertising rather than go for traditional way of advertising
- Regional and global market forecasts for digital advertising
- Key trends in the future of digital advertisement prospective
- Analysis of the market leader's business strategy in digital advertising
- The main wireless device players in the digital advertising are smartphones and tablets which bring more consumers to digital advertising via the mobile channel

Chapter 2: Introduction

2.1 Overview of Digital Media vs. Traditional Media

Technological advancement and the emergence of globalization rapidly changed the concept of traditional marketing and advertisement. Popularity of digital technology and it's faster, quicker and quality service make the position of digital advertising more striking and intensifying. Previously research studies have found that, consumers' of young age are more likely to shop through digitally compare to the aged people but now it shows that people of all aged groups mostly rely to shop digitally rather than go for physically. Not only that but also 76% of advertisements are placed digitally before appearing in the traditional forms of advertisements media .A recent study found that, as people are more dependable on using smartphones and tablets in their shopping decision the advertisers chose digital media as a way of publishing advertisements to reach potential as well as the new consumers instantly. Still there is controversy among digital and traditional advertisement modes but the rate of digital advertisements viewers are in the rising state. The figure below shows the status of digital versus traditional advertisements and its trends:
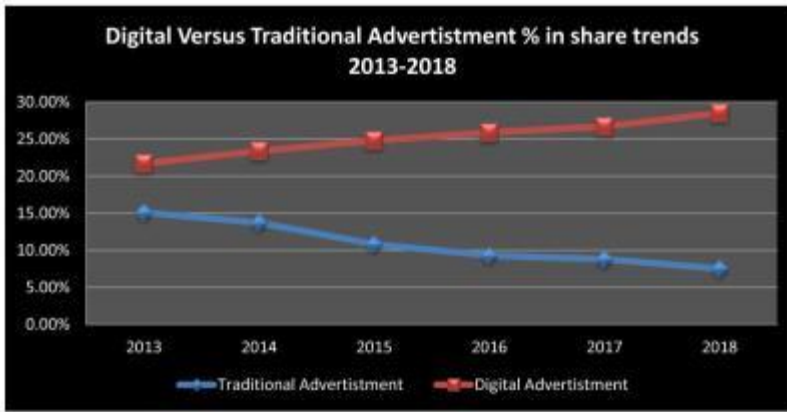Larger View

Figure 1: Traditional Advertisement vs. Digital Advertisement 2013-2018

2.2 Current Status of Digital Media over Traditional Media

2.2.1 Transformation of Online Advertising

Day by day online advertisement is growing rapidly as the way of advertising a product or service is fast and cheaper in online or any form of digital media rather than publishing in newspaper, magazines and other traditional forms of advertisement. Research has found that, online advertisement is the quick and responsive way to reach consumers instantly than any other form of digital advertisement. Although television advertisements cover around 40.1% among other forms of advertisement but by 2018 the online advertisement will cover around 32% among other forms of digital advertisement.
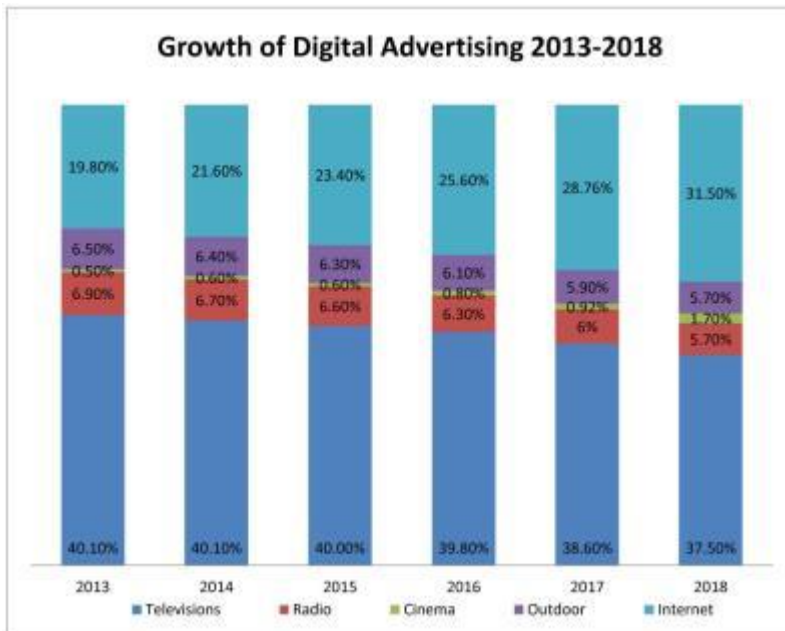Larger View

Figure 2: Growth of Online Advertisement 2013-2018

2.2.2 Declining Trend of Traditional Advertising

There is controversy among the marketing gurus in some portion of the world that digital advertisement will not sustain in long run compare to the longevity of traditional advertisement globally. As the way of traditional advertisement format is very narrow and expensive rather than digital advertisement so consumers nowadays prefer more on digital forms of advertisements. Currently traditional advertising covers 26% of the market share among digital versus traditional form of advertising and expected to decline by 18.40%.By 2025 the trends of traditional advertising will cover below 10% of the total advertising as the market will dominate by technological savvy people in near future.
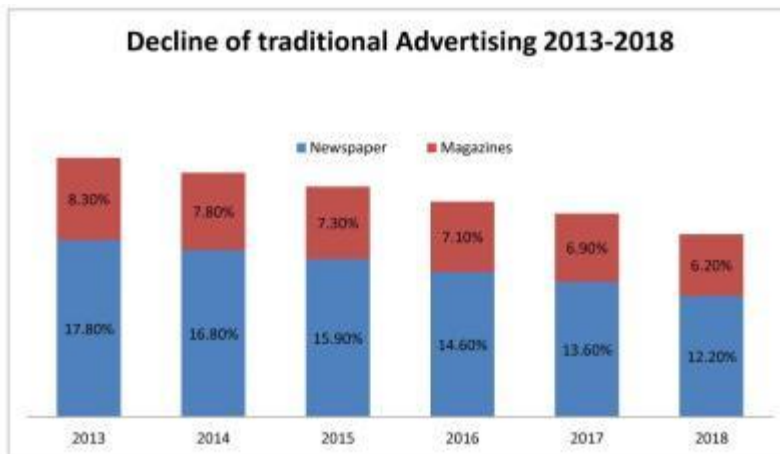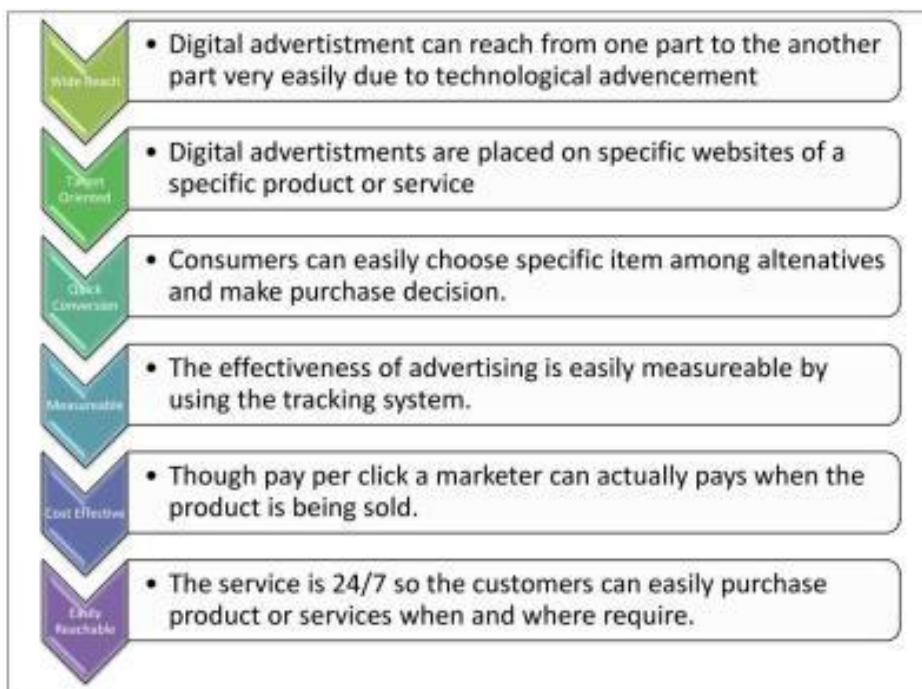
Figure 3: Traditional Advertisement in Decline 2013-2018

## 2.2.3 Digital Market Share over Traditional Advertising

Figure 4: Reasons behind Choosing Digital Media over Traditional Media

2.3 Major Advertisement Relocation Trends

2.3.1 Relocation of Budget from TV to Online

Business enterprises are capturing the digital advertisement media and are confident enough to relocate the budget of TV advertisement over online advertisement. As many of the business rely more on consumers' customized need rather than its presented needs so there is less scope to attract the right consumers instantly. Beside this issue, consumers nowadays are more dependable on multi screening advertisement from where it is easy to compare the product or services among huge alternatives. Recent studies found that, there is multiplier effect on TV advertisement versus combination of TV and other format of advertisement. A current survey shows that the, digital advertisement has effect on: likeability, message recall, brand recall and general recall. If the advertisement is just broadcasted on TV there is less effect on the key effect. The same advertisement has immense effect on the consumers mind if it is broadcasted TV and online. The figure below shows the result of that survey:
Larger View
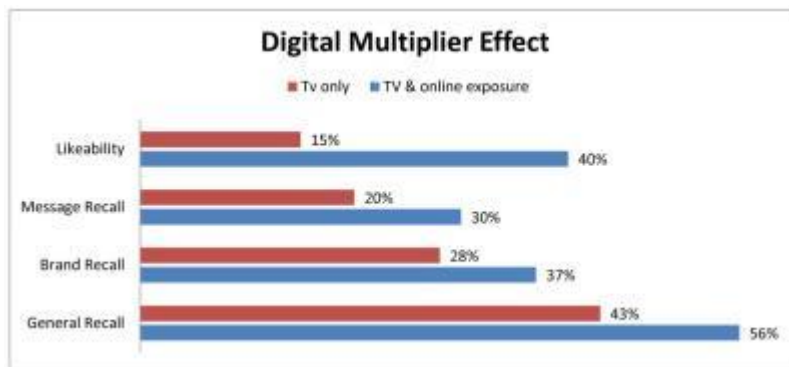
Figure 5: Digital Multiplier Effect

2.3.2 Digital Advertisement over TV commercial

TV commercial are more expensive compare to the digital advertisement. At the same time the number of consumers' response varies among the format of advertisement. Since the number of Smartphone and tablet users are rising along the other handheld devices so there is high preference on online advertisement over TV commercial. In some of the cases the TV commercial are not presented according to the desired time of consumers. On the other side consumers can easily watch the video of a specific product through their handheld devices. To keep in mind about consumers' segmentation marketers are developing both long and short form of the advertisement. Interestingly short video advertisements are developed in such a way that consumers are more interested to watch the full version of that video. Recently a study was conducted among different segmented consumers who watch both online and TV commercial .Their response about this survey is: "We like to watch online video of a product rather than go for TV commercial because in online version of any advertisement there is huge scope to choose among alternatives whereas the TV commercial has very narrow scope to choose among alternative". The other benefit of the online advertisements' are: Multi screening advertisements, consumers feedback about the product and consumers can easily communicate to the business to make the product tailored and customize according to the need of different consumer segmentation.
Larger View
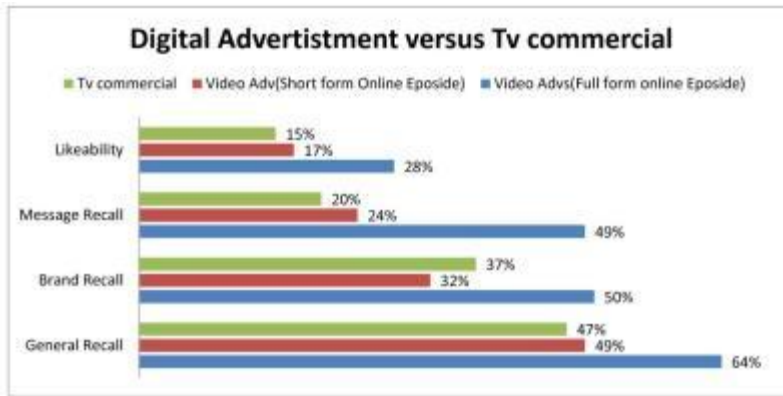
Figure 6: Consumers Preferences - TV commercial vs. Video Advertisements

2.3.3 Brand Effectiveness Analysis of Digital Advertisement over TV

Recent study has revealed that consumers prefer to purchase service through online video advertisement rather than go for TV commercial or any form of traditional advertisements. Consumers nowadays are more cognizant on brand for a specific product or service. Not only that but also they prefer to purchase their desirable product or services through online video advertisements as there is scope to choose a brand from multi-screen facilities. Most popular services in online advertisements' are: Finance and banking, retailing, restaurant, hospitality, financing, telecom, technology and automobile industry. These industries are like star in online advertisements where consumers are the key of success of any brand which attracts consumers in order to gain high market share in a specific industry along with the profit gainer.

The figure below shows the comparison of same advertisements broadcasted on TV and posted online on video format and it's effectiveness on consumers mind.
Larger View
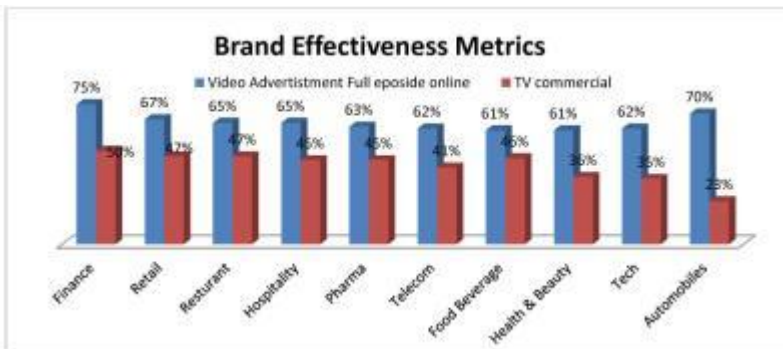
Figure 7: Brand Effectiveness Metrics TV vs. Video Ad (Full Episode Online)

2.4 The Digital Advertisement Ecosystem

Digital advertisement ecosystem is one of the easiest and quickest ways to reach to final customers. Although the basic features are like traditional advertisement tools but it requires less dependencies on all. The primary tools are brand (Representing a specific organization), advertisement agencies (third party as well as the mediator among organization to the final consumers) and the publishers of a specific product's digital advertising. In the whole advertisement ecosystem the Ad Networks and Ad Exchanges maintain the communication among the organizations to the advertisement publisher.

Following diagram shows how digital advertisement ecosystem works to publish digital advertisement of a product or service.
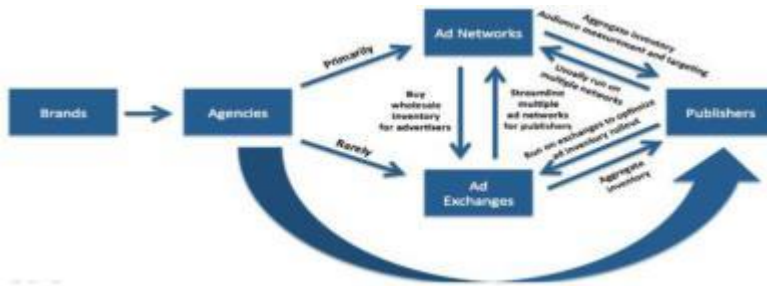
Figure 8: Digital Advertisement Ecosystem. (Source: Business Intelligence)
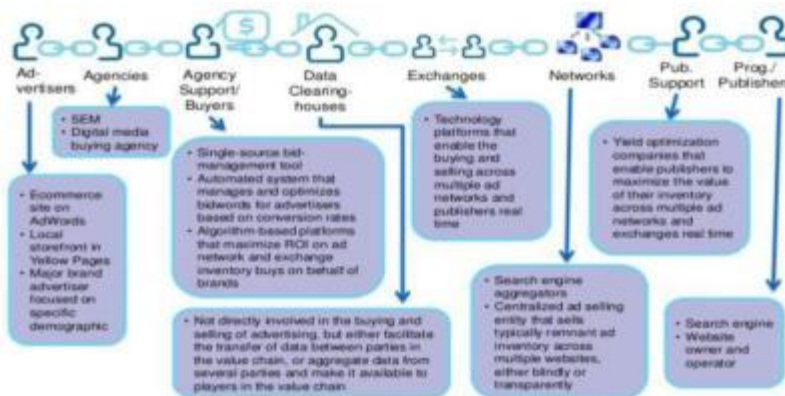
2.5 Digital Advertising Value Chain

Digital Advertising ecosystem basically consists of three players namely advertisers, advertisement agency (the agencies which produce advertisements, the supporting players are: agency support/buyers, data clearing houses, exchanging medium, networks, publication supports) and program publishers. There is close relation among the key drivers as there is dependency among them.

Figure 9: Digital Advertising Value Chain and Activities. (Source: www.immobile.com)

Chapter 3: Digital Advertising Methods

3.1 Online Advertising

Online advertising is one of the most widely used tools among other digital advertising methods. Globalization has make virtual market more dependable on online methods of advertising since consumers want the faster and quicker quality products and services from one part to the another part of the world. The most widely used online methods are shown in table below

Placing advertisement of a business in Social media it is quicker to reach potential consumers. Beside facebook the other social medias are twitter,Google+ and orkut are popular. In some of the cases linkedin works

Forms of Online Method	How it work
Pay Per Click (PPC)	This system enables a user to buy through online whereas business organizations put advertisements of a product or service with the features and prices. By clicking on the product's buying option users can buy it by using different modes of online payment.
SOCIAL	Placing advertisement of a business in Social media it is quicker to reach potential consumers. Beside facebook the other social medias are twitter,Google+ and orkut are popular. In some of the cases linkedin works
EMAIL MARKETING	The older form of digital advertising where the business or organization sent email about the promotion or launching of a product or service to the potential as well as the non potential consumers through email

Figure 10: Forms of Online Advertising

Larger View
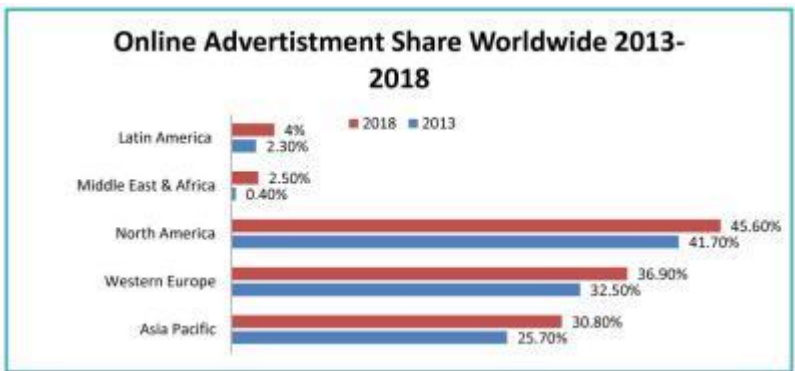
Figure 11: Online Advertising Global Share 2013-2018

3.2 Mobile Display Methods

Advancement of technology makes it easier for the advertisers to place advertisements through the mobile network operators. Not only is this the case, but also the Internet enabled smartphone and tablet phone users can purchase their desirable products or services by way of mobile advertisements. The forms of Mobile advertisement methods are as follows:
Larger View

Forms of Mobile Display	How it Works
On device Mobile Display Advertising	It works as a pure branding mood to pure direct responses. The format can take place as an advertisement via text, graphical Statistic(Either clickable or stick), graphical text with additional link, format of TV advertisement with a maximum length
Off device Mobile Display Advertising	Measurable call to action advertisement. (ex: SMS,MMS), event invitation or promotion of a product advertisement.

Figure 12: Mobile Display Advertisement Method

3.3 Mobile Search Method

Mobile search advertising continues to increase as the number of mobile advertisers are growing rapidly .Majority of overall search ad spend is being more allocated to mobile. The growth will increase by 29% by 2018. Research indicates that,60% of advertising spending are placed for mobile advertisement .In addition, search is the preferred method of advertising for mobile campaigns. According to estimates from eMarketer, by the end of 2013, over 51% of all mobile ad spend will go toward search, with the remaining allocated for display advertising.
Larger View

Figure 13: Mobile Search Method in Digital Advertisement. (Source: Dude Mobile)

Chapter 4: Digital Advertising Market 2013-2018

4.1 Global Digital Advertisement Market Value

Globally digital advertisement is taking the market of traditional advertisement. In many part of the world consumers are more flexible to watch the advertisement in digital format because it reflects the product's feature lively to the consumers of all segmentation. The digital advertisement is going to reach 75% in the near future. Digital advertising has special role in today's world because consumers are more reliable and flexible on using digital communication media rather than using traditional way. According to recent researches the data indicates that traditional advertisers are transforming into digitally because of globalization and technological advancement besides meeting consumers' demands and needs.

4.1.1 Global Trends in Digital Advertising 2013-2018

Larger View
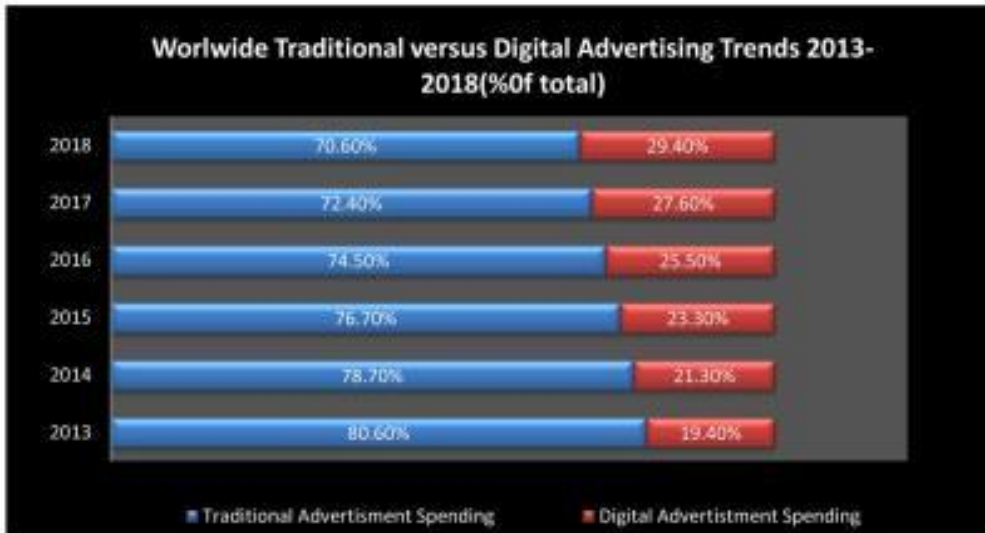
Figure 14: Digital Advertising Trends 2013-2018

4.1.2 Digital Advertisement Growth Globally 2013-2018

Table 1: Global Digital Advertising Growth 2013-2018

Larger View

➡Open table as spreadsheet

Digital Advertisement Growth Worldwide(In Millions US$)						
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
North America	7,724	12,031	17,192	22,999	29,067	36,345
Asia Pacific	4,143	5,842	8,120	10,516	13,061	15,453
Western Europe	3,589	6,388	91,999	12,050	15,184	19,300
Central & Eastern Europe	162	273	423	609	822	987
Latin America	150	289	482	766	1,196	1,345
Middle East & Africa	50	86	137	219	340	498
Worldwide	15,818	24,909	118,353	47,159	59,670	73,928

4.1.3 Digital Advertisement Revenue by Region 2013-2018

Digital Advertisement is still in the introduction stage in some part of the world but the major portion of the world is dependable on it. The key drivers in digital advertisers are: North America, Western Europe, Asia pacific and Japan.

Table 2: Digital Advertisement Revenue by Region 2013-2018
➡Open table as spreadsheet

Region(In Million US$)	2013	2015	2018
North America	2,235.5	5,791.4	18,456.4
Western Europe	1,987.9	5,131.9	10,345.5
Asia/Pacific and Japan	3,567.4	6,925.0	26,897.5
Rest of the world	1,234.6	2,761.7	12,456.4

4.1.4 Global Digital Advertising Revenue 2013-2018

The leading players in the digital advertising are: USA, UK, China, Japan, Germany, Australia, France and Russia. As the number of global users rapidly grows, so are developers all over the world adapting various digital advertising technologies including mobile, search, digital video, and display ads.

Internet advertising revenue hit a historic high $20.1 billion at mid-year 2013. Components include:

Mobile: $3 billion

Video: $1.3 billion

Search: $8.7 billion

Display: $6.1 billion

The top three advertising verticals accounted for 46 percent of advertising revenue, including Retail at 20 percent, Financial Services at 14 percent and Automotive at 12 percent.
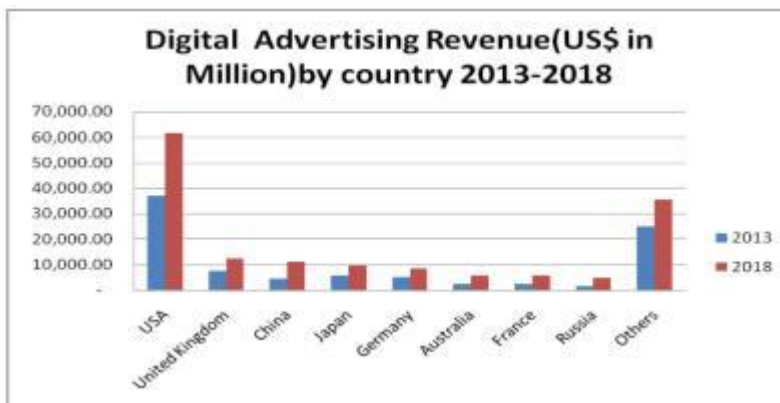
Larger View

Figure 15: Digital Advertising Revenue ($M USD) 2013-2018

4.2 Search Engine Revenue in Digital Advertising 2013-2018

Table 3: Top Digital Search Engine Revenue 2013-2018

Larger View

➡Open table as spreadsheet

Top Digital Search Engine Revenue (% Of total search & spending)						
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Google	73.70%	74.20%	75.50%	77.01%	78.55%	80.12%
Microsoft	9.30%	11.00%	13.20%	13.46%	13.73%	14.01%
Yahoo!	6.20%	6.00%	5.90%	5.96%	6.02%	6.08%
AOL	1.10%	1.00%	1.00%	1.01%	1.02%	1.03%
Total top 4% of total search	90.30%	92.20%	95.60%	97.44%	99.32%	101.24%

4.3 Market Share by Format

Digital advertisement basically follows three forms of advertisement tool namely: search, display and messaging. The advertisement revenue varies among country to country because of consumers' preference over the advertisement format. Generally consumers all over the world prefer the display format because it contains all information whereas the messaging option gives only the required information and search format is time consuming. If we consider the market share of digital advertisement we see that market share varies among region because of some internal forces: initiative of digital advertisers and it's sustainability in the global market, role of mobile network operators in a country and consumers adaptability of technology. The good news is that digital advertisement revenue will triple digit percentage growth globally by 2025 as compared to 67% by 2018.

Larger View

Figure 16: Digital Ad Revenue Share by Region and Format 2013

4.4 Global Digital Advertising Budget Breakdown 2013

Digital advertisement budget consists of the cost of Display advertisement, Social advertisement, Video, Programmatic buy, Search, Mobile and others. Research revealed that, display advertisement consists of 41% of total digital budget breakdown whereas search is 19% and social advertisement 10%.The budget of social advertisement breakdown into Facebook 57%, YouTube 13% and twitter 13% because social media is the platform which generates more revenue in spite of having fewer budgets

Larger View
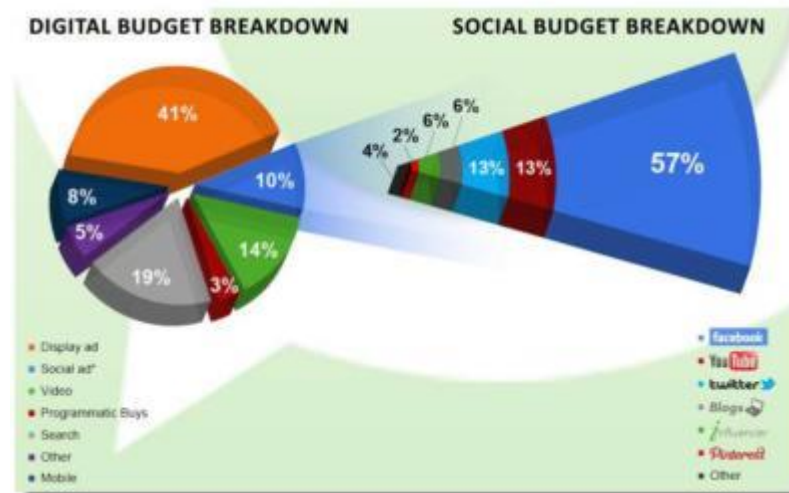
Figure 17: Global Digital Advertising Budget Breakdown 2013

4.5 Direct Response and the Marketing to Commerce Cycle

Our broader definition of commerce is a continuum of everything from an impression, to a purchase decision, and finally an actual purchase. Commerce in this sense includes online and mobile advertising, traditional advertising (print media, broadcast media, etc.), social networking, CRM, and more.

Larger View
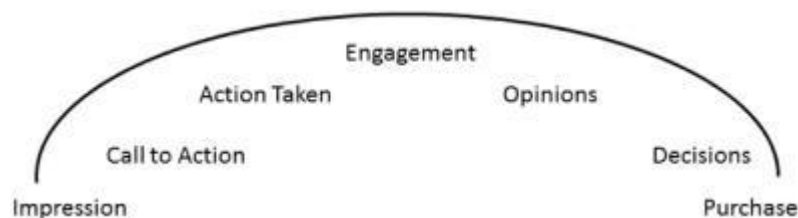
An impression often starts with a person seeing and/or hearing an advertisement of some type. An advertisement need not have a call to action and may therefore only create an impression in one's mind about the product, service, etc. An example of this is a billboard advertisement with no phone number or website associated with it. It has been said that it takes about seven impressions for a product to resonate with a potential buyer.

Another form of advertising that is often one of the first things to occur in commerce is the call to action. The call to action represents what the advertiser wants the reader/listener of the advertisement to do and how to do it. For example, an advertiser may want the person to get

additional information about a product and offer for them to call a phone number or visit a website. Usually there is some incentive to do so, which can be either a monetary incentive, such as a discount on a product or special offer. However, there are other tools to facilitate action such as games, sweepstakes, prizes, peer pressure, etc.

Action taken can be anything from calling a phone number, sending a text, visiting a website, clicking on a link, etc. After that occurs, the next big hurdle is engagement. What most advertisers and brands are seeking is ongoing engagement rather than a one-time engagement of interest in the customer with the brand and/or product.

The increased use of mobile Web access is correlated to the ad spending growth in mobile browser-directed advertisements, including direct response advertising and text messaging.

Mobile marketing is a natural extension of any marketing program or campaign. The mobile phone is phone is very personal, always with the user, and provides the ability for "remote control" of advertisements rendering including end-user preferences and response mechanisms. Mobile marketing will ultimately become at least as important and as large in scale and scope as other forms of marketing including on-line, print media, outdoor, broadcast.

Direct response mobile marketing represents the use of the mobile phone as a means of enabling end-users to obtain, control, and/or interact with various forms of advertising. It entails an end user utilizing a mobile phone or other wireless device to obtain additional information about an advertisement that will typically be heard or viewed from traditional advertising means including outdoor advertising (billboard), print media (magazine ad), broadcast media (TV ad), etc.

More precisely, with direct response mobile marketing, the end-user utilizes the mobile phone to receive additional information about a brand, product, and/or service. The information may be sent directly to the end user's mobile phone and/or sent elsewhere (such as via email) for later perusal.

Direct response is the use of mobile for purposes causing/enabling the end-user to engage with an entity (brand, advertiser, aggregator, content provider, etc.) for purpose of establishing and maintaining a relationship. The purpose(s) for this engagement are many and varied and not mutually exclusive. The entity may want to create an impression, make an offer, provide a discount/incentive, provide product/service information, obtain customer feedback and interests, etc. The technologies/solutions for direct response are many and include SMS (Short Messaging Service with Short Codes and Keywords), 2D Bar Codes, and Abbreviated Dial Codes (ADC). Each of solutions has their own advantages and disadvantages.

Therefore, engagement is a very large portion of the mobile commerce continuum and often consists of many different solutions, approaches, and relationships with other aspects of mobile commerce. Important aspects of engagement include social network, reference and social marketing, and customer relationship management (CRM).

The next stage of the continuum is opinions, which are formed both by the potential customers on engagement as well as the engagement of others. This is where social networks are important as a potential buyer will often form opinions based on the engagement and opinions of others, especially those entities (family, friends, colleagues, businesses) that the potential customer trusts. This is particularly important if it is either new or unknown item and/or a big-ticket product or service that is either relatively expensive and/or a big commitment of ownership.

Next decisions are made, either consciously or unconsciously. In the case of larger (more expensive or involved) items, it is usually a conscious decision with well-defined thoughts about why, how, where, when, etc. With less expensive items, it may be a subconscious and/or not easily defined decision, such as "why I like Coke vs. Pepsi".

Finally, sometime after the continuum is realized, and a purchase decision is made, an actual purchase will occur. The purchase many occur in any number of ways, which may be via a mobile phone or may not be via a mobile phone. The important thing to recognize here is that even if the final purchase does not occur with a mobile phone, mobile commerce solutions may still be implemented to reach the actual purchase. This is an important distinction as mobile commerce is more than just a purchase, and all the things that occur within the mobile commerce continuum are linked, and should be measured and reported, so that analytics can be formed to recognize the effectiveness of any one program within the whole purpose of the continuum – to drive sales.

In the discussion thus far, is has been presented that each aspect of the continuum is a step that leads to the next step. While this is one way to view the continuum that makes it easier to discern the discrete impacts of one aspect versus another for a given customer/purchase pairing, the reality is that the continuum recycles.

Another way of stating what occurs is the continuum repeats itself for a given customer and a give product. It repeats itself over and over again. This is why it is important to have solid solutions within each aspect of the continuum. It also important of have a strong engagement solution as powerful engagement can prevent or reduce the need for repetition for a given customer/product pairing.

It is also important to recognize that the continuum is often not linear as a given custom may jump from one aspect to another.
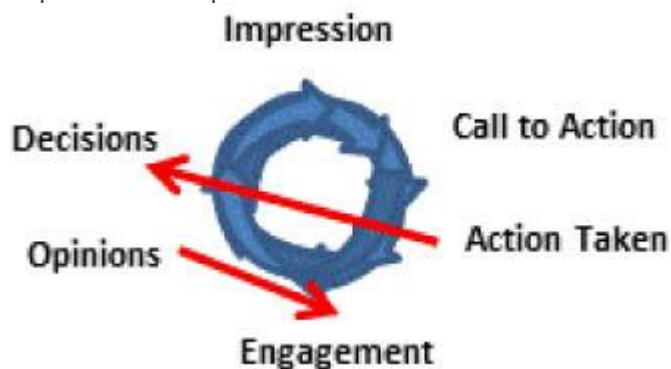
In this example we see that someone may jump straight to a decision process after taking certain actions, effectively by-passing the need for engagement and opinions. We also see in this example that someone may seek further engagement after forming some initial opinions. This may be the case if some of the opinions were based on social networks, which may have altered the customer's initial opinions and thus created the need for further engagement.

4.5.1 Mobile Direct Response

Notwithstanding its long years of existence, mobile as a medium of marketing and advertising was in the doldrums until the arrival of large quantities of smartphones and tablet computers in recent years. Earlier pioneering efforts were confined to short message service (SMS) marketing and email marketing, relatively minor segments (in revenue terms) of mobile marketing which involves the distribution of any kind of promotional or advertising messages to customers on or with a mobile device like a mobile phone or a tablet. Mobile advertising which is concerned with advertised messages is a subset of mobile marketing.

When the advertisement world thinks of digital, there is too much emphasis on display advertisements such as banner ads, text ads, and others. There needs to be a focus on improving direct response. Most advertising money is spent on the media buy, including print media (magazines, newspapers, etc.), broadcast media (TV, radio, etc.), and outdoor (billboards, kiosks, etc.). The typical linkage for direct response is to provide a telephone number (typically a toll-free number) or website address (URL).

4.5.2 Key Mobile Direct Response Methods

4.5.2.1 2D Bar Codes
There is some emphasis on emerging technologies such as 2D barcodes, but they do not work in all environments and situations. Mobile barcodes are becoming a global phenomenon. We became familiar with the original, linear barcodes (or 1D), from our supermarket shopping in the 1980's (patented in the 1950's). They comprise a series of vertical black lines and white spaces of variable width, representing numbers, which are read (or decoded) by a barcode reader to extract the information they bear.

However, as barcodes were used in an ever greater variety of environments beyond straightforward stock control, they became longer and longer as people tried to pack more information onto them. A new generation of barcodes was devised in the 1990's, usually referred to as 2D or matrix codes. They are formed by patterns of black and white squares arranged on a (usually) square grid and can encode thousands of alphanumeric and other characters in virtually any language. Immediately the size and capacity problem was solved, opening the way for applications that had never been considered.

A mobile barcode or QR (quick response) code is a graphical image that stores digital information. Mobile barcodes store information in two dimensions, vertically and horizontally as a pattern of dots. This means that 2D barcodes can store thousands of characters of data.

QR codes are becoming one of the hottest marketing trends, giving businesses and organizations the ability to brand themselves with the click of almost any mobile or handheld device in lightning speed. Once someone snaps a photo of a QR code, they gain instant access to links, texts, ads, videos, coupons, maps, etc. The possibilities are endless as to how much data can be stored in the bar code, depending on how it's set up. Mobile barcodes can be used in many ways.

For example, they can bring static marketing and advertising campaigns on billboards or in press to life with mobile engagement and interactivity. In retail, barcodes can help shoppers by providing additional information on products, such as nutritional or safety details or by adding products to a virtual shopping basket when shopping on the mobile Web. Barcodes can be used for mobile ticketing or promotions such as discount coupons. By embedding mobile barcodes into product or delivery packaging, suppliers and logistics companies can more easily track deliveries and update stock information.

Mobile bar code or QR Codes can store complex data and perform a wide variety of actions when scanned such as:
- Instantly visit website links
- Initiate text or SMS messages
- Show maps and directions
- 'Like' or visit Facebook pages and social networking
- Send emails
- Place calls
- Run applications or programs
- Instantly perform actions designed to inform, assist and entice buyer's calls to action.

4.5.2.2 Abbreviated Dial Codes

Technology and solutions for mobile marketing are evolving at a rapid pace. One of the solutions we will evaluate here is the use of ADC for direct response mobile marketing. One of the things that we have uncovered is that the technology for ADC has evolved beyond strictly voice and switch-based technology to one that is non-voice (or voice optional) and network based. To the end-user, the process is still the same with the act of simply dialing (on the keypad) to engage in the ADC experience (as opposed to other direct response methods that required one to utilize a specific interface such as the SMS client).

The distinction between a network vs. switch based ADC goes beyond the use of switch versus network assets at the operational level. The distinction involves the ability to provide a more customized experience to the user and/or ADC code provider (brand, advertiser, etc.). For example, with a traditional ADC code the end-use will always here a voice (typically because of connection to an IVR) and interact (via DTMF) to make choices and then get a response (get a text message, picture message, etc.). Sometimes the user could get a response immediately and perhaps hear a tone and then get the response (e.g. SMS) but the experience is limited. With a network base approach, the end-user could have non-voice experience, voice only experience, or both. There is much more flexibility to customize the experience to occur on a per ADC, per scenarios basis.

We see this as a pretty big leap forward in approach to mobile marketing, specifically in support of one of the key areas, direct response. It is possible for this approach, which incidentally scales much better (due to it being network based), to afford the use of many ADC codes, which could be used by many brands/advertisers, and thus made available in many advertisements in various media. This opens up a range of possibilities in which ADC may be used for:
- Offers and incentives
- Customer loyalty
- Product information
- Sweepstakes and giveaways
- Obtaining customer opinions

In addition, network based ADC may also be employed for the following:
- Means of initiating search (voice or data based)
- Means of getting an application on content (e.g. discovery)

They may also be used by the network operator themselves for the following:
- Balance check
- General customer care inquiries
- Connect to the carrier store

4.5.2.3 Wearable Technologies

Computer technology has advanced from mainframes to desktops, then laptops and palmtops and is now moving onto and into the human body by way of wearable computers. This type of gadget provides the ultimate in network access - hands-free, heads-up operation with complete mobility. With voice activation and head-mounted or touchscreen display options, users anywhere can communicate with computers through the internet. Wearable computers bring forth a whole new concept in mobile computing, computer portability and computer miniaturization.

There are many definitions of a wearable computer. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) defines a wearable computer as "a computer that is always with you, is comfortable and easy to keep and use, and is as *unobtrusive as clothing*." More specifically, the wearable computer according to MIT has the following characteristics:
- **Portable while operational:** The user can operate a wearable while moving around. This feature distinguishes wearables from desktop and laptop computers.
- **Hands-free use:** This is another distinguishing feature of wearables which rely on heads-up display or voice or use chording keyboards, dials and joysticks to minimize the tying up of a user's hands.
- **Sensors:** A wearable should have sensors for the physical environment such as wireless communications, cameras or microphones.
- **Attention-getting:** A wearable should be able to convey information like an email to its user even when not actively being used.
- **Always on:** By default a wearable is always on and working, sensing, and acting. This is opposed to the normal use of pen-based "Personal Digital Assistants," which normally sit in one's pocket and are only woken up when a task needs to be done.

Barriers to wearable technology usage include:
Size: Wearable computing devices always face the challenge of being small in size. Though this is addressed from time to time, there is the desire or need for miniaturizing product size.
Invasiveness: It is important for devices not to weigh down the wearer. This is particularly relevant where many items are to be worn and carried around, for example, by the military.

Weight: Wearable computers can be quite heavy because many components have to be attached to the body. A wearable computer, like any other computer, requires a Central Processing Unit (CPU) as well as a monitor and peripheral devices. The computer can also be quite heavy if all these components are built into the wearable computer. Weight is of particular concern for military gadgets.

Discomfort: During hot weather or high energy activities, wearable computers tend to irritate the user. This is because the computer itself emits heat despite its built-in cooling system, and the user himself gives out heat due to the daily activities he is engaged in. Like regular computers, wearable computers can give the user a slight headache as a result of prolonged use.

4.5.2.4 Augmented Reality

A particularly key wearable technology, which merits its own section, is Augmented Reality (AR). AR is a live, direct or indirect, view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are augmented by computer-generated sensory input, that enrich the user's perception of the real world. Although AR is often perceived to be in the visual domain (video or graphics etc.), it actually includes the other senses as well such as sound or GPS data. It is related to a more

general concept called mediated reality, in which a view of reality is modified (possibly even diminished rather than augmented), by a computer.

By introducing advanced AR technology such as computer vision and object recognition, information about the real world can become interactive and usable. As a result, the technology functions by enhancing one's current perception of reality. By contrast, virtual reality replaces the real world with a simulated one.

One of the more commonly known applications of augmented reality is the heads-up displays (HUDs) that project data for military pilots or the 'first down' markers superimposed on American football TV broadcasts. AR has the potential to change how people interact and experience their surrounding environment.

AR applications can be used in several industries; one of the most promising industries for AR is gaming and entertainment. AR applications can be used in manufacturing; manufacturing and repair are fields which are very promising for utilizing the benefits of AR technology. Its applications would reduce training time, would speed up prototype development, and reduce errors in design, maintenance, and repair, and therefore lead to cost savings, which will be a trigger for industrial applications of such AR technology. Instructions for assembly or disassembly can be given directly into the user's view, pointing to specific object parts and providing not only textual manuals, but also 3D drawings and animations superimposed on real objects. The interactivity allows step-by step instructions to be displayed, depending on the progress.

Many big industry players are behind AR and its monetization, which will largely be through advertising. By way of example, Google has patented "gesturing" as a means of "clicking" with AR and therefore facilitating AR based advertising. Other companies are involved as well. SixthSense is a project from Pranav Mistry which augments the physical world with digital information and helps interpret hand gestures to interact with the information. It comprises of a pocket projector, mirror and camera. Data is projected on any solid object and hand gestures are recognized by the camera to process information and give desired results. The project is still in prototype stage and when commercially launched has the potential to replace smartphones entirely. This is because, the prototype is capable of doing all the necessary tasks like call, take pictures, read mail, book tickets etc. without handling the phone and only uses hand gestures in real time.

In terms of mobile commerce, AR can be used to virtually try on new clothes, eyewear, shoes etc. by uploading an image and the AR software will superimpose the desired item on the user on request to help them choose. The webcam social shopper tool created by Zugara is one such AR application which uses motion capture to help the user try out new outfits, controlled by hand gestures of the user. Mattel, LazyLazy, Zawara, Prestashop, La Mania are some of the companies which use this software on their sites.

Chapter 5: Future of Digital Advertising

5.1 Wireless Devices

The advancement of digital media makes it easier for the consumers as well as the organization to buy product or services digitally. Nowadays tablet and smartphones are so popular that it together grabs around 79% of market share among other handheld digital advertisement devices. Research has revealed that tablet will take hold of 72% of market share among other digital advertisement tools by 2018.
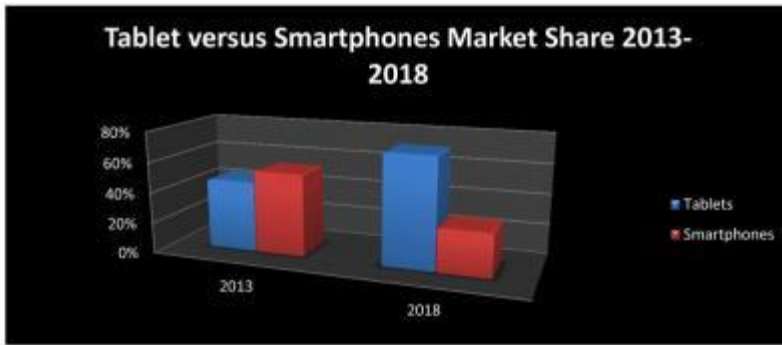Larger View

Figure 18: Tablet vs. Smartphone Market Share 2013-2018

5.2 Digital Bidding

According to the research of ABI, in-app advertising accounted for the bulk of mobile RTB ads, at 93% of ads viewed whereas browsers accounted for the remaining 7%.Android is the market leader in real time bidding compare to the other operating systems in the world. Since the popularity and reliability of mobile real time bidding is expanding throughout the world consumers along with the organizations are expecting more companies' arrival to provide better quality service in cost effectively. Some Chinese companies are taking initiative to compete with the market leaders as by following their market strategies in cost effective manner.

5.3 Digital will Domination

According to Google SVP and chief business officer Nikesh Arora, "There's currently about $800 billion in the global advertising market today. That's a very large number, but online advertising accounts for less than $100 billion of that number," He also mentioned that. "There is a reasonable probability that over 50 percent of advertising goes online in the next five years." Larger View
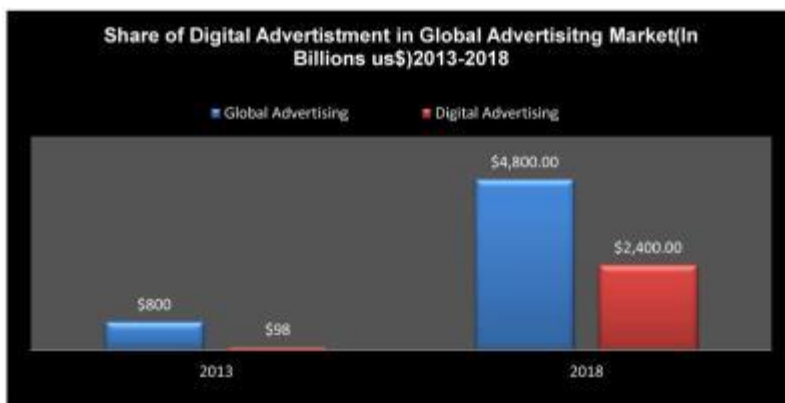
Figure 19: Digital Advertising in 2018

He said that, "We've been stuck in the same model for the better part of the past century, and companies like Google have spent the last decade trying to convince the ad industry that, yes, the Web can indeed make you money." That's exactly what YouTube's Robert Kyncl has been pitching with the online video arm of Google and its channels initiative, not to mention Google's other potential ad businesses According to him whatever it'll look like, it's going to be successful.

5.4 Diversified Ad Formats

Digital Advertisement is growing rapidly throughout the world so the marketer has to make decision in order to run in the long run. Recent study found that 73% of advertisers prefer to make advertise n pre roll format. The other format includes social format, promoted content, branded content, display and large format.
Larger View
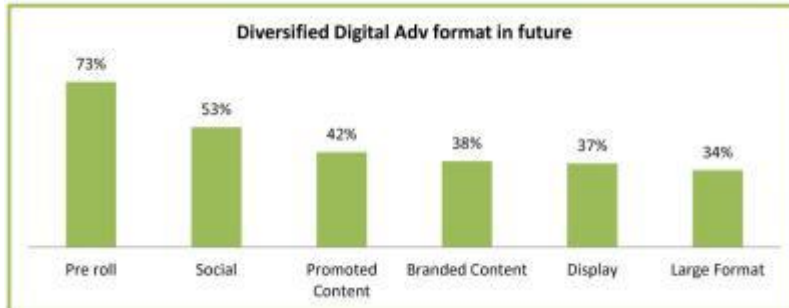
Figure 20: A Diversified Digital Advertising Format Future

5.5 Opportunities Business-to-Business (B2B)

Business-to-business marketers are more concerned to choose digital advertising format among other because of quick response, cheaper and faster service. The world is like global village where the dependency of one country to another is necessary in order to sustain as a global company. Not only that but also business organizations are more dependable on virtual communication such as website and social media. Recent study found that B2B marketers are more flexible to use websites rather than any form of content marketing channel in digital advertising.
Larger View
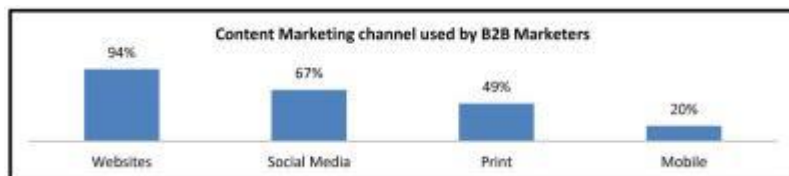
Figure 21: Content Marketing Channel used by B2B Marketers

Chapter 6: Real-Time Bidding (RTB) In Digital Advertisement

6.1 Real Time Bidding Ecosystem Analysis

Real-time bidding (RTB) is a style of programmatic buying in which digital advertising opportunities are auctioned off in real-time. The auctions take place in milliseconds as an advertiser bid on the right to show users an advertisement and immediately after user open an apps or clicks to a new web page. In the RTB ecosystem there are two platforms namely RTB exchange platform (Demand side platforms) and exchanges (Supply side platforms) of data. These two platforms work as a linkage between the advertisers and the publishers. The whole system works in a cyclic way so the interrelations among all elements are vital.
Larger View
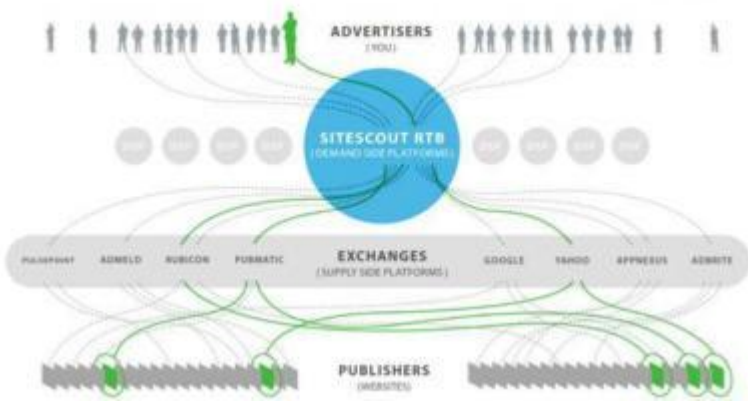
Figure 22: Real Time Bidding Ecosystem. (Source: Sitescout)

6.2 RTB Market 2013-2018

6.2.1 RTB Global Market Value 2013-2018

Globally, over the nine key markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Australia, Japan, China, Spain) Real Time Bidding (RTB) already represents $12 billion in 2013 and will nearly triple in the next five years to reach $36 billion in 2018 .The reason behind the growth of RTB markets is that, Programmatic buying is a new means of purchasing display ads, and many advertisers and publishers are still not fully versed in the process. Those who adapted the process gain competitive advantages. On the other side Premium pricing discourages publishers reluctant to move too much inventory onto RTB markets too fast. But still many of the country around the world is adapting this technology to keep track with the digital advertisement mode. Larger View

Figure 23: Global Market Value of RTB 2013-2018

6.2.2 Auction Volume by Mobile OS 2013

As RTB is growing rapidly all over the world consumers nowadays prefer to do auction through their mobile. Mostly consumers prefer iPhone and Android operating system (OS) rather than using other OS .Research has forecasted that as the popularity of tablet is growing and people

tend to use Android tablet so the market share of Auction will grasp by Android tablets along the existing Android and iPhone.
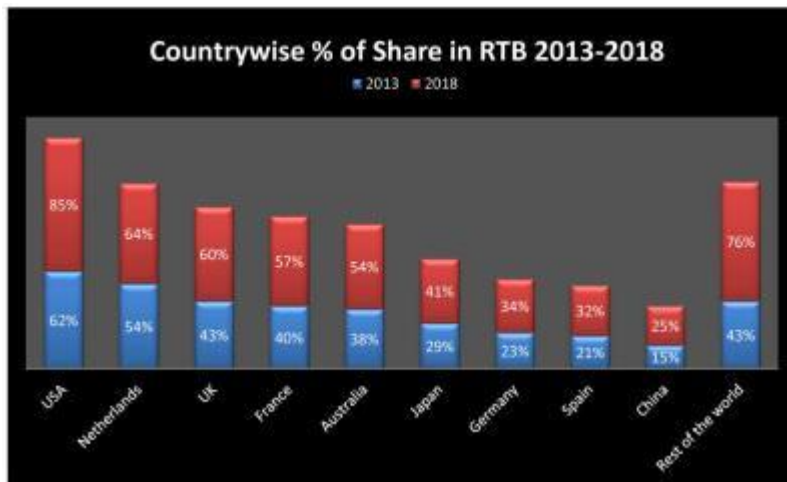Larger View

Figure 24: Auction Volume by mobile OS 2013

6.3 RTB in Mobile Display Prospects 2013-2018

Although RTB advertisement is dominated by PC and other digital media to reach the final consumers but studies has found that by 2018 consumers will rely more on mobile display rather than PC display. As consumers will be more reliable on RTB so the mobile will be the only device to reach the final bid.
Larger View
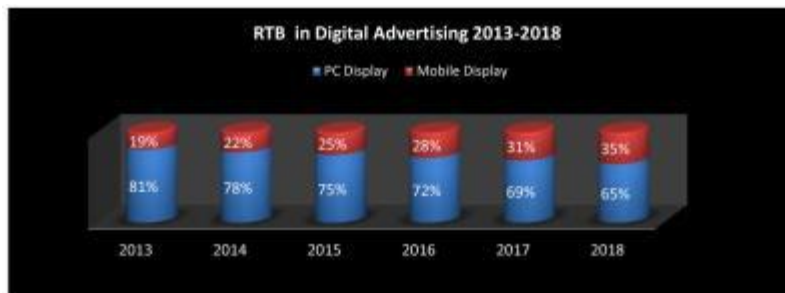
Figure 25: RTB in Digital Advertising 2013-2018

6.4 RTB Industry Trends

6.4.1 USA Automobile Industry Case

6.4.1.1 Growth in automotive digital Ad spending
Automotive industry in USA spent around $5.07 billion in 2013 for paid digital advertising and the growth will rise by $8.90 in 2018 with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14%. Financial service industry eMarketer estimated that marketers in the automotive industry will invest approximately 60% of their paid digital dollars in direct-response efforts and ensures that brand-focused campaign will make up the remaining 40%. Search and display will still command the largest chunks of digital spending across the category, with the greatest growth in the areas of mobile, video, social and local."
Larger View
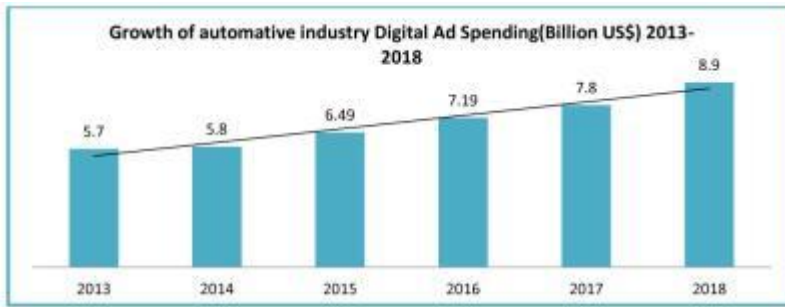
Figure 26: Growth in Digital Automotive Industry 2013-2018

6.4.1.2 Smartphone Visitors are increasing in US Automotive Industry

Investors today tend to invest more in mobile advertisers are the auto industry seek out consumers researching vehicle purchases on tablets and smartphones. It is expected that the rate of digital advertising will grow by 83% till 2018 as digital tools changes consumer behavior in this industry.

Recent study found that, digital and mobile are "changing the habits of auto shoppers, turning premarket, in-market and post-market phases into a cycle of constant consideration in which brand influence can be won or lost at any post."
Larger View
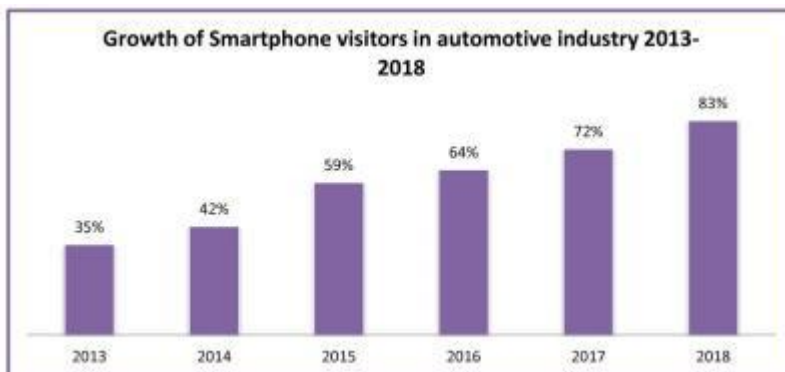
Figure 27: Smartphone Visitors in US Automotive Industry 2013-2018

6.4.2 RTB to Share Display Market

Dish Network Corp. (DISH), the second-largest U.S. satellite provider, is developing a feature that would let advertisers see what people are watching in real time, setting the stage for last-minute auctions of ad space.

6.4.2.1 RTB tracks through "What's Hot Now,"

The company is looking to build on a viewership-tracking service named Hopper set-top boxes. The features, called "What's Hot Now," allows Hopper users to see what other Dish customers are watching and flip to the most popular programs. By collecting real-time data through set-top boxes, Dish may develop a new way for the industry to sell advertisements.
Larger View

Figure 28: RTB Tracker

6.4.2.2 Expert's opinion about the device & future outlook:
Warren Schlichting, Dish's senior vice president of media sales and analytics, said "The move also could improve the company's relationship with advertisers, the victims of a technology that Dish introduced to skip commercials using a single button on a remote control."

6.4.3 Real-Time Bidding to Take Ever-Bigger Slice of Display Pie

Real-time bidding (RTB) accounts for 13% of all US display advertising spending this year, more than triple its share in 2010," Over the next few years, RTB will continue to gain momentum and share of ad dollars as more media buyers and publishers gain profit from its efficiencies.
Larger View

Figure 29: Growth of Real Time Bidding Advertisements 2013-2018

This year, the overall US display ad market growth rate is 21.5% compare to 2011 and now e the market value is $14.98. The key influencers that determine the RTB growth includes:
- Maturation of Facebook's private ad exchange (FBX)
- Expected influx of video and mobile inventory
- Anticipated greater availability of premium ad inventory
- Demand for better transparency for all of digital display (not just RTB)

Chapter 7: Digital Advertising with Wearable Technologies

Smartphones and smart glasses users are expected to grow 333% by 2018.One of the significant role player in this happening is augmented reality apps which covers 60 millions of users around the world and the user will grow by 200 million by 2018.
Larger View

Figure 30: Digital Advertisement through Wearable Technologies

Findings and Analysis:

- According to Juniper Research, "Initial innovations will stem from games, such as Google Ingress, but the technology will expand to include lifestyle and fitness apps," it also includes that there is the possibility of a "paradigm shifting utilization of AR within social media, potentially breaking the digital-physical wall with potential future uses allowing a digital representation of a person to appear in the users surroundings."
- Android's growing dominance as a good thing for the AR industry, which is currently fragmented and buggy.the increasingly dominant position of Android may give app developers a more standardized platform to work from and possibly, take AR out of the death zone of QR codes and into the realm of something that is ordinary, easy, and useful

Chapter 8: Augmented Reality in Digital Advertising

There is a direct relationship between AR, Wearable Wireless, and the so-called Body Area Networks (BAN). This relationship is multifaceted and is due in part to the ability to have a wearable computing/wireless device act as a conduit to a variety of applications and for AR to provide the User Interface (UI).

While it is true that not every wearable wireless application will need or use AR, many of them will, and there is a growing trend do towards very high capacity broadband wireless being available ubiquitously to the end-user, allowing them to leverage both push and pull based applications.

Some say the era of the smartphone will be coming to a close soon. We disagree. However, what we do believe is that there will be a transformation from all user interface experiences being relegated to a phone (smartphone or otherwise). This transformation will be enabled based on several things:

1. Starting with 4G, carrier networks will include have much greater capacity
2. Wearable Wireless (including smart watches and other devices) will be the focal point for communications with carrier broadband wireless networks from an access perspective and also from a BAN perspective with a variety of other devices.
3. Ad hoc networks, which may include both on licensed spectrum as well as various publicly available carrier channels, will enable communications with a variety of devices. We see the so-called BAN as being a reality that will extend beyond healthcare applications (example: monitoring of body functions and communications from a telemetry perspective for healthcare applications) to include many different commercial applications.

Currently the overall market for AR applications is limited by is expected to grow at high rate in the next 5 years especially in the advertising, marketing and navigation end use segments. AR is being used in industrial segment for markets like defense, medical, manufacturing and repair. In the consumer applications segment AR is used in the gaming, e-learning, GPS or navigation and

advertising markets. Smartphones, tablet PCs, eyewear, Helmet Mounted Displays (HMDs) and Head Up Displays (HUDs) are the main products where AR applications are found.

8.1 Growth Driver Analysis for Augmented Reality

8.1.1 Improvement in User Experience

AR helps in augmenting the user experience on any product by overlaying additional data feeds like audio and video. This is useful in scenarios like gaming where immersive feel can be generated using AR and virtual reality as a combination. Similar experiences can be shown in watching television and movies using AR as a data augmenting tool.

8.1.2 Increasing Demand for Smartphones and Tablet PCs

The demand for smartphones and tablet PCs has been increasing tremendously and manufacturers have been differentiating the products based on software and hardware specifications. The current products in both segments have Apple and Android OS occupying almost the entire software share of the market. In the hardware specifications field, almost all the phones feature a dual core processor and some latest ones have a quad core processor.

The increase in processing power, RAM and storage capacities have made smartphones and tablet PCs very powerful computing devices. But the necessary applications to fully utilize this advantage are not present currently except for high quality graphic intensive games. AR is expected to be the main product that is expected to utilize this advantage for a host of applications which can help in outdoor and indoor navigation, entertainment and location based services.

8.1.3 Diversification into New Applications

Traditionally, AR was used for marketing and online advertising purposes. Recently, AR is being used in combination with other new technologies like NFC, QR codes and with GPS to create education tools. These tools help students understand subjects like history, archeology better. AR is also being used in places like entertainment theme parks, museums and other large places to embed information based on GPS coordinates to help users understand the significance of a spot using smartphones loaded with a particular app. This in effect is similar to a virtual guide to the interested user. Companies are also embedding AR in HMDs and HUDs of automobiles like BMW 7 Series and aero planes like Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Boeing 737 Next Generation to show the path of flight and other critical variables to the pilot.

8.2 AR Solution Devices Market Deployment Challenges: A Market Outlook

8.2.1 Bandwidth Constraints

AR applications are highly intensive on graphics, video and audio feeds and also need to continuously communicate wirelessly to pull and push data for its functioning. This puts severe strain on the networks when used on a smartphone and according to MindCommerce, the network capacity in the developed countries is already being utilized to the maximum potential. The launch of LTE in several countries will be good for AR applications, but true AR performance can be exploited with the discussion, standardization and launch of the 5G standard by ITU possibly by 2020.

8.2.2 Problem with LBS inside a Building

Inside a closed building or room, cellular, WiFi and GPS connectivity issues are largely common and this can be a major challenge for AR applications. Manufacturers must make sure that the AR product can be used and is compatible over a range of wireless connectivity standards. One possible solution is the use of Zigbee for short range wireless communication and using routers to extend connectivity distance and signal strength.

8.3 Augmented Reality Forecasts

Larger View
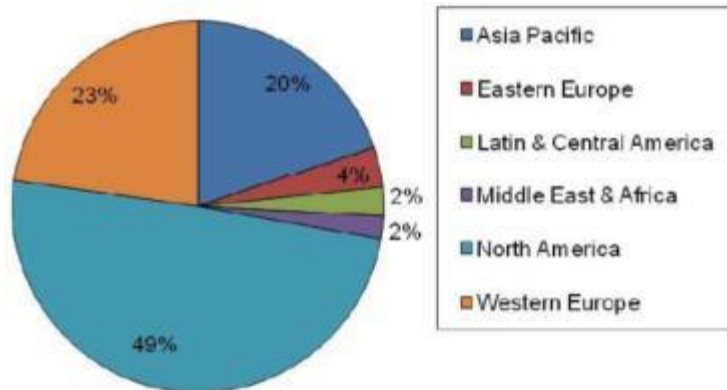
Figure 31: AR Market Share (%) by Region: 2013

While North America will continue to dominate the market, the Asia Pacific region will witness the highest growth rate, growing at CAGR of nearly 30 % from a base of 300 Million USD in 2013 to nearly 1.7 Billion USD in 2016.

By 2018, location-based augmented reality and games will account for less than half of the AR market, according to Juniper not only that but also healthcare and lifestyle will take hold of 33% of the total category wise augmented reality users. Although technology has never been stop to introduce new media and new way to interact with consumers at the same time the demand of customers never remain same. Each and every time consumers want more from the business.
Larger View
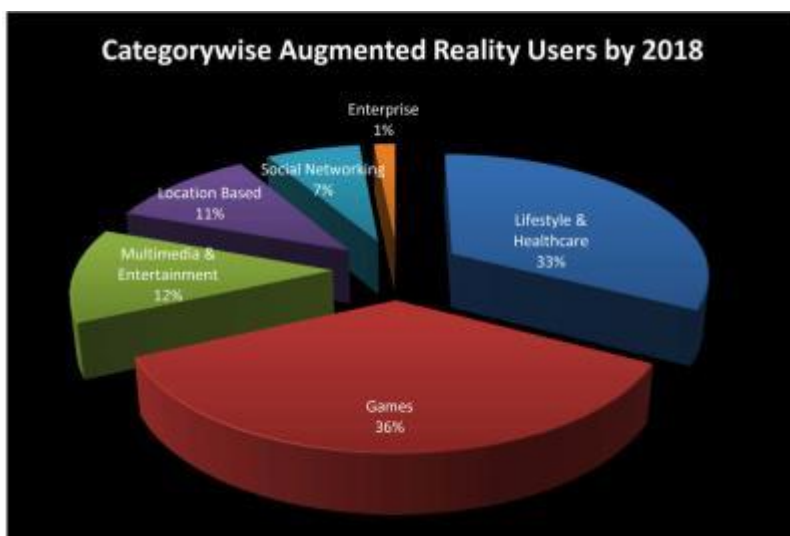
Figure 32: Augmented Reality users by Category 2018 Projections

The global augmented reality market will grow at a compound annual growth rate of 54.3% from 2012 to 2016. While many of the companies adopting augmented reality are doing so because of the dynamic aspects of the technology, the key factor driving growth is the demand for enhanced consumer experience.

The AR market is a niche market currently and is expected to grow at a tremendous rate in the next few years when products from companies like Google, Samsung, Qualcomm, Sony, LG and Apple will be launched from their R&D prototype phase. The overall market revenues for 2011 were just $0.18bn in 2011, but this is expected to grow at a CAGR of 75% during the next 5 years to reach $5.2bn by 2016.
Larger View
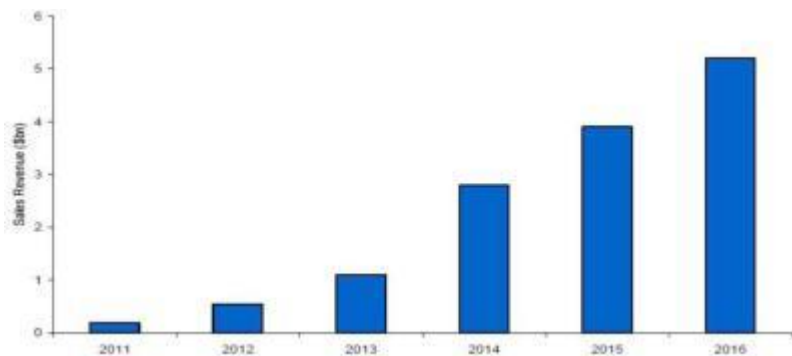
Figure 33: Global Augmented Reality Devices Market Revenues 2011 – 2017

8.3.1 North America

The North America region will grow from a base of 3 million USD in 2013 to 12 Million USD by the end of 2018, growing at a CAGR of nearly 26 % over the four year period between 2013 and 2018.
Larger View
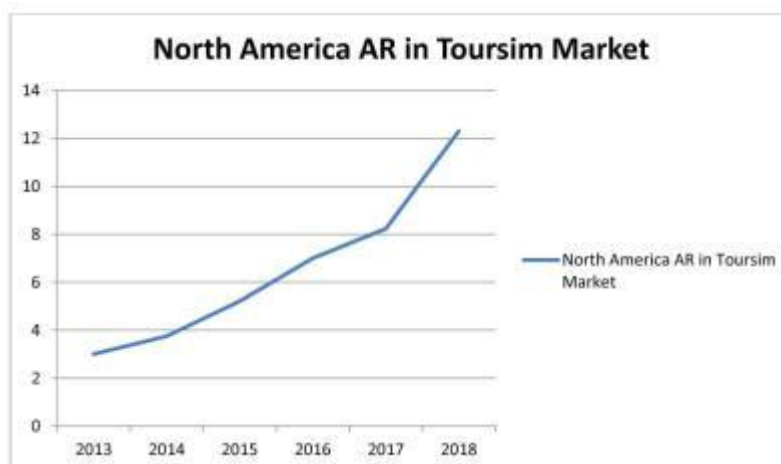
Figure 34: AR in Tourism Market in North America

8.3.2 Asia Pacific

The Asia Pacific region will grow from a base of 5 Million USD in 2013 to nearly 29 Million USD by the end of 2018, growing at a CAGR of nearly 30 % over the four year period between 2013 and 2018. This will be the highest growth rate of all regions.
Larger View
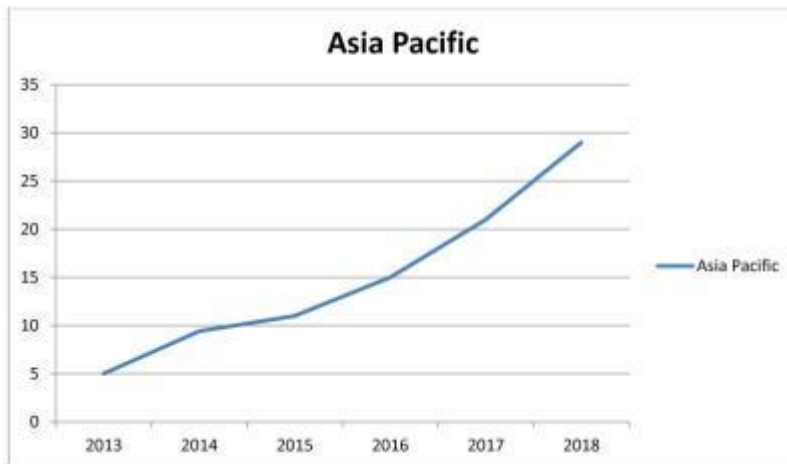
Figure 35: AR in Tourism in Asia Pacific

8.3.3 Europe

The European region will grow from a base of 6 Million USD in 2013 to nearly 21 million USD by the end of 2018, growing at a CAGR of nearly 17% over the four year period between 2013 and 2018.
Larger View
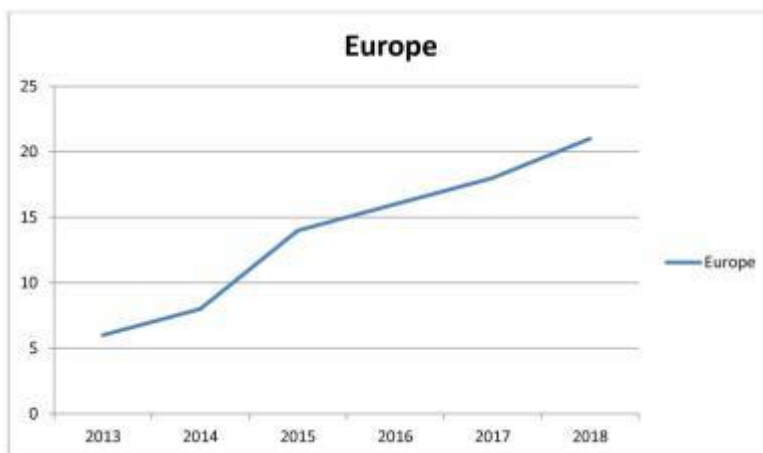
Figure 36: AR in Tourism in Europe

8.3.4 Middle East & Africa

The Middle East & Africa region will grow from a base of 3 Million USD in 2013 to nearly 10 Million USD by the end of 2018, growing at a CAGR of nearly 25% over the four year period between 2013 and 2018. This is the third highest growth rate of all regions.
Larger View
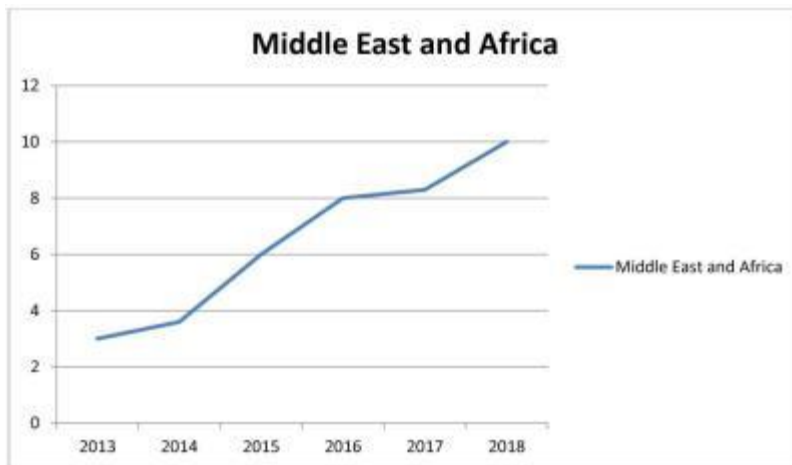
Figure 37: AR in Tourism in ME and Africa

8.3.5 Latin & Central America

The Latin & Central America region will grow from a base of Million 6 USD in 2013 to nearly 19 Million USD by the end of 2018, growing at a CAGR of nearly 18 % over the four year period between 2013 and 2018.
Larger View
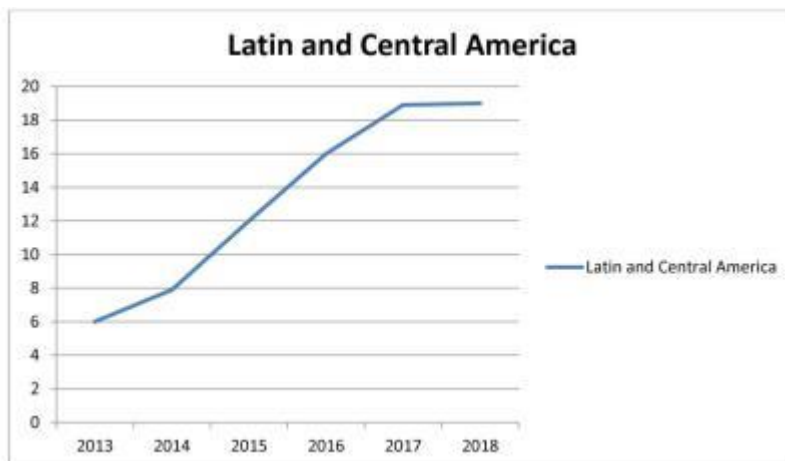
Figure 38: AR in Tourism in Latin and Central America

8.3.6 AR in Tourism: A key AR Market and an Key Advertising Segment

AR in tourism is a fast growing industry. The industry has not seen a major breakthrough yet, but Mind Commerce expects that the market of AR in tourism will gain attention in the near future with huge expansion in its applications. Currently the AR in tourism market is a part of the AR overall market. Users of WikiTude and other AR apps use these apps for tourism. For instance, if a mobile user using his/her phone in new place to them, they can use WikiTude to see what other said about the place via AR apps.

In the figure below an example on how this exactly works.
Larger View

Figure 39: Augmented Reality in Tourism

Table 4: Augmented Reality in Tourism revenues 2013-2018
➡️Open table as spreadsheet

Year	Revenues in Million USD $
2013	20
2014	31
2015	48
2016	69
2017	73
2018	90.12

Chapter 9: Big Data in Digital Advertising

9.1 Big Data Ecosystem in Digital Advertising Industry

Big Data is defined by different industry analyst in different way but the features are almost similar for every industry. Some of the features can be customized according to the needs and wants of the consumers as well as the organizations but the three dimensions of big data contain 3 V's, Volume, Velocity and Variety. (Volume = multiple terabytes or over a petabyte; variety = numbers, audio, video, text, streams, weblogs, social media etc.; velocity = the speed with which it is collected).Although 3V's are classified with the context of the salient features of the data. The key drivers of Big Data are technology, economics and the tangible value that can be extracted from the data, in other words the business insights.
Larger View

Figure 40: Big Data Ecosystem in Digital Advertisement. (Source: Sitescout)

9.1.1 Big Data Technologies:

Technology is the key driver to run any type of operating system successfully in a most efficient manner. Big Data analysis requires processing of huge data volume sets which are non-relational with a weak schema, at an extremely fast pace. The need of this is to process unstructured data to perform quick exploratory analysis. Unlike traditional approach of using procedural code and state management to manage transactions the modern new preprocessing technologies demonstrates the growth of alternate DBMS technologies like NoSQL and NewSQL to analyze large chunks of data in non-traditional structures. The high speed service provides) compliance across all database transactions in a flexible approach on using ACID(Atomicity, Consistency ,Isolation, Durability) in terms of enforcing it whenever necessary and eventually designing a consistent system in a more iterative fashion..

9.1.2 Economics:

To run a new business model smoothly a business has to choose highly scalable business analytics solutions at a low cost to reach the consumers at all level..

9.1.3 Business Insights:

As enterprise are getting stylish in managing their data they should realize that no matter how small or big their data set is, the true value of the data is realized only when they have produced actionable information. Some of the key issues in implementing successful Big Data are:

9.2 DMP (Data Management Platforms) and Data Scientists

In digital marketing environment data is always used to measure simple thing like clicks and conversations and more recently to deliver more relevant ads to consumers. The expansion of real time bidding and advertising exchanges allow new ways to buy and sell advertising has catapulted data science to the forefront of 'must-have' skills in the industry. The role of data scientist in this industry is crucial as the agencies and traditional ad networks need to train planners, buyers and sales staff about complex new technologies. The industry need to restructure by recruiting mathematicians and data analysts As a result almost everyone spends more time working with Excel spreadsheets and online data dashboards – and those at the data

deep end have had to get to get to grips with new analytics software like Hadoop. The weakness of this technology is many technicians lack skills, resources and technology to use campaign data to its potential, especially in their battle to compete with the likes of Google and Facebook. Data scientists also took some campaigns and insights that many advertisers now insist upon. The most momentous change is that it has democratized online advertising; businesses of all sizes can use new technology and get hold of valuable campaign data which make the advertising more profitable in future digitally.

- Social Media Intelligence
- Customer loyalty programs
- Large-scale click stream analytics

9.3 Targeting Audience in Digital Advertisement by Big Data

To target the potential consumers Advertisers can also use a technique called 'lookalike targeting' to target customers with same attributes with the existing online visitors which in turns improves advertising efficiency. To capture target consumers following strategies can be use:

- Identifying visitors attributes - such as interests, location and demographics – before then delivering adverts to other web users with similar attributes.
- Branding campaigns by avoiding inappropriate site content and ensuring that adverts appear in the area of the screen visible before users scroll down.
- Allowing advertisers to see exactly what data variables is from the context of individual web sites, content type, user interests and, amongst others,
- Application of Data intelligently in real time – to deliver adverts only to those web users most likely to respond positively to specific messages.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

Digital Advertising is gaining popularity so widely that the consumers all over the world will rely more on digital advertisement format rather than wait for traditional advertisement format. Although there is still controversy among the traditional marketing gurus and digital advertisements' data scientists and advertising developers but still consumers are more dependable and reliable on using digital mood of advertisement as it is quicker, responsive and provides quality service within short term compare to the long process of traditional advertisement.

The significantly growing part of digital advertisings is: Real Time Bidding (RTB), augmented reality in digital advertisements, and the expansionary role of big data.

While these technologies are evolving rapidly, it is consumers' preference that is the key rather than implementing traditional marketing theories in making advertisements more effective. Since digital advertising extents its dimension in business effectively so there is wide scope to make the world of digital advertising rather than stick on traditional marketing. Digital advertising not only opens the door for consumers but also for the data scientists, programmatic advertising developer and the technological firms as a way of creating business opportunity uniquely.

Certain key mobile/wireless solutions, such as mobile direct response marketing via network-based Abbreviated Dial Codes (ADC) will place a significant role. In addition, the convergence of wearable technologies, enhanced broadband wireless, and augmented reality will play a huge role in next generation advertising. Finally, those industry constituents that learn to leverage Big Data and related predictive analytics technologies will "mine" profits significantly better than those that sit idly by waiting to see what market leaders do in this area.

Chapter 1: Employing Keyword Research Techniques and Tools

In This Chapter

- **Discovering your site theme**
- **Brainstorming for keywords**
- **Creating a keyword-based outline**
- **Choosing related keywords**
- **Researching keywords by niche**
- **Evaluating keywords**

In this chapter, we talk about picking and choosing your keywords. This is an extremely important step. You might say the mantra of search engines should be "keywords, keywords, keywords." Search engine *spiders* (the bots that go through your page gathering web page data) are looking for keywords that match or closely relate to the search query. A *keyword* is a specific word or phrase a search engine looks for in its index (the list of websites it looks at during a search), based on what the user typed as the search query. For example, [cars] could be a keyword for a website that deals with restoring classic cars.

It seems simple enough: Just figure out a couple of great keywords and go! Unfortunately, there's more to picking keywords than that. Say you've got a website that specializes in selling custom-made classic automobiles. But the site isn't receiving the *traffic* (number of visitors) it should. Here's a tip: Think about what kind of keywords you used in your website. You might be using general keywords like [automobiles] and [vehicles], but how many people actually type in a search query of [classic automobiles]? Nine times out of ten people are going to be looking for [classic cars]. Little distinctions like this can make a big difference in the traffic your website receives.

This chapter shows you how to pick good, solid, relevant keywords. You discover that one of the first things you must do is to identify the theme of your website. Second, you sit down and brainstorm all the keywords you think fit your theme. And we're not talking five or ten keywords here: We're talking dozens or hundreds or thousands. Then we talk about creating a good outline for those keywords and researching your market to find out what the competition is doing and what your potential customers are searching for. We also discuss culling unproductive keywords so that you can focus on the most relevant ones.

REMEMBER Remember, relevancy = higher ranking = more traffic for your website.

Discovering Your Site Theme

The first thing you need to figure out is your website's theme. The *theme* is the main thing that your site is about. It's the central concept of whatever your site is doing on the web. Again, it seems simple enough, but it's very important to know *exactly* what it is that you're about. If you have a website that specializes in selling customized classic cars, you need to figure out exactly what that means, narrowing down the kinds of cars you consider to be classic, the types of customization you do, and so forth. Also consider where it is that you'll be going with this website. Think about whether you only want to handle classic cars, or if you might also want to broaden your scope and include newer models. Be thinking about whether there's a broad enough market out there for customized classic cars, decide whether you might include both domestic and foreign cars, newer cars, and so on.

You also need to think about your service area. Are you a local-only business, or could you take things to a national or international level? Try to break it down in very specific terms.

TIP Write down the things that you feel your website is about, and all the things that your site *is not* about. So, if you're creating a site about customized classic cars, you would write things like

- We work on only classic cars built from 1950–1970.
- The cars we work on are American-made; no foreign vehicles.
- Customization means we do paint, chrome, and upholstery.
- We do engine work or can install an entirely new engine if necessary.
- We do not install "banging" stereos; that's the guy down the road.
- We are a local business, but are willing to accept clients from out of town and out of state.

Brainstorming for Keywords

After your theme is clear in your mind and you've clarified what your business is really about, you have a good starting point for your keyword brainstorming sessions.

Brainstorming is an appropriate first step for choosing good keywords. At this point, there are no bad keywords; you just want to compile a big list of possibilities. Here are some possible viewpoints to consider and questions you can ask yourself:

- **Natural language:** What would I search for to try to find my product?
- **Customer mindset:** How do regular people talk about the products or services I offer?
- **Industry jargon:** What do the experts call my products or services?

Write down whatever you think would be the major keywords you will be using. Ask your friends, relatives, associates, employees, and coworkers. It's a matter of throwing things at the wall to see what sticks and what doesn't. Figure 1-1 shows a simple mind map. Tools like this can help you come up with new topics and concepts that might relate to your site.
Larger View

Figure 1-1: Brainstorming your keywords with a map outline

Building a Subject Outline

After you have a large list of keywords that you might want to use, your next step is to create an outline using those keywords. Start with the broadest ones at the top level and break the list into categories and subcategories, getting more specific as you go deeper.

A keyword outline for a customized classic cars website could look something like this list. Notice how the keywords build on each other as you delve deeper into the subject:

- Classic cars
- Classic cars 1950–1970
- Classic cars American
- Classic cars Ford
  - Classic cars Ford Mustang
    - Classic cars Ford Mustang convertibles
    - Classic cars Ford Mustang hard tops

- - - o Classic cars Ford Comet
  - Classic cars Chevrolet
    - o Classic cars Chevrolet trucks
    - o Classic cars Chevrolet sedans
  - Classic cars German
  - Classic cars Volkswagen
  - Classic cars Mercedes Benz
  - Classic cars customization
    - o Classic cars customization paint
    - o Classic cars customization chrome
    - o Classic cars customization fenders
    - o Classic cars customization wheels
    - o Classic cars customization tires
      - o Classic cars customization tires white wall
      - o Classic cars customization tires black wall
    - o Classic cars customization upholstery

You can see how the breakdown in the preceding list goes from very broad terms to more specific terms. These all represent things that people might search for when they are looking up classic cars, or customization, or both, and can all be used as keywords. This is a very small, simple outline. You can go into even more breakdowns and come up with even more specific keywords as appropriate for your site.

REMEMBER Remember to list as many keywords that relate to your theme as you can. The broader base you have to work with, the better chances you have of identifying good, solid, relevant keywords.

Choosing Theme-Related Keywords

Now, take your nice, long list of hundreds of potential keywords and go through and match them to your theme. Figure out whether you will be doing custom work for a Ford Anglia as opposed to Ford Mustangs, and whether you want to include Dodge at all. Also start thinking about keyword phrases, like [Ford Mustang convertible] or [1960s Ford Mustang hardtops]. Qualifiers, such as [convertible] or [1960s], thrown in at the beginning and end of a main keyword, turn it into a keyword phrase, and they help you figure out how narrow you want the search to be. This is especially important if you have a local business because you want to rank for the local search query, such as [Poughkeepsie classic car customization]. When you feel as though you have some good usable keywords, drag out your thesaurus and look up synonyms for those words. Anything that relates to your keyword or has the same meaning is another good keyword.

Doing Your Industry and Competitor Research

Now it's time to check out the competition. With any business, it's an important step in getting a feel for the market. With industry research, you need to know what keywords your competitors are using in their content and what kind of traffic they're getting. One of the easiest ways is to look them up on the search engines. Use the keywords you came up with during your brainstorming session and plug them into the query window. Google bolds your search terms in the search results, so pay attention to those words and the text surrounding them. Google also provides you with disambiguation options when appropriate, as in a "Did you mean …?" phrase. In Figure 1-2, the search for [classic car customization] returns 1,400,000 results. The top 10 results returned are worth mining for keyword ideas.
Larger View
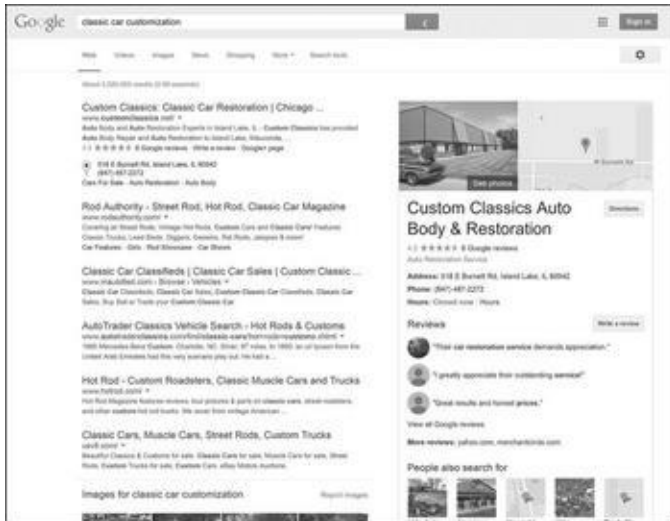
Figure 1-2: A Google search result for [classic car customization]

TIP Check out the highest listings and make note of the keywords they use on their pages. The websites that have the highest rank are your competition for those keywords, and to have such a high listing on the search engine, they're obviously doing something right. For a really in-depth look at how to do research on your competition, check out Book III.

After you've identified who your competitors are, it's time to do some research. Look at any print materials they've put out, along with what's on their websites. Pay attention to how they market themselves and what words they use to describe themselves. This is important especially if you're looking to draw industry traffic to yourself or obtain links from other industry sites. Look at their sites' navigation, check out their metadata, and read their content and press.

Researching Client Niche Keywords

After you know what keywords your competition is using, it's time to start thinking about what your targeted visitors are using to search for your products or services. The language the industry uses and the language the customer uses are often two entirely different things. For example, people in the auto industry use the words *auto* or *vehicle*, but the guy on the street is not going to refer to his Ford as his auto: He's going to call it his car. The same goes for search queries. Most people are not looking for [classic automobiles]; they're going to be looking for [classic cars].

You can find out what the man on the street is saying by actually going to the man on the street. Check out Internet forums, interest groups, and newsgroups that relate to your business and make note of what people are writing in their posts. What words do they use when referring to your type of business or the product that you sell? Those can be used as keywords for your website. Talk to your clients. Communication is key to figuring out what they're looking for.

Also, pay attention when people call your business and ask questions. Those are the kinds of questions that people are asking the search engine. One person's slightly questionable phrasing can be another person's usable keyword.

Checking Out Seasonal Keyword Trends

Some keywords retain their popularity and relevance throughout the year, like [Ford Mustang] or [California]. Others see rises and spikes throughout the year due to seasonal trends. Holidays are a good example. More people buy Christmas tree ornaments in December than in July, and

the majority of costume sales happen before Halloween. The same is true of the actual seasons themselves because people look for things at certain times of the year. More people look for bathing suits in the months before summer and for snowboards in the winter (see Figure 1-3). Larger View

Figure 1-3: Google Trends showing seasonal keyword trends

TIP You can use tools provided by the search engines to see keyword spikes and trends. Take advantage of end-of-the-year reports such Google Zeitgeist (www.google.com/press/zeitgeist), along with Google Trends (www.google.com/trends), which measures how often a keyword is used during a given day, providing the most popular examples and measuring when the spikes happen.

You may find it important to note spikes and trends in your keywords: While certain things immediately come to mind during a given holiday (for example, *flowers* and *chocolate* for Valentine's Day), other keywords and keyword phrases that are much more loosely connected might spike during that time period as well. Around February 14, you might notice a rise in searches for engagement rings, vacation listings for second honeymoons, and wedding-related searches. Restaurant searches and hotel listings also probably spike, along with clothing, shoes, and jewelry. As we explain in the section "Brainstorming for keywords," earlier in this chapter, one broad high-traffic term can be broken down into specific, small-traffic terms. These more specific terms are every bit as relevant as the broad term, and they generally have less competition. Remember the long tail when considering possible keywords.

Seasonal keywords are important to keep track of because you can use them to tailor your site to draw in that seasonal traffic. Many stores receive the bulk of their revenue from seasonal purchases, so it's a good thing to keep seasonal traffic in mind when building your website.

Evaluating Keyword Research

After you've done your research and your brainstorming, you have, with luck, acquired a good long list of keywords that can be used. Now it's time to figure out which ones you'll actually be using.

In figuring out how often your keywords are searched for, you can use a variety of tools for keyword evaluation. Using some of these tools, you can monitor how often a certain keyword is searched, what the click-through rates are, and whether it would be a good, usable keyword to keep. Some tools you have to pay for, but there are free ones out there. A couple of examples:

- **Google Keyword Planner:** Google has its own keyword research tool, shown in Figure 1-4. You have to have a Google AdWords account to access the Keyword Planner keyword research tool located at https://adwords.google.com/keywordplanner. (Microsoft has a keyword tool as well, which also requires you to establish an account. Find the tool login page at www.bing.com/toolbox/keywords.) Note that the Keyword Planner gives you additional suggestions based on seed keywords, competitiveness of keywords, and average number of searches for keywords. What's really cool are the different ways of breaking down keyword popularity by mobile devices and location of searchers.

Larger View
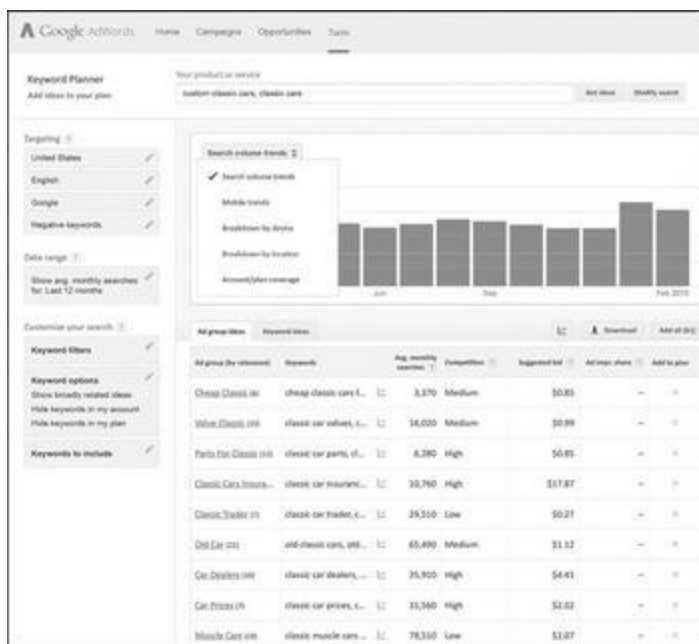
Figure 1-4: The Google AdWords free keyword research tool

- **Search Engine Optimization/KSP:** Bruce Clay, Inc., provides a free keyword tool at www.bruceclay.com/seo/combining-keywords.htm. Simply type your keywords into the Please Enter Keywords box and click the Run KSP button. You'll get keyword counts, plus demographic information.

The following services are paid services, so you have to cough up a little bit of cash for them. They actually do research and check out your competition for you, so they might be something you want to invest in. That doesn't mean you get out of doing the brainstorming and researching yourself; they just make it easier. Here are some paid services:

- **SEOToolSet:** In addition to the free tools offered by Bruce Clay, Inc., you can also subscribe to a suite of fully integrated SEO tools. Far more robust than the free version, the Pro version of the SEOToolSet is available for $89.00 per month for up to two domains (www.bruceclay.com/seo/tools.htm).
- **Wordtracker (www.wordtracker.com):** A keyword tracking service that you have to pay for, but they do offer free trials. Several monthly and annual pricing plans are available starting at $27 per month.
- **Keyword Discovery (www.keyworddiscovery.com):** Made by Trellian, this is another paid keyword tracking tool. You can subscribe for $199.95 a month.

You need to cull the least relevant keywords from the list right away. If your business is customizing only American cars as opposed to foreign ones, you can do away with words like [foreign], [Anglia], and [Volkswagen]. Don't worry: You've still got a pretty big list to choose from. You're just narrowing the focus a bit. When you're clipping out keywords, remember that keywords that are supportive of a strong branding exercise, that result in sales more often than other keywords, or that have very high profit margins should all be retained.

Using the tools and brainstorming methods we describe in this chapter, you can come up with a pretty sizable list of keywords. Using the keyword tracking tools, you can also get rid of a bunch of irrelevant, low-traffic keywords right away and pick a good list to focus on. Remember, you're not looking for five or ten keywords: You're looking for hundreds of good keywords, depending on the size of your site.

> Although it might seem like a good idea to concentrate on the broadest, most general keywords out there, it's actually not. What you want are keywords that give you conversion. A keyword that brings 60 visitors to your site, 10 of whom make a purchase, is much more desirable than a generic keyword that brings in thousands of visitors who only come in, blink, and then hit Back on their browser. Statisticians attribute this to the fact that people use generic keywords when gathering information and more specific keywords when they're ready to open their wallets. We explain this phenomenon.

Chapter 2: Selecting Keywords

In This Chapter

- **Selecting proper keyword phrases**
- **Reinforcing versus diluting your site theme**
- **Selecting subject categories**
- **Choosing high-traffic and high-conversion keywords**
- **Optimizing with keywords for natural language-based search**

In this chapter, we take that nice long list of keywords discussed in Chapter 1 of this minibook and select the best keywords of the bunch. (If you haven't yet put together such a list, what are you waiting for? Do it now!) In this chapter, you discover what makes a good keyword phrase, especially in terms of a *search query* (the words you type into the search engine's Search box). We also explain the deal with subject categories and how they help you choose your keywords. Also, we talk about high-traffic keywords and high-conversion keywords, as well as the difference between the two. After you understand the concept behind using keywords on your website to match search queries, you learn about *semantic search* (a method by which search engines rank results to best match word meaning, as opposed to exact keyword matching).

Selecting the Proper Keyword Phrases

When you're doing a search, you must use the proper phrase as a search query. Just like a *keyword* is a single word used as a search query, a *keyword phrase* is two or more words typed as a search query. For example, [Poughkeepsie classic car customization] is a good example of a keyword phrase.

Search engine users find what they are looking for by searching for specific keywords or keyword phrases and choosing the most relevant result. You want your site to have as many opportunities to be included in those search results as possible. In other words, you should try to use every keyword phrase that you think someone might search for in order to find your site.

Usually when people do a search, they type in a keyword phrase rather than just a single keyword. In fact, the vast majority of search queries are three words or longer. So, having keyword phrases on your site increases your website's chance of appearing higher on the page rank (because more keywords match the search query). The *click-through rate* (how many people click your listing to go to your site) also increases when more words match the search query. Your *conversion rate* (how many visitors actually purchase something, sign up, or take whatever action is appropriate on your site) also increases because you're more likely to have what the user is looking for.

Search engine users are becoming more savvy as time goes on, and they know that a single keyword is probably going to be too broad a search to return the results they're looking for. A good example is what happens when you do a search for [security]. You might be in need of a security guard service, but doing a quick search on Google by using the keyword [security] gives you results as varied as the Wikipedia article on security, the Department of Homeland Security, the Social Security Administration, and many listings for computer security software. Using the keyword phrase [security guard service Poughkeepsie], on the other hand, turns up map results that list local businesses, two local business sites for hiring security guards, and a couple of news articles about security services in Poughkeepsie.

REMEMBER You can see why it's a good idea to have proper keyword phrases, and not just single keywords, on your web pages. You could use the keyword phrase [Poughkeepsie classic car customization] as a heading for your paragraphs, place it in the `Heading` tags (HTML tags used for paragraph headings), or use it as the title of your web page (by using the `Title` tag in the HTML code).

It is best to use simple, everyday language that searchers are likely to type in. As a general rule, we recommend including multiple uses of each keyword phrase, enough to be prominent on the page without forcing your keywords into your content. Mention each keyword a couple of times while making sure that the way you use those keywords still sounds natural. Additionally, you should avoid using only general phrases; be sure to include detailed descriptive words, as well. If your keywords are too general, they likely have to compete with too many others targeting the same keywords. However, if your keywords are too specific, few people search for those terms, resulting in few potential visitors. It's a balancing act, and the rules aren't hard and fast. You need to find the right mix for your site by finding the keywords that not only bring traffic but bring traffic that actually converts — in other words, you want to put out the bait that brings in the right catch.

When putting keywords in the content of your site, make sure the words surrounding those keywords are also good, searchable keywords. For example
- Classic car customization in Poughkeepsie
- Reupholstery for classic Mustangs
- Chrome, wheels, and paint for classic automobiles
- New York State classic cars

These can all be used as headings for paragraphs or as links to their own pages. Remember, search engines also look for keywords in *hypertext links* (where clicking a word or phrase takes

you to another page on the web) within the page, and using a search phrase within the hyperlink leads to a higher search rank for that phrase.

You should also still include *stop words* (very common words such as *the, a, to, if, who*, and so forth, which serve to connect ideas but don't add much in the way of meaning to your content) in your search phrases. Google had removed stop words from its indexes for several years, but it now uses them to deliver much more precise search results. Plus, you don't want your website text to sound like machine language — "Come shop classic cars customization all your needs Poughkeepsie." Instead, you want your website to sound like properly written English (or whatever language your audience is using): Your true readers are real people, after all. You also don't want to give the search engines the impression that you're *keyword stuffing* — over-using keywords in the text thinking it will help with ranking; they're expecting natural-sounding text, which means full sentences with natural keyword usage.

Reinforcing versus Diluting Your Theme

If you have a list of thousands of keywords that apply to your website (we tell you how to create this list in Chapter 1 of this minibook), unfortunately, you probably can't use *all* those keywords — not unless you have a site that has hundreds or thousands of pages, anyway. And even if you do have a site that huge, it's best to reduce the list somewhat: There is such a thing as too many keywords. What you want are keywords that are going to enhance your site theme and not dilute it.

Imagine that your website is a jar full of black marbles. That's a very focused theme with very focused keywords, so your site ranks high for searches for [black marbles]. Because you never talk about anything but black marbles, it's inherently obvious to search engines and visitors that your site is an expert on black marbles. Imagine that the jar of black marbles in Figure 2-1 is your site.
Larger View
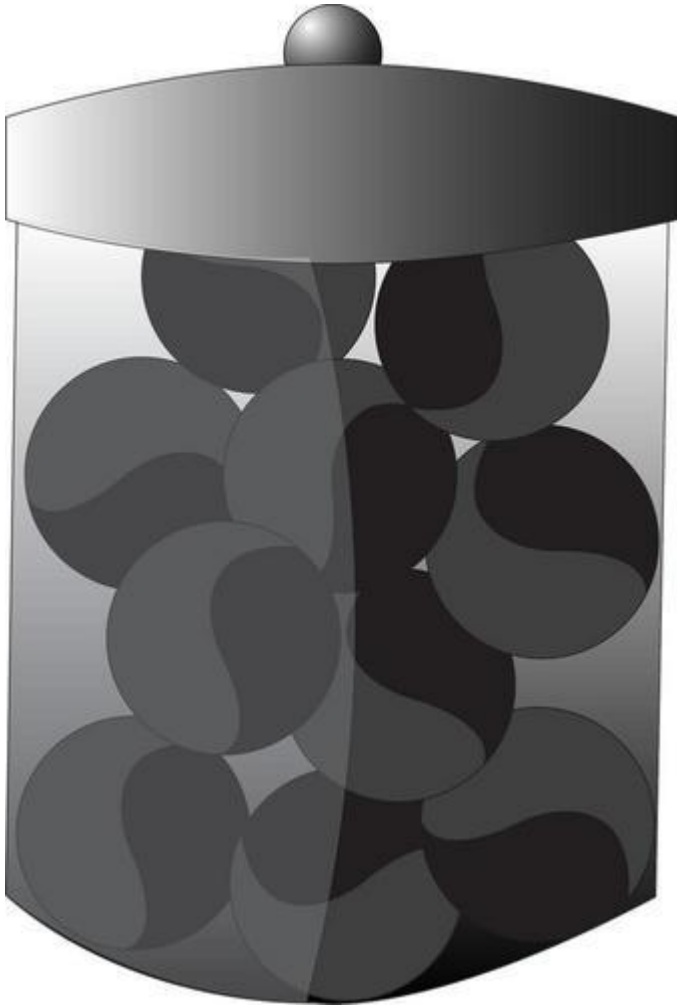
Figure 2-1: Your site is clearly about black marbles

Perhaps you also sell white marbles on your site. If you just add the different-colored marbles, with no order or emphasis, it becomes harder to say that your site is focused on black marbles. You're starting to dilute your focus. The search engine still ranks it pretty high for [black marbles] because this theme is still very obvious. You might even rank for [white and black marbles]. But your rank for [black marbles] drops because your focus is now not explicitly clear. Figure 2-2 shows how a mixed-up jar of marbles doesn't seem to be about either black or white marbles, in particular, although it's still clearly about marbles.
Larger View
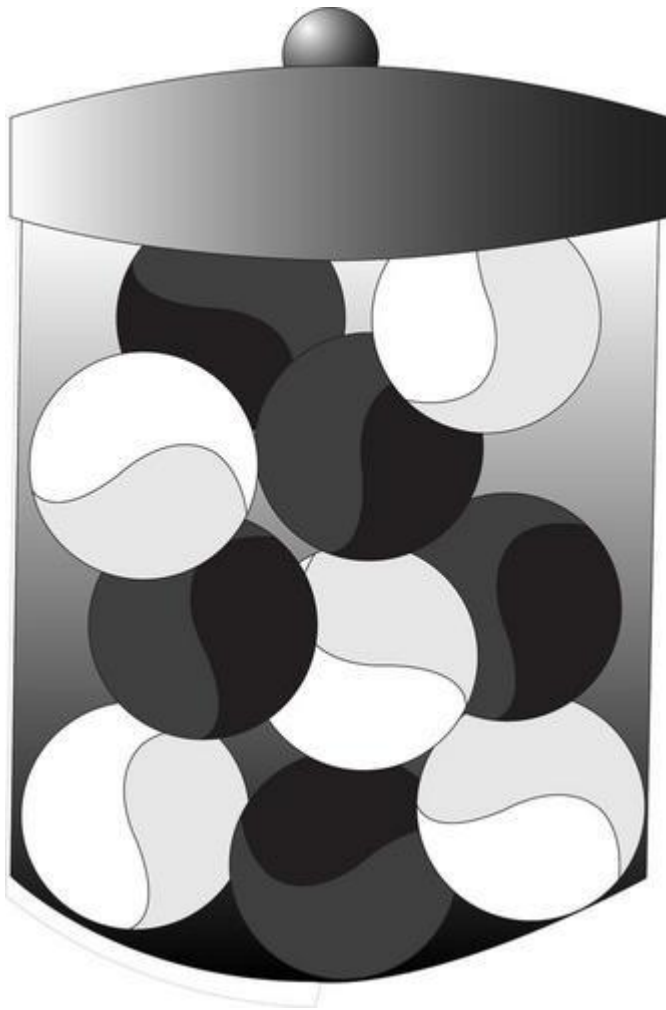
Figure 2-2: A jar of mixed black-and-white marbles

Similarly, if you add gray marbles to the mix, you further dilute the black-marble theme of the jar. The search engines still rank you for [marbles], but your rankings for [black marbles] and [white marbles] are much lower or gone entirely. Your site isn't about just black marbles anymore. The more colors you add — blue, green, red, pink, tiger's eye, clear, silver — the more diluted your theme of black marbles becomes. Figure 2-3 shows how adding more colors makes black marbles less of an obvious focus.
Larger View
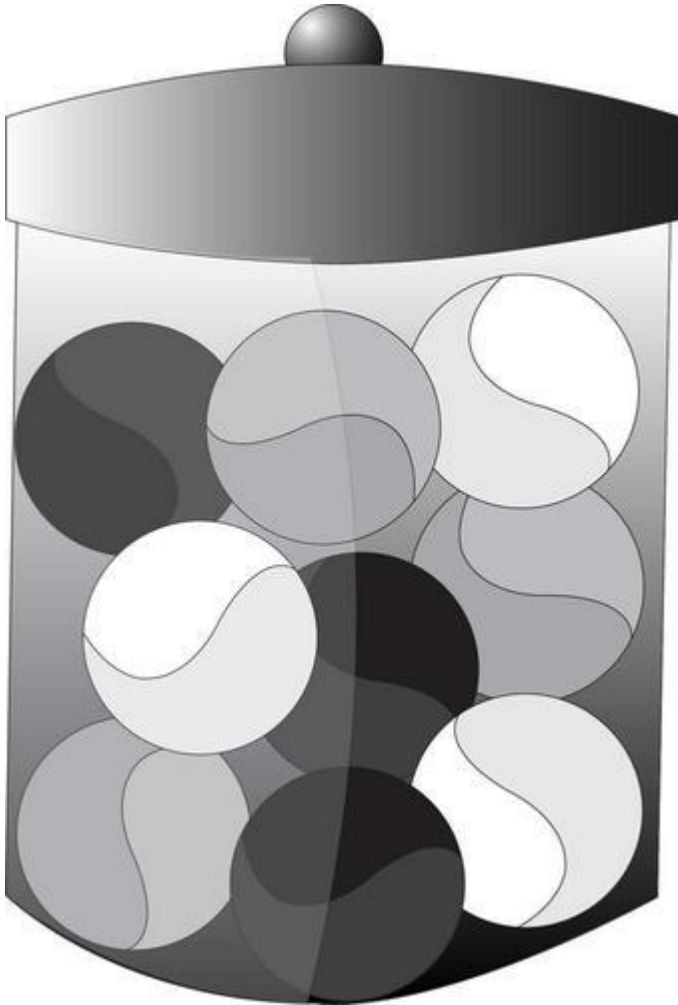
Figure 2-3: White, black, and gray marbles mixed together

By picking a clear site theme (in this case, black marbles) and removing all the marbles not associated with that theme, you bump up your website's search ranking because the search engine can clearly deduce that your site is all about black marbles. (***Note:*** You *can* rank well for lots of different themes successfully by using a technique called *siloing*. For more on how to silo your site, refer to Chapter 4 of this minibook. Detailed instructions on siloing can be found in Book IV.)

Keeping in mind that you want a clearly defined theme, take your nice, long list of keywords and choose the ones that represent your site's theme the best. Say your site theme is Classic Car Customization. Keywords that you would definitely need to use would be [classic], [car], and [customization]. But don't forget the industry-standard words. When experts want to link to other resources, they use industry jargon to do their searches. So, research both your industry and the people on the street, so you can attract both kinds of traffic. Also include [auto], [automobile], and [vehicle] in your keywords because those words are industry terms, even though users are more likely to search for [cars] than [automobiles].

TIP Focusing only on keywords that are very broad, high-traffic terms can lead to you not achieving a high ranking in the search engines and not getting good conversions from what traffic you do get. People tend to look for broad search terms only when they're first doing information gathering; they use much more specialized terms or phrases when they're getting ready to make a purchase. Broad search terms can bring people to your website, but make sure you also have much more specific keywords that go along with them as well.

Make sure that the specific keywords match your site theme and don't dilute it. For example, if you run a classic American car customization business in Poughkeepsie, tossing in keywords such as [Anglia], [Ferrari], [Italian], and so forth could actually do more harm than good because the business doesn't deal with foreign cars. You don't want to draw traffic for traffic's sake; you want people to actually stay and visit your site. Unless your website makes money simply by the number of visitors (like sites that make their money from selling ads based on page views), you want to attract people who won't immediately hit the Back buttons on their browsers.

Here are some things to remember when you're picking keywords:

- **Clarity:** Are the keywords clear and concise?
- **Relevance:** Do the keywords relate to what you're actually offering on your website? (False advertising is *never* a good idea.)
- **Categorization:** Can the keywords be grouped into understandable keyword phrases?
- **Audience appropriateness:** Do the keywords give a good mix of both industry standards and what your clients use in their searches?
- **Targeted keywords:** Are the keywords specific to your product? Three-, four-, even five-word phrases are best.

> Start weeding out what won't work for you using the preceding criteria and taking into account the traffic and return on investment the keyword brings. This can be a pretty time-consuming process, but you can take steps during the brainstorming process (s) to make this as painless as possible.

◀

▶

Picking Keywords Based on Subject Categories

Having a clear site theme, plus many relevant keywords, is a good start. But now you're going to have to break it down into smaller categories in order to best organize your website and all those keywords you picked out. In Chapter 1 of this minibook, you can make an outline of your list of keywords, grouping them into categories and subcategories.

The high-level terms represent broad keywords, and then they're broken into longer, much more specific keywords as you go down the outline. Using this detailed outline, you can arrange your subject categories for your website. You want to have distinct subject categories for your website because those categories help you when you *silo* (or theme) your website's contents. A website that has grouped or related keywords and links allows a search engine to return results more quickly, which in turn equals a higher page ranking for that website.

High-Traffic Keywords

The next step you want to take with your keywords list is to determine which ones generate a high amount of traffic and which ones have a high conversion rate. High traffic keywords are the keywords that bring the most people to your site.

With a high-traffic keyword, you want not only to bring people to your website but also to keep them there. If your word brings in a lot of traffic, but there's also a high *bounce rate* (people who stay at the landing page only briefly and then hit Back on the browser), you have a problem. A high bounce rate indicates one or more of the following issues:

- The keyword isn't relevant for your web page.
- The text on the web page isn't relevant enough to the keyword.
- The content or layout of the web page doesn't hold a user's interest.
- The page loads too slowly, so a user loses patience and abandons the page before that page fully renders.

In any case, you want to look closely at the page with the particular keyword in mind and make appropriate improvements. Keywords that have a high bounce rate do not yield many conversions, and therefore do not generate any revenue (unless you have a website where you make money based on page views alone). If anything, high bounce rate keywords can cost you money by requiring a lot of site hardware and *bandwidth* (the speed data moves to and from your site) to support all the extraneous traffic.

TIP What we recommend to help you analyze your keywords is to use a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel. Excel comes along with most Microsoft Office packages, so if you have Microsoft Word, chances are you already have Excel. Microsoft Excel allows you to arrange and compare data in rows and columns, similar to a paper ledger or accounts book. We're going to talk about Microsoft Excel, but there are other spreadsheet programs out there like Google Sheets and PlanMaker. You can also try the open-source Open Office program from the Apache Software Foundation.

We suggest that you copy your entire keyword list and paste it into column A of an Excel spreadsheet, so you end up with a simple list of keywords, one per row. Depending on how big your list is, you may want to create a new tab for each subject category, separating their keywords into more manageable spreadsheets. Setting up a keywords spreadsheet comes in handy when you're keeping track of which keywords are working and which ones aren't. Not an Excel whiz? Check out *Excel 2016 For Dummies*, by Greg Harvey (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

Now you can use the remaining columns (B, C, and so on) to store data about each keyword. The first piece of data you need to find is an estimate of how many times people search for the keyword each day.

You can use free tools like Bruce Clay, Inc.'s Search Engine Optimization/KSP tool to measure daily search activity for specific keyword phrases on the Internet across the major search engines. It's not just guesswork; you can see actual counts!

In the previous chapter, we list tools that are available online for checking search activity by keyword (and many other search engine optimization-related tasks).

Keep in mind that the results from any keyword research tool are only estimates and should be taken as general guidelines. However, they give you a general indication of activity levels. For instance, if the keyword research tools say that Keyword A supposedly has 20,000 searches a day and Keyword B only 200, you can look at the numbers proportionally and trust that although the actual counts may vary, relatively speaking, Keyword A is searched 100 times more frequently than Keyword B.

On your spreadsheet, label column B **Searches** or **Activity.** Using a keyword research tool, enter your keywords and fill in the daily search activity count in column B for each keyword (shown in Figure 2-4). You may find it tedious to try out each keyword and copy the resulting activity number into your spreadsheet, but this data will be extremely useful for you in evaluating your keywords and improving your search engine optimization. You need benchmarks and figures, not just guesses, to make sure that you're optimizing your site for the right keywords. Larger View

	A	B	C
1	Query	Searches	Volume
3	pga	5244	11.08230719
4	pga.com	2583	6.610499028
5	freegolfinfo	64	4.147764096
6	golf tips	1884	3.046014258
7	golf	176388	1.62022035
8	pga tour	4142	1.360985094
9	michigan football	5105	0.777705768
10	golf swing	1596	0.777705768
11	pga golf	1406	0.712896954
12	pga championship	504	0.583279326
13	mgoblue	311	0.583279326
14	putting tips	133	0.518470512
15	golf shank	22	0.453661698
16	michigan wolverines	2587	0.453661698
17	golf lessons	463	0.453661698
18	us open	6077	0.388852884
19	online golf tips	8	0.388852884
20	university of michigan	4948	0.32404407
21	golf schools	1657	0.32404407
22	how to play golf	394	0.32404407
23	free video golf lessons	5	0.32404407
25	stratton	976	0.259235256
26	swing plane	15	0.259235256

Figure 2-4: A keyword spreadsheet lets you compare data for each keyword

High-Conversion Keywords

You want to figure out what keywords are going to draw buyers, versus just window shoppers, to your website. It's nice to get a lot of traffic, but it's better to get conversions; and it's best to have both *ROI* (return on investment) and high traffic. A *high-conversion keyword* is a keyword that brings you a lot of sales, sign-ups, entrants, or whatever action you consider a conversion on your site. A high-conversion keyword also could be a high-traffic keyword (see the preceding section), but not necessarily so.

A low traffic keyword may be okay if it is also a high conversion keyword. For example, if you have a keyword that brings only ten visitors a year, but one of those visitors becomes a sale that equals half a million dollars, that's a good keyword. You wouldn't want to remove that keyword from your site for a minute! Sometimes these types of keywords are called *elephant words* — big words that are so laborious to type and so obscure in usage that only a very serious searcher would think of entering it in a query. One elephant word is *mesothelioma*, which is the type of cancer that results from asbestos poisoning. Law firms love *mesothelioma* as a keyword, because even though it doesn't bring them a huge amount of traffic, people searching for the term usually mean business, and even one legal case can generate a huge amount of revenue. On the other hand, if you optimize for a keyword that brings you a million visitors and only one conversion that isn't worth much money, it's time to consider dropping that keyword phrase unless that term is a branding term for you and you want to keep it for the name recognition.

Understanding Keyword-Based Search versus Semantic Search

Earlier you learned that search engines use keywords to match results to queries. However, that's not entirely true. Search engines were first developed to use a ranking system that rewards pages by how closely the words in the query match the words on a page. The more exactly the query phrase matches a phrase repeatedly used on your web page the more likely your web page is to be delivered to a searcher as a relevant result.

There are problems with a strict keyword-based ranking system, though. First, it's easy to manipulate this kind of system with keyword spam. And perhaps more important, searchers are moving away from stilted keyword phrase-type queries like [classic car parts Poughkeepsie] and toward natural language queries like [who sells classic car parts in Poughkeepsie?]. A major

driver in this shift is the prevalence of mobile Internet use and queries spoken into smartphones via the voice assistants introduced in .

In order to deliver the best results for queries in a natural language format, search engines developed technology that understands the connection between words, or semantic search.

By understanding the connections between words, search engines build *entities*. An entity is a person, place, or thing, as a search engine understands it, and entities are understood in connection to other entities. For instance, the entity Abraham Lincoln is connected to the entity of the White House and the entity of the American Civil War — a person, place, and thing, respectively, each with a history and multitude of facts that are much more than keywords strung together. In fact, Google often describes semantic search and the entities behind it as a move to a system of "things, not strings" (of keywords).

How to Optimize with Keywords in Light of Semantic Search

How does semantic search affect what you do to help your website rank? It makes it especially important that full sentences are used and that keywords are included in a natural way that doesn't feel forced or overdone. Focus on covering a topic in a thorough and complete way rather than hitting a keyword quota. If the web page is indeed about the keyword, that keyword will necessarily be included in the text, along with other words and phrases associated with the topic. Seek to develop your website into an authoritative resource for the topic you cover. Provide useful and helpful resources that cover a topic in depth. Search engines rank subject matter experts highly, rewarding sites on qualifications it refers to as *E-A-T* (expertise, authority, and trust).

In practical terms, optimizing your web pages with targeted keywords is a process that helps content writers and website owners make sure that their website is on target, supporting the overall website theme and purpose. Keywords are helpful for guiding web page content and making it clear what the page is about. Choosing keywords and optimizing pages for them requires a certain amount of guesswork, science, finesse, and practice. The process has few hard and fast rules — for each item, you must weigh the pros and cons and make a lot of decisions. Over time, you develop a feel for search engine optimization and it becomes easier. However, it's extremely important to both track and test your keywords as you develop your website. This process is ongoing, so be patient and let yourself go through the learning curve. And remember that the kinds of tools and analytics you've begun to use in this chapter are an SEO's best friend.

Chapter 3: Exploiting Pay per Click Lessons Learned

In This Chapter

- **Analyzing pay per click campaigns**
- **Testing keywords through pay per click ads**
- **Building your brand with pay per click ads**
- **Eliminating low click-through keywords**
- **Overlapping paid ads with organic ranking to reduce costs**

Buying pay per click ads can be a useful part of your overall search engine optimization strategy. *Pay per click ads* are paid ads that appear in a Sponsored Links section on a search results page (the site owners have negotiated with the search engine to display the search results page when a user searches for certain keywords). Pay per click ads can complement the work you're doing to move your listing up in the *organic results* (the normal search results). And because it's relatively fast to set up pay per click ads, they can be an easy way to jump-start your website's performance in search results.

To buy a pay per click ad, go to the chosen search engine's paid search website (we cover these sites in Book I, Chapter 4) and bid on a particular keyword phrase for which you want your ad to appear. From then on, the search engine tracks how many times people click your ad and bills you monthly for the total clicks. Generally, the highest bidders are awarded the top positions on the search results (though with Google, some relevance factors do affect the order). For more information on buying pay per click ads, you can pick up a copy of *Pay Per Click Search Engine Marketing For Dummies*, by Peter Kent (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.). In this chapter, you learn why these ads are useful to your search engine optimization efforts and how to use them to build your brand and reduce your cost of conversion.

Analyzing Your Pay per Click Campaigns for Clues about Your Site

You can use pay per click (PPC) ads to provide clues that help you optimize your website for organic results, such as

- Which keywords bring *traffic* (lots of visitors) to your site
- Which keywords don't bring traffic to your site
- Which keywords bring the right kind of visitors to your site (for example, ones that convert to customers)
- Some real traffic volume numbers from that search engine for a particular keyword

What's nice about using PPC ads for this kind of research is that you can test ads scientifically. (***Note:*** It's difficult to set up scientific tests of keywords in the natural search rankings because the search engine's methods are largely a secret and their algorithms are constantly in flux.) With PPC ads, you can control which ads appear for which keywords, and you can set up comparison tests. For example, you could test

- **Two different versions of an ad:** To see which wording draws more people
- **An ad that appears for two different keywords:** To find out which keyword is more effective

The various statistics and analytical tools offered by Google AdWords and Bing Ads are a nice benefit to purchasing paid ads through these search engines. The data you collect through them helps you refine your website's theme(s) and keywords. In turn, this knowledge helps you improve your site's ranking in organic search results, as well as paid results, by targeting better keywords for your pages.

TIP Keep in mind that pay per click campaigns require constant monitoring and revision. Bid prices can fluctuate, and you have to make adjustments based on the performance of your ads. Over time, you must change your listings, removing the underperformers and adding new ones. You want to identify keywords that are costing far more than the profits they generate and discontinue them, while keeping track of these lessons learned to apply them to your natural search engine optimization as well. For these reasons, it is important to use the search engines' analytics tools mentioned previously to measure the effectiveness of your ads and to harvest data that helps you optimize your campaign.

Be aware that pay per click data does not necessarily represent how the same keywords would behave in natural search results; it only provides clues. However, it's a step in the right direction. Organic search engine optimization can take months of trial and error to produce results. By comparison, a pay per click campaign benefits you immediately with listings placed on the first page of search results, an increase in traffic, and some useful data. These benefits can help start your SEO efforts off quickly and give you some good indications of what might be the best keywords for your site.

Brand Building

You want your company name to be seen and recognized in your industry without becoming generic — that's *branding*. When you think Nike, you think of a lifestyle, not merely a pair of running shoes. When your company is branded, it becomes a search keyword all by itself. Successful branding associates you with your particular industry so tightly that you're nearly synonymous. The key word here is *nearly*, of course. You don't want to have your brand name

become so watered down that you lose control of how people use it. For instance, when you sneeze, do you reach for a tissue or a Kleenex? When you need a paper copied, do you photocopy it or Xerox it? A recent brand struggling with this problem is Google. It's been fighting to remind people that you're not "Googling your blind date," you're "performing a search on your blind date by using Google." Walking that line is probably a long way down the road for most businesses, however.

You can build awareness of your brand instantly by purchasing pay per click ads. Every time your company name shows up visibly in search results for a particular search query, it helps to build your brand. If your business is selling classic custom cars, you can make your name appear on search results for [classic custom cars] simply by bidding for that keyword phrase with the search engines. Although you might need to do months of search engine optimization work to bring your listing up to the first page in the natural search results, pay per click ads give you a way to increase your branding right away.

TIP We usually recommend that clients buy ads for their own company names. You'd be amazed how many companies don't show up in natural search results for their own names. This is brand nonexistence, at least on the web. If you want to generate brand awareness, taking out PPC ads on your branded terms is a quick fix that should be on your to-do list. And if your company already does rank well in the natural search results for your branded terms, including a PPC ad as well only strengthens your branding. According to studies done by Microsoft, companies with the top organic spot and the top paid listing receive a greater brand lift than those appearing in either location alone.

When you're building your brand name, make sure your brand goes first in the `Title` tags on your website. For example, a page on our company site could have a `Title` tag that looks like this:
Larger View


```
<title>Bruce Clay, Inc. - Search Engine Optimization Services</title>.
```

TIP When you put your brand name first, it shows up first in your search results listing (as well as at the top of the browser window when someone is on your site). This exposure helps to give your brand a sense of authority. Be aware, however, that this does sacrifice some relevancy in the mind of the user when searching on non-branded terms.

Identifying Keywords with Low Click-Through Rates

Pay per click ads let you easily test different keywords. Write your ads by using good marketing copy that's highly relevant to the keyword phrase you're bidding on in a search engine's paid search. After you've accomplished that, you can find out which keywords yield the most *click-throughs* (when people click the link) and *conversions* (when people not only visit your site, but also buy what you offer). Conversely, you can weed out those keywords that have low click-through and conversion rates.

After all, just being listed on a search results page is of little value if people don't click through to your site. With pay per click ads, you can find out which search terms work best at generating the kind of traffic you need. Broad search terms such as [cars] are probably not a good place to put your ad money. First of all, these types of broad terms are heavily searched, which makes the bidding for them more competitive. The per-click cost for a broad term would be very high (measured by price per click times traffic) and might not be worth it. Also, although [cars] is searched frequently, the click-through rate is very low. Even if someone does click your listing and visit your site, broad search queries tend to have low conversion rates because the people usually are just seeking general information and not ready to take action, such as making a purchase.

TIP As a best practice, bid on everything that has a positive ROI and test, test, test — always test … never stop.

You want keywords that specifically draw people to your site and result in conversions. Here are a few facts you can keep in mind:

- Approximately 70 percent of search queries contain at least three words.
- People tend to use short, one- or two-word search queries for information gathering; those searches usually don't convert into customers.
- When users refine their search by using longer queries, they tend to be more seriously looking for a product or service.
- In general, users are getting more sophisticated and using more refined searches (meaning they type in longer search queries).

When choosing good keywords for your site, keep in mind the long-tail effect we cover in Book I, Chapter 5. The *long tail* is a statistical concept that says items in comparatively low demand can nonetheless add up to quite large volumes. The idea is that longer, more specific keyword phrases may not get a lot of traffic, but when people do search for them, the likelihood of click-through and conversion is quite high. Take our classic custom cars website example. A long-tail keyword phrase such as [1965 Ford Mustang GT] might make an excellent keyword phrase for a pay per click ad linked right to the Ford Mustang page on the website. Although the phrase might not get searched very often, someone typing in this search query would probably be a serious shopper — or, at the very least, will find exactly what she's looking for on your web page.

You want to purchase long-tail keyword phrases for pay per click ads for several reasons:

- They're relatively cheap to buy because fewer sites bid on them.
- The *bounce rate* (percentage of people who click a listing but then bounce right back to the search results by clicking the Back button) tends to be low because your web page closely relates to the search query.
- Fewer searches mean fewer clicks, so your costs remain low.
- The pay per click ads let you test different keyword phrases and find out what people search for that leads them to your site.
- You can apply what you figure out with your pay per click ads directly to optimize your website for effective keywords, which can help you rank highly in organic search results. Your ranking may go up fairly easily for these long-tail keywords because they're less competitive.
- Long-tail traffic adds up, and that makes it attractive.

If you have ads that people aren't clicking, the keyword might not be the problem. A low click-through rate could be due to a number of factors:

- Your ad copy may not be written well.
- Your ad may not be relevant to the search term.
- The audience your ad is targeting is not the same audience searching for the keywords that you associate with the ad.

> Because there are several variables, it may be difficult to pinpoint exactly why a given ad has a low click-through rate. You can actually learn more from ads with high click-through rates than you can from those that under-perform. If you've found a winning combination of ad copy and relevant keyword terms and it's bringing the right kind of traffic to your website, you have marketing gold. By all means, apply the same types of keywords to your website to improve your organic search engine optimization, as well.

Reducing Costs by Overlapping Pay per Click with Natural Keyword Rankings

Pairing your search-engine-optimization work with a pay per click campaign often yields the best results. Don't do just one or the other. If you have the budget, doing both organic SEO and pay per click together is the best strategy.

Research supports the use of PPC ads, in addition to organic search results, that rank for your targeted keywords. If your company name appears in two places on the results page, you get higher impact and brand awareness — and more clicks on both the ad and the listing — than you would if only one appeared in the results. Studies have shown that when your company listing appears in the organic results *and* in a paid ad on the first results page, people get the impression that your company is an expert. As a result, they click your organic listing far more often than they would if no pay per click ad appeared. See Figure 3-1 for an example of a search ad paired with an organic ranking.
Larger View

Pay per click ad

Organic listing

Figure 3-1: Displaying a paid ad as well as an organic listing, as CarGurus.com has in this example, raises a company's perceived expertise, branding, and click-throughs

REMEMBER You benefit when your pay per click ads work in conjunction with a high page ranking in the organic results. It's interesting to note that when both display, although click patterns depend upon the keyword, some studies have shown that clicks go up for both the listing and the ad. Nevertheless, most people click the organic listing, rather than the paid ad. Either way, you're still generating more traffic to your site by having both an ad and a good ranking.

In addition to perceived expertise and more click-throughs, your company earns better brand recognition by appearing in two places on the search results page. And on a practical level, your site also controls more real estate on the page — leaving less room for competitors.

Chapter 4: Assigning Keywords to Pages

In This Chapter

▪ **Knowing what search engines see as keywords**

Chapter 4: Assigning Keywords to Pages

In This Chapter

- **Knowing what search engines see as keywords**
- **Planning your site's themes**
- **Creating landing pages that attract and hold visitors**
- **Organizing your site into subject categories**
- **Consolidating themes for maximum ranking value**

If you've read Chapters 1 through 3 of this minibook, you've already done a lot of the prep work for assigning keywords to pages. In this chapter, you use all that research and prep work as we explain how you can assign keywords in a way that helps make your website most accessible to search engines. You want to make it as easy as possible for the search engines to find out what your site is about because the more relevant your site is to a user's search query, the higher your site is likely to show up in the search results.

Planning Subject Theme Categories

Search engines rank individual pages but they do look for overall site-wide themes in determining how relevant your web page is to a search query. As a general rule, the home page should use more broad-range terms, and the supporting pages should use more specific and targeted terms that help support the home page. By using this method, you enable the search engines to understand and index your site's contents because this is the organization they're expecting. And better indexing means better inclusion on search results.

TIP Here's a general guideline about keywords, topics, and themes: A web page's first paragraph should introduce its keywords. If a keyword is repeated in every paragraph, it's a *topic*. If the website has multiple (we recommend six or more) interconnected pages related to the topic, we consider that a *theme*. Search engines consider a site with multiple pages of unique, informative content on a theme to be highly relevant.

You need to choose a main theme for your website. What is your whole website about? For instance, our classic custom cars website might have a main site theme of *custom cars* or *classic cars*. Which one makes the most sense depends on two things: which theme most accurately fits the business and vision of the website, and which theme is searched for the most. To find out which phrase gets the most searches, you need to use a keyword research tool such as those covered in Chapter 2 of this minibook. Here, we suffice to say that the phrase [classic cars] receives about four times the number of searches that [custom cars] does, so we use *classic cars* as our main site theme.

TIP The preceding example points out an important principle: You should not plan your site theme and structure based solely on what makes sense to you. Instead, do research to find out how people search, and lay out your website accordingly. This is essential to your design.

Assuming that you want your site to rank high in searches for its major theme, you want to

- Make sure your site theme is included in your home page's `Title` tag and `Meta` tags (HTML code located at the top of a web page — we show you how this is done in Book IV).
- Use your site theme in your page content so that the search engines interpret the theme as keywords for your web page. Making your theme part of the keywords helps your web page come up in searches for those keywords. (You learn more about keyword strategy in Chapter 5 of this minibook.)

After you've got your main site theme, you need to organize the site content. If you already have a website, try to view it with fresh eyes because the current organizational structure might not be the most conducive to good search engine ranking. In our experience, many websites are disjointed arrays of unrelated information with no central theme. Your site may not be that bad, but as you read through the recommendations in this chapter, you may find that you're light on content, have too much of the wrong type of content, or need to do some major reorganization. As Figure 4-1 shows, you need to figure out how best to divide your site into subject categories. Larger View
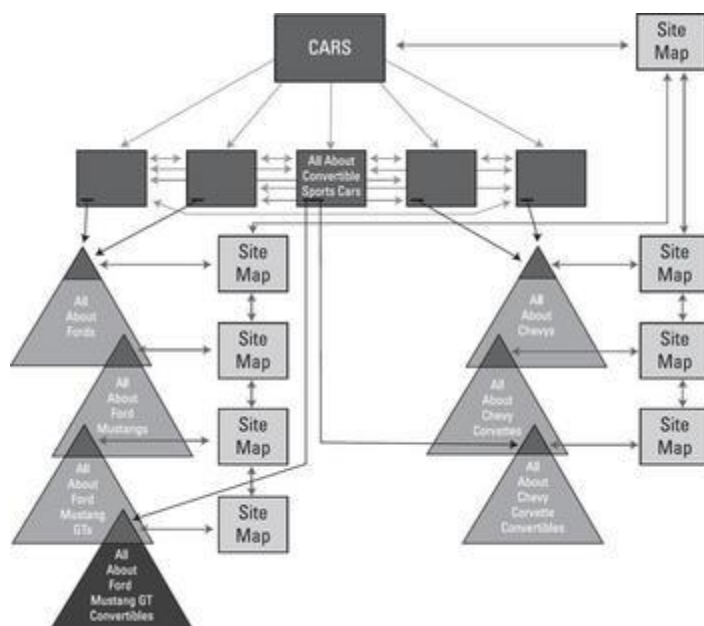
Figure 4-1: A subject organization chart showing a major theme and subtopics

Look at all the content, products, services, and so on that your website offers. Is all the stuff on your site well organized into categories and subcategories? Do those breakdowns match the way people search for what you offer? Depending on the size of your website and the diversity of its subject matter, you could have a single site-wide theme or a structure with hundreds of subject theme categories and subcategories. Some keyword research is in order here as well to make sure you're dividing up the information according to how people search. For instance, the classic cars website could separate its content either by body type (sedans, coupes, convertibles, vans, and so on), by make (Chevrolet, Ford, Oldsmobile, and so on), by year of manufacture (1950, 1951, 1952, and so on), or by some other method. It turns out that people don't usually search for cars by body type, such as [sedan cars], or by year, such as [1959 Oldsmobiles]. Instead, most people looking for cars search by make and model, like [Oldsmobile 98]. For maximum ranking in search engines, therefore, this website ought to organize its contents by make, and then by model. Of course, based on how people search in your industry, your subcategories will vary.

Choosing Landing Pages for Subject Categories

You should organize your website into categories not just because it's neater that way but also so that your site can rank well for any of its subject themes. Rather than having all inbound links

point to your home page only, you should create an array of highly targeted pages representing all your categories. For each subject category in your website, you want to choose a landing page.

A *landing page* acts as the primary information page for a subject category. It's the page where all *hypertext links* (text that can be clicked to take the user to another web page) related to that subject should point. Your website's landing pages present the all-important first impression to site visitors. You want to make sure your landing pages not only put your best foot forward but also interest visitors enough to entice them to go further and hopefully convert to customers. Landing pages have to look good to users *and* search engines.

The primary subjects for our classic cars website are the different makes of cars, and each one needs a landing page. The Ford landing page needs to contain some general information about Ford cars; a separate Oldsmobile landing page should contain some information about Olds cars, and so on. Your landing pages need to have enough content so that people reaching them from a search engine feel satisfied that they've come to the right place. You want the content to engage visitors enough so that they want to stay. You also need your landing pages to link to other pages on your site that offer more detailed information within the subject category and lead to opportunities to buy, sign up, or take whatever action your site considers a conversion.

Organizing Your Primary and Secondary Subjects

Search engines look for depth of content. Your landing pages should each have at least three or four pages of supporting information that they link to. These subpages need to be within the same theme as the landing page that they support. Having several subpages linked from each landing page that all talk about the same subject theme reinforces your theme and boosts your landing page's perceived expertise on the subject.

Now that you've decided on primary subjects for your website, each with its own landing page, you need to decide whether further stratification is needed. Do you have natural subcategories under your primary subject categories? If so, you probably want to create landing pages for this second tier, as well. For our classic cars website, the secondary subjects under each car manufacturer would be the different models of cars, and we'd create a landing page for each model. So the Ford landing page could link to individual landing pages for Ford Mustang, Ford Falcon, Ford Thunderbird, and so on.

The concept of organizing a website's content into distinct subject categories, each with its own landing page and supporting pages, is called *siloing*. Refer back to the diagram in Figure 4-1 to see how our classic cars website could be arranged into silos.

Here are a few recommendations for building landing pages:
- Keep each landing page's content focused on its particular subject category.
- Make the content engaging — consider including video, audio, images, or dynamic elements along with highly relevant text (not in place of it!).
- Customize the keywords on each landing page to reflect that page's subject theme.
- Be sure to include the keywords in the page content as well as in the `Meta` tags.
- Include links to secondary pages in the same category.
- Don't include links to secondary pages under different subject categories. (See the "A note about links" sidebar for more about the effective use of links.)

A note about links

Hypertext links (also known as just *hyperlinks*) that lead to each landing page should contain your page's keywords. You want the linked text that the user clicks (the *anchor text*) to be meaningful. Google keeps track of links to determine the relevancy of each of your web pages. The link Ford Mustang Information and Pricing gains you a lot more points than Click Here

because your page is not really about Click Here — it's about Ford Mustangs. You definitely want to use good, keyword-rich anchor text for links going to landing pages in your website. You don't have as much control over the links that other websites use to link to your pages, but as much as possible, try to have those links also show descriptive anchor text.

Understanding Siloing "Under the Hood"

Now that you understand the importance of grouping content on your site, you might be wondering how to accomplish it. If you have a gigantic website with thousands of pages that need to be reorganized, don't panic. You can do your siloing in two ways. Either can be successful, but you get the most bang from your buck by doing both:

- **Physical silos:** Ideally, the physical structure of your site — the directories or folders — should reflect your silo organization. This is the simplest, cleanest way to do it, and it keeps everything nicely organized as your website grows. With this organization, you want the top-level folders to be your primary subject categories, the next-level folders to contain the secondary subject categories, and so forth. So a directory structure for our classic cars site might look something like Figure 4-2.

Figure 4-2: A siloed directory structure in Windows Explorer

Arranging the physical directories to match your siloing scheme is fine if you have the luxury of starting a site from scratch or if your site is small enough to move things around without too much pain and effort. However, if you have a very large site or a very stubborn *Content Management System* (*CMS;* software that helps you create, edit, and manage a website), you need a more flexible solution.

- **Virtual silos:** Websites that cannot adjust their directory structures can accomplish siloing by creating *virtual silos.* Instead of moving related web pages into new directories, virtual silos connect related pages using links. You still need to have one landing page per subject, and you need links on each landing page to identify the sublevel pages within that subject's silo. So no matter how the directories are set up for our classic cars website, the Ford landing page would have links to the Ford Falcon, Ford Mustang, and Ford Thunderbird pages. Because search engine spiders follow the links as they move through a website, this virtual silo organization does not confuse the spiders, no matter how your underlying files and folders are set up.
- **Doing both:** Incorporating both virtual and physical silos can be very powerful for a site that has pages that should exist in more than one silo or category. For a complete overview of siloing and architecture, refer to Book VI.

Consolidating Themes to Help Search Engines See Your Relevance

In order to rank well in search results for a particular keyword phrase, your website must provide related information that is organized in clear language that search engines understand. When your textual information has been stripped away from its design and layout, does it measure up to be the most relevant aggregate information compared to that of other sites? If so, you have a high likelihood of achieving high rankings and attracting site visitors who are researching and shopping for products and services that you offer.

As we mention in Chapter 2 of this minibook, we often explain the importance of creating subject silos by using the analogy that most websites are like a jar of marbles. A search engine can decipher meaning only when the subjects are clear and distinct. Take a look at the picture of the jar of marbles in Figure 4-3.
Larger View
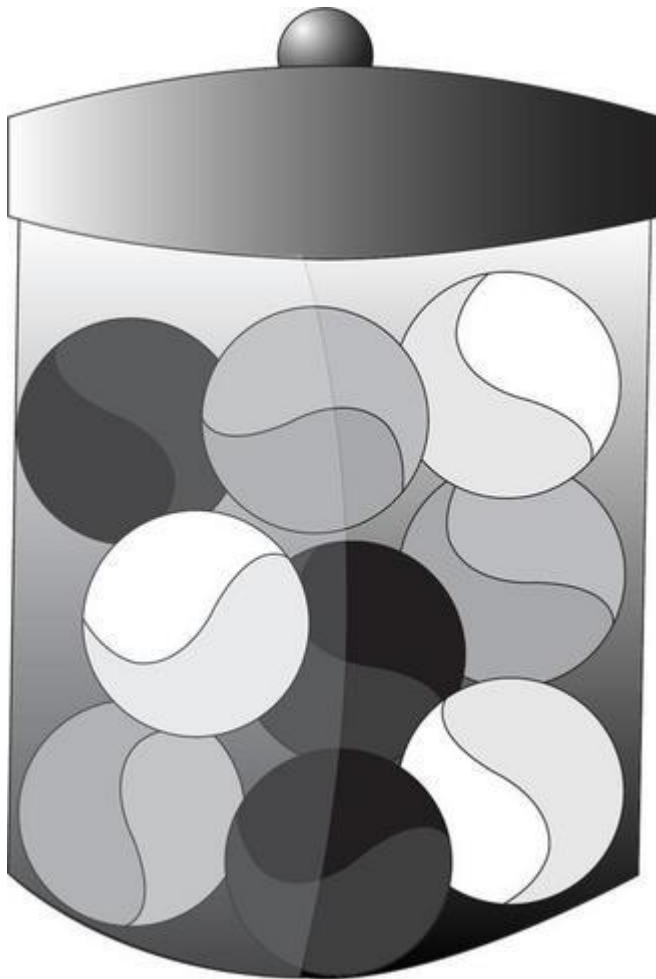
Figure 4-3: A typical website is a jumbled mixture of items, like this jar of marbles

The jar in Figure 4-3 contains black marbles, white marbles, and gray marbles all mixed together, with no apparent order or emphasis. It would be reasonable to assume that search engines would classify the subject only as *marbles*. (By the way, the marbles are used quite a lot in this book as we explain concepts and refine your understanding of developing themes. Learn to love them.)

If you separated each group of marbles into its own jar (or website), they would be classified as a jar of black marbles, a jar of white marbles, and a jar of gray marbles (see Figure 4-4).
Larger View
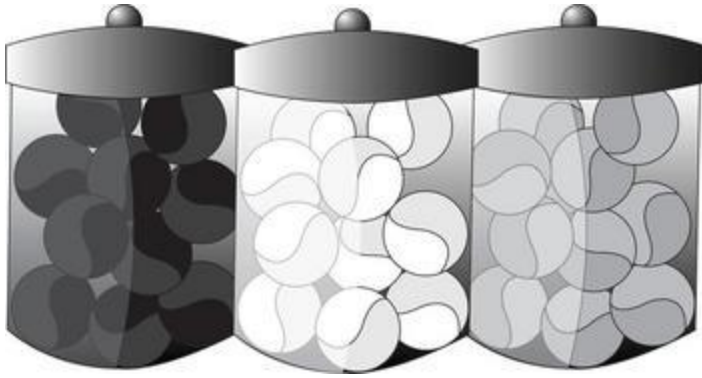
Figure 4-4: Each jar (or site) is clearly about one color of marbles: black, white, and gray

However, if you wanted to combine all three marble colors into a single jar, you could create distinct silos within the site that would allow the subject themes to be *black marbles, white marbles, gray marbles*, and finally the generic term *marbles*. (See Figure 4-5.) Most websites never clarify the main subjects they want their site to become relevant for. Instead, they try to be all things to all people.
Larger View

Figure 4-5: A website can contain multiple subjects if they are clearly organized into silos

REMEMBER Your goal, if you want your site to rank for more than a single generic term, is to selectively decide what your site is and is not about. Rankings are often damaged in three major ways:

- By having too little content for a subject on your website
- By including irrelevant content that dilutes and blurs your theme
- By choosing keywords that are not well matched to your theme

Do you have your themes poorly defined, spread out in pieces over a number of different pages? Or are you mixing dissimilar items together on a page so that no central theme emerges (similar to the first jar of marbles in Figure 4-3)? Both of these cases may be preventing the search engines from seeing your web pages as relevant to your keywords. If your website is not currently ranking well for a keyword phrase, consider both possible causes. You may have too little content for a theme, in which case you need to increase the number of pages that contain keyword-rich content on that subject. Conversely, if you have irrelevant or disorganized content, you might need to consolidate your subject themes by separating and concentrating them into silos, like the marbles in Figure 4-5.

Chapter 5: Adding and Maintaining Keywords

In This Chapter

- **Figuring out keyword densities**
- **Adjusting keywords**
- **Updating keywords**
- **Using tools to aid keyword**

If you've been doing what we suggest in the previous four chapters of this minibook, you've brainstormed, done your research, categorized your keywords, and created *landing pages* (the web page the user comes to when clicking a link) for your subject categories. So now what? Now you actually get to add keywords.

There is an art to placing keywords on your website. You can't simply type **car, car, car, car, car, car** again and again. For one thing, that's considered spam and will get your site pulled from the search engine index. (For our purposes, *spam* is any type of deceptive web technique meant to trick a search engine into offering inappropriate, redundant, or poor-quality search results. For more details, see Book I, Chapter 6.) For another thing, a user who sees "car, car, car, car …" would immediately hit Back on the browser window because your site is obviously not going to be of any use to him. Remember, you want to *keep* people on your website so that they will stick around and be converted from a visitor to a customer (or however your website defines a conversion). To do that, you have to create searchable, readable content for your website.

But what do you do with those keywords we make you gather in Chapter 1 of this minibook? In this chapter, we talk about how to distribute them on your pages and how to determine the number of times you need to use them. We also discuss how to maintain your keywords. Unfortunately, the Internet is ever changing, and so is the market. To maintain your relevancy, you also have to adjust and update your keywords regularly, both in importance and frequency. But not to worry: There are tools out there that help you measure your keywords' performance and analyze your competition's keywords, and we show you how to use them

## Understanding Keyword Frequency and Distribution

Keyword *frequency* and *distribution* are two factors that marketers look closely at in SEO land. Keyword *frequency* refers to the number of times a keyword is used on a web page. Any word (or phrase) is considered a keyword if it's used at least twice on the page. (Note that search engines

do not include stop words such as *and, the, a*, and so forth as keywords, although they may be part of keyword phrases.)

Keyword *distribution* measures whether a keyword is evenly distributed throughout the page and the site. It's important to make sure that your keywords appear throughout the page but especially right up front because search engine spiders generally put more weight on the first 200 words, including words in your navigation, headings, and so on. Make sure to remember to sprinkle the keywords evenly throughout the page in a normal writing fashion. Natural-sounding text is easier to read and scores better with search engines.

You can visualize keyword distribution if you imagine all the content of a web page arranged horizontally in a box, so that the beginning of the page is at the far left and the last words on the page are at the right edge. Figure 5-1 shows the distribution of a keyword on a given page. These charts show how often a keyword phrase [peanut butter] occurs many times near the beginning of the page, a couple of times near the middle of the page, with another sprinkling of uses near the end. Although a more even distribution would be better, search engines could tell from this distribution that the word [peanut butter] is an important keyword for this web page. Larger View
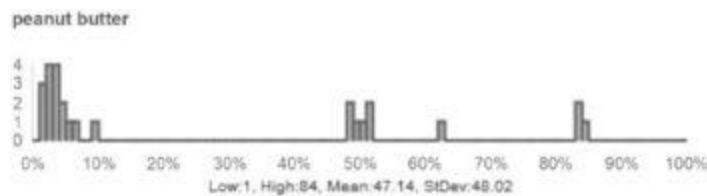
Figure 5-1: A linear distribution chart for a keyword across a web page

In order to have proper keyword distribution, you can't clutter up your page with keywords or just dump them on the page. When writing your text, form sentences that use those keywords. Remember what we said about keyword phrases as well. Search engine users are getting more sophisticated these days and they're entering search queries that contain four or more words instead of just two or three. If you're a good writer, you're going to have to tame some of those habits you learned while writing papers. Good writers are encouraged to use synonyms and rephrase things to keep from being too repetitive. This makes a document easier to read, surely, but it won't help with your site rankings. Because your search engine ranking is going to be measured using a math equation, it's better to think of your site in terms of supplying the equation with numbers.

For instance, if you want to rank high for a query like [classic cars], you're going to have to keep using the words *classic cars* in your page instead of using *these* and *them* and so forth. Use discretion when doing this; otherwise, your page could become unpleasant to read. A good example of how to properly spread keywords is this book. Notice how many times we say a particular word, like *keyword*, and how we distribute it through the text. We don't say "Choose your keywords during your keyword research for keyword optimization purposes using keyword tools." That level of repetition is unnatural-sounding. Instead, we mention keywords every now and then, when it's appropriate. On the other hand, we don't just say *keyword* once and then spend the rest of our time trying to find flowery ways to refer to keywords. Your competition is a good way to get an idea of what looks natural to search engines. For more on how to analyze your competition's pages, read Book III, Chapter 1.

REMEMBER Remember that search engines count every instance of a word on a web page (except if that word appears in a graphic — computers can't "read" images). This includes all words in the article text plus words in headings, navigation elements, links, and HTML tags. Here's an example, and remember this is just a recommended guideline, of how you might evenly distribute a main keyword throughout a page that had 750 words divided into five paragraphs:

- Once in the `Title` tag
- Once or twice in the description `Meta` tag (in the HTML code)
- Once or twice in the keywords `Meta` tag (in the HTML code)
- Once in the first sentence of *on-page* (user visible) text
- Twice in the first 200 words (including the first sentence)
- Once each in paragraphs two, three, and four
- Once or twice in the last paragraph

On the flip side, there is such a thing as using too many keywords — that's how you venture into the realm of spam through keyword stuffing. (Refer back to spam definitions in Book I, Chapter 6.) Remember our sample sentence about keywords from a few paragraphs ago? That's a stuffed sentence. There's no guaranteed magic number for keyword frequency, but it's a good rule of thumb to keep your keywords below 5 percent of the total number of words on the page. The better way to do it is to make it sound natural as compared to your competition. Use a keyword too often, and you could trip an alarm on a keyword-stuffing filter. Keywords repeated too often also work against user retention and could bring down the conversion rate. For a commercial website, you want to keep customers around so they'll make purchases, and you risk driving them away with too much repetition. For an informational or reference website, the goal is to have as many visitors as possible stick around and read the information available. Badly written text does not make someone want to stay on your website. Figure 5-2 shows a made-up example of a web page with keyword stuffing.
Larger View

Figure 5-2: This web page needlessly repeats the keyword [peanut butter]. Not only is this bad writing, but also it could be considered keyword stuffing

📑 **TECHNICAL STUFF** Want to make sure a search engine doesn't miss your keywords? You can draw more attention to keywords by applying special formatting, such as strong (`strong`) or emphasis (`em`), changing the font size, or using `Heading` tags. Putting them in the page titles (in the HTML `Title` tags) and the description and keywords `Meta` tags (also in the HTML code) is also recommended.

Adjusting Keywords

After you optimize your website for your selected keywords, be aware that your job is not done. Search engine optimization involves continual monitoring, testing, and tracking. You need to keep track of how your keywords are performing as you go along. If a keyword is not drawing in as much traffic as you think it should be, or it's drawing in the wrong kind of traffic (visitors who

don't convert), it's time to go in and change it. (This is why you do a bunch of research into your competition, and look up synonyms while you're at it.)

If a keyword is not working out, sitting around and hoping it eventually will is not going to increase your ranking. SEO is not an exact science; it requires tweaking, fixing, and adjusting things. If one keyword is not working for you, perhaps its synonym might. If you find that you're getting traffic but no conversions, that's a sign that you need to look deeper into whether this is a useful keyword or if you're just wasting time trying to fight that battle.

> It's more than okay to go in and adjust your keywords as needed. Do some testing between different keywords and compare the results to find your best performers. If a word's not working for you, stop using it! There are words out there that *will* bring your targeted audience, and all you need to do is make the proper adjustments to find them.

Updating Keywords

The thing about keyword maintenance is that it's not an exact science. There is no one guaranteed keyword out there that will always bring you a ton of traffic today and into the future. For one thing, no one knows what the Internet will look like two years from now, let alone five or ten. Vernacular changes very rapidly. In 2000, Google was a small upstart search engine; today, Google so dominates the industry that it's become a word in the dictionary and is often used as a verb. You can't stay still in the online world. Things that are common sense to us today might not stay that way.

> For example, in the late '90s, you used a cellular telephone. Nowadays, it's a cell phone. If you're abroad, you don't use a cell phone, you use a mobile. A term that made sense as a keyword five years ago might not make sense today. The moral of the story is that you can't do your keyword research once and then say you're done. You have to keep researching as you go along, especially if you're making plans for the long term.

Using Tools to Aid Keyword Placement

Just as there are tools for measuring how often a keyword is searched (which we cover in Chapter 4 of this minibook), there are also tools out there that aid you in researching keyword frequency and distribution on a certain page. You want to use these tools to check out the competition. You need to know not only what keywords your competitors are using but also in what frequency.

There are a couple of ways you can go about this. You can count the keywords by hand and probably drive yourself nuts. Or you can use a helpful tool called the Single Page Analyzer. The *Single Page Analyzer* measures and analyzes how effectively `Meta` tags are written, how often you are using your intended keywords compared to the total number of words on your web page, and other useful word metrics about the page. This tool measures frequency and prominence and graphs the distribution of keywords. Figures 5-3, 5-4, and 5-5 show a few things about a page's keywords reported by the Single Page Analyzer of the SEOToolSet.
Larger View

Figure 5-3: The Single Page Analyzer looks at a page's `Meta` tags and highlights the use of keywords

Larger View

Figure 5-4: The Single Page Analyzer reports the linear distribution of a keyword on a page

Larger View

Figure 5-5: The Single Page Analyzer also maps prominent words used on the page in relation to one another

REMEMBER Using a page analyzer allows you to analyze competing web pages that are currently ranking in order to see what the search engines prefer and why. We also advise you to keep track of the results using an Excel spreadsheet (see Chapter 2 of this minibook for more details on that). This is something you should do periodically in order to keep track of the progress of your competition.

You can find many page analyzers out there, but the one we discuss is available within SEOToolSet Lite, which you can subscribe to for free at http://www.seotoolset.com/tools/plans-pricing/. To use it, choose Single Page Analyzer from the Page Analysis menu, and then simply type your website's URL into the query window. Click the Analyze button, and after a minute, you see a results page like the one shown in Figures 5-3, 5-4, and 5-5 for our training site, www.peanutbutterville.com.

The Single Page Analyzer shows your SEOToolSet `Meta` tag information under the Tag Information tab, as shown in Figure 5-3.

In this section of the report, under the heading Contents, you can see all the text the Single Page Analyzer found in your `Title` tag and `Meta` tags for this page. `Title` tags are what you name your web pages in the HTML coding of the site. Placing a keyword or keywords in your page titles is very important. The `Meta` description and keywords tags are other items in the HTML code at the top of each page. These are not visible to the user, but search engine spiders read them and use the words in these fields to help determine how relevant your web page is and where it should be ranked for search queries.

The Single Page Analyzer can let you know whether a title is too long or too short, too many or not enough keywords are used, and you're in danger of a spam violation.

The next two tabs on the report reveal important information about keywords used on the page. For instance, you can see all the words and phrases that appear frequently on the page by using the Keyword Density tab. And the Linear Distribution tab shows how the Single Page Analyzer visualizes the linear distribution of your intended keywords throughout the page, as shown in Figure 5-4. Bigger bumps on the graph mean the keyword was used a lot in that part of the page.

In Figure 5-5, you see the prominent words used on a page in a visualization like a topographical map (under the Keywords tab). Words that are used the most appear as high elevations, or

darker colors. How closely associated those words seem to be in the page's content is represented by how closely the words are positioned on the map. The keyword map lets you see, at a glance, whether the page is hitting its primary keyword targets.

Using the SEOToolSet for a broader view

Similar to the Single Page Analyzer is a *multipage analyzer*, which measures the keyword density of multiple web pages so that you can check out what your competition does and compare it with your own website. Reading a multipage analyzer is a lot like reading a single-page analyzer, so we don't break that one down separately for you. Unfortunately, multipage analyzers are generally available only as a paid option (for example, you'd need to sign up for SEOToolSet Pro to use our Multi Page Analyzer tool), but they are very useful. We cover how to mimic the multipage analyzer in Book III, Chapter 2.

REMEMBER There are no guarantees when it comes to SEO. The tools we describe in this chapter are just that, tools — they can only help you do a task more easily, not tell you what to do. Search engine optimization is not only about keywords, either. If you only adjust your keywords, you only upgrade your page to an okay page instead of an excellent page. Competitor research (Book III), site design (Book IV), content (Book V), linking (Book VI), site environment (Book VII), and analysis (Book VIII) are all vital components of succeeding.

The more practice you have with researching, updating, and maintaining keywords, the less you need tools like the Single Page Analyzer. When you have more experience, you can look at a page and see if the keyword density needs tweaking, but it takes practice and patience to get to that point!

REMEMBER Maintaining keywords is only one part of search engine optimization. The gold standard of a website is to achieve algorithmic immunity. *Algorithmic immunity* means that your page is the least imperfect it can be, across the board. So if the search engines' algorithms were to change (as they do frequently), say, lessening the importance of links and stressing the importance of on-page factors, your website wouldn't be affected because it's optimized across the board. Keywords are important, certainly, but there are also many other factors to consider before your page is the least imperfect it can be.

Book III: Competitive Positioning

Chapter List

Chapter 1: Identifying Your Competitors

Chapter 2: Competitive Research Techniques and Tools

Chapter 3: Applying Collected Data

Larger View

Chapter 1: Identifying Your Competitors

In This Chapter

- **Getting to know your competition**
- **Figuring out the real competition**
- **Knowing your strengths and weaknesses**
- **Looking at conversion in a competitive market**
- **Discovering the difference between conversion and traffic**

As with any business, you need to know what you're up against. Knowing who your competition is and figuring out how to beat them are the hallmarks of good business planning. Online businesses are like any business in that regard, but online and traditional businesses have some slight differences in how you build a competitive strategy, especially when it comes to search engine optimization.

In this chapter, we discuss how to figure out who your competition is and how to make their strengths and weaknesses work for you. You figure out how to research who your competitors are for the coveted top search engine rankings. Also, your competition in the brick-and-mortar world might not be the same as your competitors online. Finally, it's one thing to know your competition; it's another to put that information to use. Not to worry: We've got you covered in this chapter.

Getting to Know the Competition

With any business, you want to feel out the market. Whom are you competing with, and how are they doing? This is important because it gives you an idea of how to run your own business. If others are succeeding in your market space, they're doing something right. You also need to know what other people are doing wrong so that you can capitalize on that and avoid their mistakes.

Say that your business is customizing classic cars. You restore, repaint, and rev up any old model American car. To figure out your competition, sit down and think about the kind of competitors you think would be in your market. Who is your competition? Other classic car customization places. Other people who do paint and body work. Other businesses that offer simple customization services. Write them all down, even ones you think would be only loosely connected. Figure 1-1 is a brainstorming graph of your business and what you do that links your competition to you.
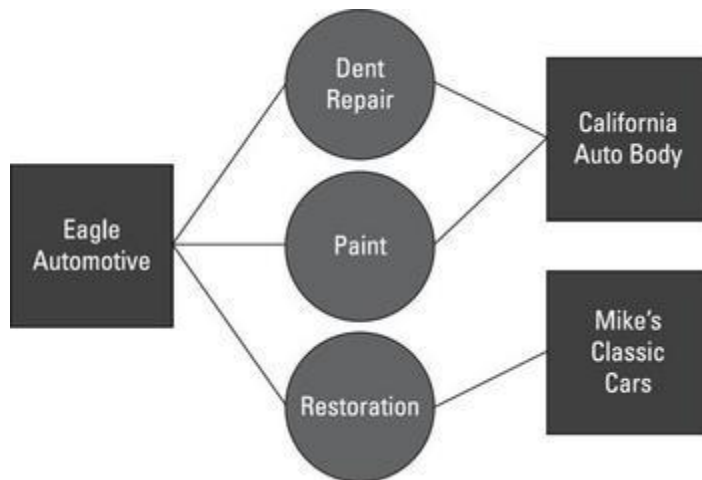
Figure 1-1: A bubble graph is a good organizational technique for assessing your competition

Research all these other companies and consider the following questions about these areas of their businesses:

- **Tactics:** How do they advertise?
- **Similarities:** What services do they offer that are similar to yours?
- **Differences:** What services do they offer that are different?
- **Success rate:** Do they get more or less business than you?
- **Opportunities:** What are some of the things they are doing that you could be doing, too?

TIP This approach is a good way to start market research. You also need to remember to continue doing this because businesses, and especially Internet businesses, are subject to changing their tactics and offerings. Every market differs, but you probably want to do a review of your competitors four to six times a year.

The other important thing to keep in mind about researching your competition using the search engines is just how much a search engine's results can differ in a day. And because different search engines use different algorithms, the page Google ranks number one — say, [classic car customization] — could be in an entirely different position over on Yahoo and in yet another position for Bing. You have no guarantee that all three engines even have the same page indexed.

REMEMBER Another problem is that sometimes a spider has not crawled a page in the index for more than two weeks (or longer). Although two weeks is not a long time to us, in those two weeks, that website could have been taken offline, been completely redone to reflect changes in the business, or had screwy code attached to attain a higher rank for the site. Search engines are not infallible, so it's best to continue to research the competition often to maintain the most up-to-date information possible.

Also, the playing field changes between the brick-and-mortar world and the online business world, so make a list and check it multiple times. Just because you have a cross-town rival for

your business doesn't mean that he's online or that you won't have other competitors to worry about. In the real world, you see competitors coming. Online, they appear from nowhere. You have to be vigilant.

Figuring Out the Real Competition

Part of knowing whom you're competing against is knowing who is actually drawing the customers you want and who is just limping along, especially when it comes to search engine optimization. Who you think your competition should be and who actually pops up on those search results pages are sometimes two completely different things.

Doing a quick search on Google for your business's *keywords* (the words people use when doing a search) might turn up those that you think of as your competition, as well as others that are completely out of the blue. Book II tells you how to pull together a keyword list that gives you a good starting point for finding your competition. Take a typical search, as in Figure 1-2, which shows the SERP (search engine results page) for [classic car customization].
Larger View
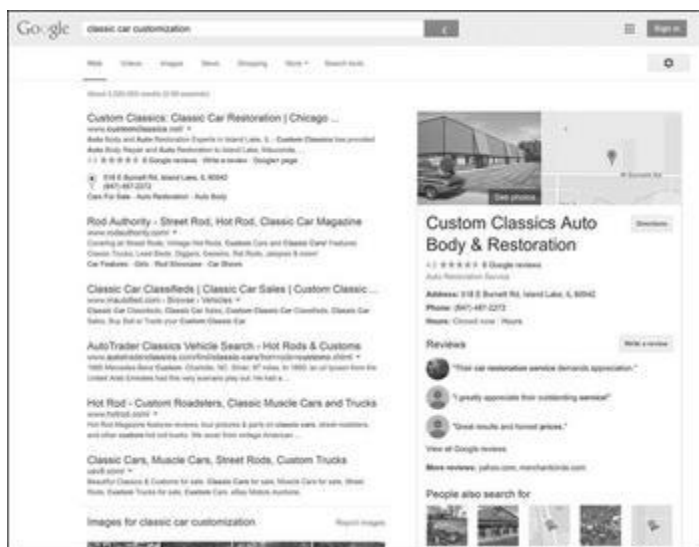
Figure 1-2: A Google search results page for [classic car customization]

The search results page yields a mixture of listings for websites related to the search term:
- Classic car classifieds
- Customization and restoration businesses
- Classic car magazines
- Videos from classic car shows

Note the different types of businesses. Are they what you'd thought they'd be? These sites represent the true competition in the search engine world for [classic car customization] because they're ranking high for those keywords. Try out other, more specialized keywords as well, and make note of who's ranking for them. Are they actual classic-car-related businesses like our example? Or are they something that's only tangentially related to classic car customization?

TIP Another good idea is to do a search for your actual business name to see if your brand is ranking. If you don't occupy the number one position for your business name, find out who does and what they're doing to rank higher. Because if they've got the spot you want, by using *your name*, they're obviously doing something right.

For example, going back to your car customization business, say that your biggest competitor in your hometown is Bob's Customized Classics. Bob is everywhere you look. He's got print ads, he's got billboards, and he's got a *really* annoying commercial. He markets himself very well. But when you go online and do an online search for your keywords [classic car customization], Bob is nowhere to be found. In fact, you find out that Bob doesn't even have a website! What you see ranking number one for your most important keyword phrase is Motormouth Mabel's Classic Car Boutique down in Boca Raton.

Mabel's website is gorgeous. It has an SEO-friendly design, is full of spiderable content, doesn't have Flash, and contains plenty of high-quality links — it's even optimized for mobile devices (read more about mobile optimization in Book IV, Chapter 3). Mabel, not Bob, is your real competition when it comes to the Internet because when people do a search in the search engines, they're going to go to her instead of Bob. So although Bob is your competition in the brick-and-mortar world of your hometown, Mabel's the one you need to be studying if you want to get anywhere with your online presence.

TIP Your other competitors might not even be related to classic car customization products or services, but because they rank high for your keywords, you should study them to understand their online methodology. After you know their tactics, you can figure out how to beat them. If you're doing searches for a keyword and none of the competitors are even in the same ballpark in terms of your business, you might have a keyword that isn't appropriate to your business, and you should reconsider optimizing for it.

Knowing Thyself: Recognizing Your Business Advantages

Part of being able to market yourself is actually understanding your business and your niche. This might seem like common sense, but the truth is a lot of businesses out there can't decide exactly what they are and what they're selling. Knowing what your strengths and weaknesses are gives you a huge advantage because you can work on reducing your weaknesses while emphasizing your strengths.

The first part of knowing yourself is figuring out what you do best. In our example, you customize classic cars, certainly. But maybe what you do best is repair work. You can take a rusted-out hunk of a Comet and have it up and running within weeks, with a shiny new paint job to boot. So one of the strengths you would play to on your website is restoration. Emphasize that on your website. Have a section devoted entirely to car restoration, with subsections linking to that.

The lighter side of competitive research

Doing competitive research can also be a good way to think up new tools, tricks, or toys to add to your website to attract users. You may discover that your competitors are writing confusing "How-To" articles that would be much clearer as instructional videos. Or they may have an article listing the latest baby names, which could easily be turned into a fun tool — take the initiative and create it. Users love interactive content. Be continuously looking for creative ways to make your site more interesting and more useful to your visitors.

Think about what makes you different than Bob or Mabel. Bob does restoration as well, but he doesn't have an Internet presence like you do. That's a point for you and gives you an advantage over Bob. Mabel has a gorgeous, SEO-friendly website, but she doesn't have much on that website about actual car restoration, so there's an advantage point for you to build on.

Knowing what your weaknesses are is also very important. Mabel's got a great website. Your website is not as good (yet). She's also a national business, while you are still fairly local. Those might be points you want to build on in order to make yourself equal with your competition. Streamline your website, and filter out or downplay your weaknesses. If necessary, completely take your site down and rebuild it from scratch.

TIP Be aware of what makes you different. If you offer a service that many other people are offering, what makes you stick out from the rest of the pack? Do you offer other services that the competition doesn't? Are you quicker or more efficient? Make sure to keep a note of these differences when researching the competition. What are they doing, and how do you do it better? Or how will you do it better? Make yourself valuable to the customer.

Compare your website to your competition's: You have to make yourself equal before you can set yourself apart. Make sure you match what your competition offers in your own way and then provide content that explains why you're unique, more trustworthy, and better overall. In other words, make it obvious that you're the first choice to fit the visitor's needs. *You* know that you are made of awesome; now you just have to convince everyone else.

Looking at Conversion as a Competitive Measure

When you go through your competitors' sites, you're essentially looking for anything they have that gives them an advantage — any special content that appeals only to a certain sector or that is attracting links. Obviously, you're not using their sites as a blueprint to copy, but there's something about venturing off your own website and seeing things from a visitor's eye that can alert you to holes you would have missed otherwise.

REMEMBER If you are bringing your business online, you're going to want a return on your investment. If you have a shopping site, you want sales. If you have an information site, you want people to hang out and read your content. If you're advertising a newsletter, you want people to sign up for it. These user responses are examples of *conversions* (the actions that a website wants visitors to take). Getting conversions, not just visitors, is your goal if you have a website.

Your keywords are an important part of this. A good, relevant keyword for which your site ranks highly brings people to your site, and if your bottom line depends on the number of *page views* you're getting (how many people are viewing your website), you're pretty much set. However, if your keywords aren't providing you with conversions, they could be actually doing you more harm than good. Keywords that aren't generating conversions won't pay for the time, labor, or the bandwidth they take up.

Here is a conversion checklist to help you decide whether your keywords are effective:
- Is your keyword bringing in traffic?
- Is that traffic bringing you conversions?
- Are you able to sustain yourself based on those conversions? For example, say you have a keyword that brings only one or two conversions a year, but those conversions are worth two million dollars each. That keyword is a keeper.
- Is this a great keyword for branding or for an emerging product area? The only reason to keep a keyword that isn't earning you money is if that keyword has value as a brand or future investment.

Conversions also depend on your competition. You want to do better than the other guy. It's a simple fact of marketing. But you want higher conversions versus high traffic. A website that pulls in 1,200 visitors per month but has only three conversions is less of a threat than a website that has 10 visitors a month but six conversions. Your goal is to achieve high traffic numbers with a high conversion rate. Your competition is the guy who already figured out how to do that

Recognizing the Difference between Traffic and Conversion

While you're looking at your competitors, make sure that you're also looking at which keywords are making sales versus drawing lots of window shoppers. Take note of how specialized they are. People search for broader terms when they're still doing their research and more specialized terms when they're getting ready to make a purchase. Your competitor who is ranked high for a general keyword might not be raking in the sales like the competitor dominating all the niche

terms. Sometimes it takes users a lot of time and research to make a purchasing decision, so conversions may be slow to happen on broad terms.

Mabel's Classic Car Boutique might have a fantastic, high-ranking website, but if she has very few conversions, she's not really someone you should be looking at when trying to set the bar for yourself in the competitive market. High traffic does not always equal a high conversion rate.

Although a website may be high ranking and well designed for prime search engine optimization, it's pretty much moot if the site does not provide what the user is looking for. If your site's revenue depends entirely on traffic, you want a lot of traffic. But even in that scenario, you also want that traffic to stay around and visit the other pages within your site. Web pages with a lot of traffic and a high *bounce rate* (which means the visitor didn't check out more than one page on the site or look at the main site for longer than a few seconds) aren't web pages with a high conversion rate.

On the flip side, you might have a website that provides a newsletter, and the only way to get conversions is to convince people to sign up for your newsletter. A lot of traffic is good, yes, but it matters only if the people who are coming to your site do what you want them to do. If no one signs up for your newsletter, you get no conversions.

WARNING! Along the same lines, if you have a keyword that draws in a lot of traffic but doesn't provide you with very many conversions, the keyword could be more trouble than it's worth. It's using up bandwidth and server space to handle all the traffic, not to mention all the time and effort you spent doing your SEO, but it's not providing you with any income.

A good example of the difference between a lot of traffic and actual conversions is a company we know that needed some optimizing. This company did well for itself in the mail order business, but not so well online. Its website was not at all search engine–friendly. After determining that changing the site's technology was not an option, the company created a research or content site, as a sister site to the original, that was designed to draw in traffic and then send people to the actual, not-optimized website, where they could make purchases. For a while, this worked well, with increased traffic and sales, until the company decided to pull down the sister site because the company felt it was drawing traffic away from its original site! Never mind that the sister site was designed to bring in traffic in order to create conversions for the original site.

The lesson here is that the company shot itself in the foot by confusing traffic with conversions. The sister site increased its sales by drawing in the window shoppers and funneling the true customers to the original website. Keep this in mind while checking your *server logs* (records that measure the amount of traffic your site receives), and don't freak out if you're not getting insanely huge numbers. If you're making a lot of sales, it really doesn't matter.

Determining True Competitors by Their Measures

Knowing your competition is very important. In terms of competition, you have three basic types: the local brick-and-mortar business, the online powerhouse, and the large corporate brand name. These are all different markets and need to be treated differently in terms of competing with them. What you need to do after doing the research on your competition is to figure out whom you're really competing against. Look at all the information you've gathered. Is Bob, your local business competitor, your main competition, or is it Mabel's online website? Or are you competing against the big kids on the block, like Ford and Chevy? It all depends on who you are and what you're trying to sell. Bob is not your competition online because he doesn't even have a website! Mabel pops up first in the search engine results, but she doesn't do quite what you do. And as for the large corporations, it's probably not even worth trying to compete with them for their broad terms.

Consider another example. Say that your brother owns his own car customization business, but he restores only Volkswagen vans. He doesn't want to rank for the term [Volkswagen] because

his is a specialized business and Volkswagen is too broad a term. Most people searching for [Volkswagen] alone would probably not be looking to restore a Volkswagen van. If he were to focus solely on the keyword [Volkswagen], it would do him more harm than good because the term is too broad and is already a brand name. What he would want to do is rank for the keyword phrase [Volkswagen van restoration] or [Volkswagen bus restoration].

REMEMBER Brands are something to watch out for. Most people doing a search for [Nike], for example, are not actually looking for running shoes. They're looking for the brand itself. Trying to rank for the keyword [Nike] is probably not in your best interest because Nike markets a brand more than it does a singular product. If you were trying to sell running shoes while also trying to rank for the keyword [Nike], it's probably not going to work very well. You are much better off concentrating on your niche market than trying to tackle the big brands.

So assume that you've crossed out the big corporations and the smaller businesses that aren't really relevant to what you're doing. You've got a list of web pages that are your true competition. They're the ones that customize classic cars, just as you do, and rank high on the search engine results page. So how are they doing it?

There are tools out there to help with determining how your competition is doing. comScore (www.comscore.com), Compete (www.compete.com), and Hitwise (http://www.experian.com/hitwise/) are three such websites that offer tools designed for online marketers, giving them statistics and a competitive advantage. These tools measure or gauge Internet traffic to websites. They collect Internet usage data from panels, toolbars, and ISP log panels. Essentially, they can measure who's coming in to your website and from where. They also can gauge your competition. They can tell you how much your competition is bidding for a certain keyword, how much they spent on that keyword, and more. They can also track your brand name. They're statistical tools that online advertisers and site owners use to rank sites in various categories on estimated traffic.

WARNING! Unfortunately, all these services charge a fee for their services. They actually cost a pretty penny. Compete starts at $249 per month for an individual plan. Hitwise and comScore do not publish their pricing. All three are useful tools for measuring the traffic to your site and where that traffic came from, along with the traffic on your competitors' websites.

Sweating the Small Stuff

Take advantage of what you can control. Every little piece of information counts, whether it's market research, what kind of traffic your competition is getting, what keywords they're using, or something else. *Do* sweat the small stuff: It really counts in search engine optimization.

But don't get discouraged because of all the competition out there: Many companies out there don't know *anything* about search engine optimization. Most major companies don't even bother with it. Your competition probably doesn't know as much as you know at this point, and you can use that to your advantage.

Chapter 2: Competitive Research Techniques and Tools

In This Chapter

- **Finding out how to equal your high-ranking competitors**
- **Calculating what your site needs to gain high ranking**
- **Running a Page Analyzer**
- **Using Excel to help analyze your competition**
- **Discovering other tools for analyzing your competitors**
- **Diving into SERP research**

If you followed our suggestions in Chapter 1 of this minibook, you spent some time finding out who your real competitors are on the web, and you might have discovered that they are quite different from your real-world, brick-and-mortar competitors. You also found out that for each of your main keyword phrases, you probably have a different set of competitors. If you're starting to feel overwhelmed and thinking that you'll never be able to compete in such a busy, complicated marketplace, take heart! In this chapter, we show you how to get "under the hood" of your competitors' sites and find out why they rank so well.

Realizing That High Rankings are Achievable

No matter what type of market your business competes in — whether broad-based or niche, large or small, national or local, corporate or home-based — you can achieve high rankings for your Internet pages by applying a little diligence and proper search engine optimization (SEO) techniques.

Your site may not be coming up at the top of search engine results for a specific keyword (yet), but someone else's is. The websites that do rank well for your keywords are there for a reason: The search engines find them the most relevant. So in the online world, those pages are your competitors, and you need to find out what you must do to compete with them. What is the barrier to entry into their league? You need a model for what to change, and analyzing the pages that do rank well can start to fill in that model.

REMEMBER The top-ranking web pages are not doing things perfectly. That would require that they know and understand every single one of Google's more than 200 ranking signals and are targeting them perfectly, which is highly improbable. However, the websites that rank highly for your keyword are working successfully with the search engines for the keyword you want. The web pages that appear in the search results may not be perfect, but if they rank at the top, they are the least imperfect of all the possible sites indexed for that keyword. They represent a model that you can emulate so that you can join their ranks. To emulate them, you need to examine them closely.

Getting All the Facts on Your Competitors

Identifying your competition on the web can be as easy as typing your main keywords into Google and seeing which pages rank above your own. (**Note:** If you know that your audience uses another search engine heavily, run your search there as well. But with a market share of more than 64 percent in the U.S. and even higher globally, we think Google offers the most efficient research tool.)

You want to know which web pages make it to the first search engine results page. After you weed out the Wikipedia articles and other non-competitive results, what are the top four or five web pages listed? Write down their web addresses (such as www.wiley.com) and keep them handy. Or, if you did more in-depth competition gathering, which we explain in Chapter 1 of this minibook, bring those results along. We're going to take you on a research trip to find out what makes those sites rank so well for your keywords.

TIP You need to know as much as you can about the web pages that rank well for your keywords. The types of things you need to know about your competitors' websites can be divided into three categories:
- On-page elements (such as content and `Title` tags and metadata)
- Links (incoming links to the page from other web pages, which are called *backlinks*, as well as outbound links to other pages)
- Site architecture

One basic strategy of SEO is this: Make yourself equal before you set yourself apart. But you want to analyze the sites that rank well because they are the least imperfect. You can work to

make your site equal to them in all the ranking factors you know about first. When your page can play on a level field with the least imperfect sites, you'll see your own rankings moving up. After that, you can play with different factors and try to become *better* than your competition and outrank them. That's when the fun of SEO really starts! But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Calculating the Requirements for Rankings

As you look at your keyword competitors, you need to figure out what it takes to play in their league. What is the bare minimum of effort required in order to rank in the top ten results for this keyword? In some cases, you might decide the effort required is not worth it. However, figuring out what kind of effort is required takes research. You can look at each of the ranking web pages and see them as a human does to get an overall impression. But search engines are your true audience (for SEO, anyway), and they are deaf, dumb, and blind. They can't physically experience the images, videos, music, tricks, games, bells, and whistles that may be on a site. They can only read the site's text, count everything that can be boiled down to numbers, and analyze the data. To understand what makes a site rank in a search engine, you need research tools that help you think like a search engine.

Table 2-1 outlines the different research tools and procedures we cover in this chapter for doing competitor research. Although SEO tools abound, you can generally categorize them into several basic types of information-gathering: on-page factors, web server factors, relevancy, and site architecture. For each category of information gathering, we've picked out one or two tools and procedures to show you.

Table 2-1: Information-Gathering Tools for Competitor Research
➡Open table as spreadsheet

Tool or Method	Type of Info the Tool Gathers
Page Analyzer	On-page SEO elements and content
Server Response Checker	Web server problems or health
Google [link:domain.com] query	Expert relevancy and popularity (how many links a site has)
Yahoo Site Explorer	Expert relevancy and popularity
View Page Source	Content, HTML (how clean the code is)
Google [site:domain.com] query	Site architecture (how many pages are indexed)
Microsoft Excel	Not an information-gathering tool, but a handy tool for tracking all the data for analysis and comparison

Of the three types of information you want to know about your competitors' web pages — their on-page elements, links, and architecture — a good place to start is the on-page elements. You want to find out what keywords your competitors use and how they're using them, look at the websites' content, and analyze their other on-page factors.

Behind every web page's pretty face is a plain skeleton of black-and-white HTML called source code. You can see a web page's source code easily by choosing Source or Page Source from your browser's View menu. If you understand HTML, you can look under the hood of a competitor's web page. However, you don't have to understand HTML for this book, or even to do search engine optimization. We're going to show you a tool that can read and digest a page's source code for you and then spit out some statistics that you'll find very useful.

We do recommend that you know at least some HTML or learn it in the future: Your search engine optimization campaign will be a great deal easier for you to manage if you can make the changes to your site on your own. You can check out the many free HTML tutorials online, such as the one by W3Schools (http://www.w3schools.com/html/), if you need a primer on HTML.

TIP Cleaning up the on-page elements of your website alone may give you a lot of bang for your SEO buck. Because they're on your own website, where you have a lot of control, changes such as modifying your Meta tags should take little effort. Often sites see major leaps in their search engine ranking just by fixing what's out of whack in their web pages.

REMEMBER You may be tempted, in the early stages of your research, to conclude that a competitor's site doesn't deserve its high rankings. But don't. As you continue to collect data, you will discover why it ranks well. Gathering accurate data, and plenty of it, can mean the difference between drawing brash conclusions and forming an effective strategy.

Grasping the Tools for Competitive Research: The Single Page Analyzer

The Single Page Analyzer tool tells you what a web page's keywords are (by identifying every word and phrase that's used at least twice) and computes their density. Keyword density is a percentage indicating the number of times the keyword occurs compared to the total number of words in the page. We also cover the Single Page Analyzer in Book II, Chapter 5, as it applies to analyzing your own website. When you run a competitor's page through the Single Page Analyzer, it lets you analyze the on-page factors that help the web page rank well in search engines. Subscribers to SEOToolSet Pro can simply run the Multi Page Analyzer, but for those just using the Single Page Analyzer included with a free subscription to SEOToolSet Lite, we've included a step-by-step process to build a comparison tool for yourself.

Because you're going to run the Single Page Analyzer report for several of your competitors' sites and work with some figures, it's time to grab a pencil and paper. Better yet, open a spreadsheet program such as Microsoft Excel, which is a search engine optimizer's best friend. Excel comes with most Microsoft Office packages, so if you have Word, chances are you already have Excel, too. Microsoft Excel allows you to arrange and compare data in rows and columns, similar to a paper ledger or accounts book. (We talk about Microsoft Excel, but you might have another spreadsheet program such as Google Sheets, and that's fine, too.)

Here's how to set up your spreadsheet:

In Excel, open a new spreadsheet and name it Competitors.

Type a heading for column A that says URL or something that makes sense to you.

In this first column, you're going to list your competitors' web pages, one per row.

Under column A's heading, type the URL (the web page address, such as www.bruceclay.com) for each competing web page (the pages that are ranking well in search results for your keyword phrase), one address per cell.

You can just copy and paste the URLs individually from the search results page if that's easier than typing them.

Now you're ready to run the Single Page Analyzer report for each competitor. You can use the free version of this tool available through our website. Here's how to run the Page Analyzer:

Go to www.seotoolset.com/tools/free-tools/.

In the Single Page Analyzer section, enter a competitor's URL (such as www.competitor.com) in the Page URL text box.

Click the Run Page Analyzer button and wait while the report is prepared.

While you run this report for one of your own competitors, we're going to use a Single Page Analyzer report we ran on a competitor for our classic custom cars website. The whole report contains a lot of useful information (including ideas for keywords you might want to use on your own site), but what we're trying to gather now are some basic counts of the competitor's on-page content. So we want you to zero in on a row of data that begins with "Used Words," about halfway down the report and shown in Figure 2-1, which shows a quick summary of some important page content counts.

Larger View

Figure 2-1: The summary row of a competitor's on-page elements from a Single Page Analyzer report

Next, you're going to record these summary counts in your spreadsheet. We suggest you create some more column headings in your spreadsheet, one for each of the following seven bold items (which we also explain here):

Title: Shows the number of words in the page's Title tag (which is part of the HTML code that gets read by the search engines).

Meta Description: Shows the number of words in the description Meta tag (also part of the page's HTML code).

Meta Keywords: Shows the number of words in the keywords Meta tag.

Headings: The number of headings in the text (using HTML heading tags).

ALT Tags: The number of Alt attributes (descriptive text placed in the HTML for an image file) assigned to images on the page.

Body Words: The number of words in the page text that's readable by humans.

All Words: The total number of words in the page content, including onscreen text plus HTML tags, navigation, and other.

Now that you have the first several columns labeled, start typing in the counts from the report for this competitor. Run the Single Page Analyzer report for each of your other competitors' URLs.

You're just gathering data at this point, so let yourself get into the rhythm of running the report, filling in the data, and then doing it all over again. After you've run the Single Page Analyzer for all your competitors, you should have a spreadsheet that looks something like Figure 2-2.

Larger View

Figure 2-2: The spreadsheet showing data gathered by running the Single Page Analyzer

After you gather some raw numbers, what can you do with them? You're trying to find out what's "normal" for the sites that are ranking well for your keyword. So far you've gathered data on eight different factors that are part of the search engines' ranking systems. Now it's just simple math to calculate an average for each factor. You can do it the old-fashioned way, but Excel makes this super-easy if you use the AutoSum feature (found in the Formulas toolbar). Click to highlight a cell below the column you want to average and then click formulas, then AutoSum, and then Average. When you select Average, Excel automatically selects the column of numbers above the field containing the average calculation, so press Enter to approve the selection. Your average appears in the highlighted field, as shown in Figure 2-3.

Larger View

Figure 2-3: Excel's tools let you compute averages effortlessly

You can create an average for each of the columns in literally one step. (You can see why we like Excel!) In Figure 2-3, if you look at the outlined cell to the right of the Average cell, notice the slightly enlarged black square in the lower-right corner. Click and drag that little square to the right, all the

way across all the columns that have data, and then let go. Averages should now display for each column because you just copied the AutoSum Average function across all the columns where you have data.

You can next run a Single Page Analyzer on your own website and compare these competitor averages to your own figures to see how far off you are from your target. For now, just keep this spreadsheet handy and know that you've taken some good strides down the SEO path of information gathering. In Chapter 3 of this minibook, we go into depth, showing you how to use the data you gathered here, and begin to plan the changes to your website to raise your search engine rankings.

TIP A Multi Page Analyzer makes short work of analyzing all your competitors' web pages at once. Unfortunately, we don't know of any free versions of this tool, but you can subscribe to a number of different SEO tool vendors online that provide this and many other worthwhile tools for a fee, including the SEOToolSet.

Discovering More Tools for Competitive Research

Beyond the Single Page Analyzer, there are some other tricks that you can use to size up your competition. Some of this may seem a little technical, but we introduce each tool and trick as we come to it. We even explain what you need to look for. Don't worry: We won't turn you loose with a bunch of techie reports and expect you to figure out how to read them. In each case, there are specific items you need to look for (and you can pretty much ignore the rest).

Mining the Source Code

Have you ever looked at the underside of a car? Even if it's a shiny new luxury model fresh off the dealer's lot, the underbelly just isn't very pretty. Yet the car's real value is hidden there, in its inner workings. And to a trained mechanic's eye, it can be downright beautiful.

You're going to look at the underside of your competitors' websites, their source code, and identify some important elements. Remember that we're just gathering facts at this point. You want to get a feel for how this web page is put together and notice any oddities. You may find that the page seems to be breaking all the best-practice rules but somehow ranks well anyway — in a case like that, it's obviously doing something else very right (such as having tons of high-quality backlinks pointing to the page). On the other hand, you might discover that this is a very SEO-savvy competitor that could be hard to beat.

To look at the source code of a web page, do the following:

View a competitor's web page (the particular page that ranks well in searches for your keyword, which may or may not be the site's home page) in your browser.

From the View menu, choose Source or Page Source (depending on the browser).

REMEMBER As you look at the source code, keep in mind that the more extra stuff it contains, the more diluted the real content becomes. For good search engine ranking, a web page needs content that's as clean as possible. Too much HTML, script, and coding can slow down page loading time, bog down the search engine spiders, and most importantly, dilute your keyword content and reduce your ranking. Webmasters may not agree with this principle, but from an SEO perspective, a web page should be a lean, mean, content-rich machine. Want to see if your competitor is doing things right? Look for these types of best practices:

Use an external CSS (Cascading Style Sheet) file to control formatting of text and images. Using style sheets eliminates font tags that clutter up the text. Using a CSS that's in an external file gets rid of a whole block of HTML code that could otherwise clog the top section of your web page and slow everything down (search engines especially).

JavaScript code should also be off the page in an external JS file (for the same clutter-busting reasons).

Get to the meat in the first hundred lines. The actual text content (the part users read in the Body section) shouldn't be too far down in the page code. We recommend limiting the code above the first line of user-viewable text overall.

You want to get a feel for how this web page is put together. Pay attention to issues such as:

Doctype: Does it show a Doctype at the top? If so, does the Doctype validate with W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) standards? (Note: We explain this in Book IV, Chapter 4 in our recommendations for your own website.)

Title, description, keywords: Look closely at the Head section (between the opening and closing Head tags). Does it contain the Title, Meta description, and Meta keywords tags? If you ran the Single Page Analyzer for this page, which we describe how to do in the section "Grasping the tools for competitive research: The Single Page Analyzer," earlier in this chapter, you already know these answers, but now notice how the tags are arranged. The best practice for SEO puts them in this order: title, description, keywords. Does the competitor's page do that?

Other Meta tags: Also notice any additional Meta tags ("revisit after" is a popular and perfectly useless one) in the Head section. Webmasters can make up all sorts of creative Meta tags, sometimes with good reasons that may outweigh the cost of expanding the page code. However, if you see that a competitor's page has a hundred different Meta tags, you can be pretty sure it doesn't know much about SEO.

Heading tags: Search engines look for heading tags such as H1, H2, H3, and so forth to confirm what the page is about. It's logical to assume that a site will make its most important concepts look like headings, so these heading tags help search engines determine the page's keywords. See whether and how your competitor uses these tags. (We explain the best practices for heading tags in Book IV, Chapter 1, where we cover good SEO-friendly site design.)

Font tags, JavaScript, CSS: As we mention in the previous set of bullets, if these things show up in the code, the page is weighted down and not very SEO-friendly. Outranking pages with a lot of formatting code might end up being easier than you thought.

Seeing Why Server Setup Makes a Difference

Even after you've checked out the source code for your competitor's pages (which we talk about in the preceding section), you're still in information-gathering mode, sizing up everything you can about your biggest competitors for your chosen keywords. The next step isn't really an on-page element; it's more the foundation of the site. We're looking beyond the page now at the actual process that displays the page, which is on the server level. In this step, you find out how a competitor's server looks to a search engine by running a server response checker utility.

Generally, an SEO-friendly site should be free of server problems such as improper redirects (a command that detours you from one page to another that the search engine either can't follow or is confused by) and other obstacles that can stop a search spider in its tracks. When you run the server

response checker utility, it attempts to crawl the site the same way a search engine spider does and then spits out a report. In the case of our tool (available at no charge as part of the SEOToolSet at www.seotoolset.com), the report lists any indexing obstacles it encounters, such as improper redirects, robot disallows, cloaking, virtual IPs, block lists, and more. Even if a page's content is perfect, a bad server can keep it from reaching its full potential in the search engine rankings.

You can use any server response checker tool you have access to, but we're going to recommend ours because we know it works, it returns all the information we just mentioned, and it's free. Here's how you can run the free SEOToolSet Server Response Checker:

Go to www.seotoolset.com/tools/free-tools/.

Under the heading Check Server Page, enter the URL of the site you want to check in the Your URL text box, and then click the Check Response Headers button.

TECHNICAL STUFF The SEOToolSet Check Server Page tool reads the robots text (.txt) file on a website, which contains instructions for the search spiders when they come to index the site. Because you don't want the first thing a search engine finds to be a File Not Found error, you definitely want to have a robots text file on your own website. Even an empty file is preferable to having no file at all. Search engines always check for one, and if no file exists, your server returns a File Not Found error. (More on robots text files in Book VII, Chapter 1.)

When we run the Check Server Page report for a classic cars competitor site, the report looks like Figure 2-4.

Larger View
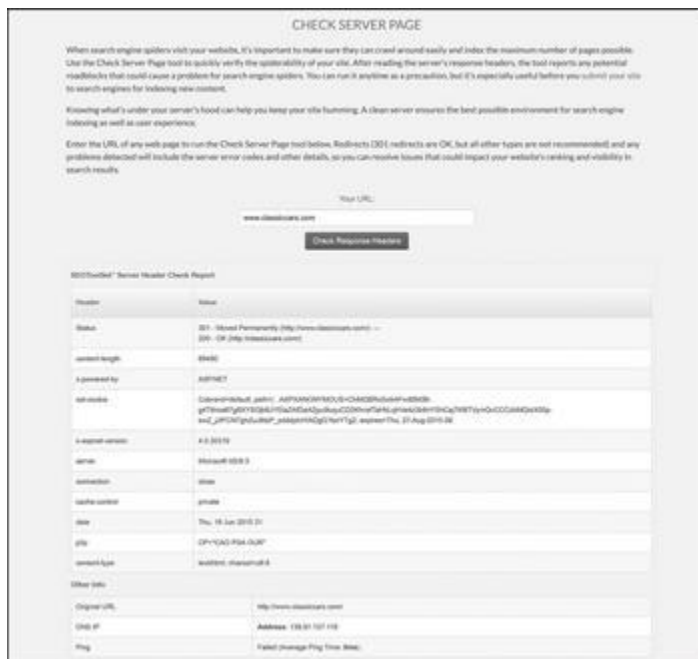
Figure 2-4: The Check Server Page report for a competitor's web page

In the report shown in Figure 2-4, you can see that it has a Sitemap.xml file, which serves to direct incoming bots. The more important item to notice, however, is the number 200 that displays in the Header Info section. This is the site's server status code, and 200 means that its server is A-okay and is able to properly return the page requested.

Table 2-2 explains the most common server status codes. These server statuses are standardized by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), so they mean the same thing to everyone. The official definitions can be found on its site at http://www.w3.org/protocols/rfc2616/rfc2616-sec10.html if you want to research further. We go into server code standards in greater depth in Book IV. Here, we boil down the technical language into understandable English to show you what each server status code really means to you.

Table 2-2: Server Status Codes and What They Mean

➡Open table as spreadsheet

Code	Description	Definition	What It Means (If It's on a Competitor's Page)
200	Okay	The web page appears as expected.	The server and web page have the welcome mat out for the search engine spiders (and users too). This is not-so-good news for you, but it isn't surprising either because this site ranks well.
301	Moved Permanently	The web page has been redirected permanently to another web page URL.	When a search engine spider sees this status code, it simply moves to the appropriate other page.
302	Found (Moved Temporarily)	The web page has been moved temporarily to a different URL.	This status should raise a red flag. Although there are supposedly legitimate uses for a 302 Redirect code, they can cause serious problems with search engines and could even indicate something malicious is going on. Spammers frequently use 302 Redirects.
400	Bad Request	The server could not understand the request because of bad syntax.	This could be caused by a typo in the URL. Whatever the cause, it means the search engine spider is blocked from reaching the content pages.
401	Unauthorized	The request requires user authentication.	The server requires a login in order to access the page requested.
403	Forbidden	The server understood the request, but refuses to fulfill it.	Indicates a technical problem that would cause a roadblock for a search engine spider. (This is all the better for you, although it may be only temporary.)
404	Not Found	The web page is not available.	You've seen this error code; it's the Page Can Not Be Displayed page that displays when a website is down or nonexistent. Chances are that the web page is down for maintenance or having some sort of problem.

Code	Description	Definition	What It Means (If It's on a Competitor's Page)
500 and higher	Miscellaneous Server Errors	Individual errors are defined in the report.	The 500–505 status codes indicate that something's wrong with the server.

The other thing you want to glean is whether the page is cloaked (the page shows one version of a page's content to users but a different version to the spiders). Enter the site URL you want to check into the SEO Cloaking Checker tool (also located at www.seotoolset.com/tools/free-tools/). This software tool runs through the site, identifying itself as different services, including Mozilla Firefox, Googlebot, and Bingbot, to ensure that they all match (see Figure 2-5).

Larger View

Figure 2-5: Cloaking info from the SEO Cloaking Checker report

To manually detect whether a competitor's site uses cloaking, you need to compare the spiderable version to the version that you are viewing as a user. So do a search that you know includes that web page in the results set, and click the cached link under that URL when it appears. This shows you the web page as it looked to the search engine the last time it was spidered. Keeping in mind that the current page may have been changed a little in the meantime, compare the two versions. If you see entirely different content, you're probably looking at cloaking.

Tracking down Competitor Links

So far, we've been showing you how to examine your competitors' on-page elements and their server issues. It's time to look at another major category that determines search engine relevance: backlinks.

REMEMBER Backlinks, also known as inbound links, are incoming hyperlinks from one web page to another site.

Why do search engines care so much about backlinks? Well, it boils down to the search engines' eternal quest to find the most relevant sites for their users. They reason that if another web page thinks your web page is worthy of a link, your page must have value. Every backlink to a web page acts as a vote of confidence in that page.

The search engines literally count these "votes." It's similar in some ways to an election, but with one major exception: Not every backlink has an equal vote. Backlinks that come from authorities in your subject area will have greater weight than those that do not. For example, if you have a site about search engine optimization, a backlink from Search Engine Land (a popular digital marketing

news website) will carry more weight than a backlink from your neighbor's blog about pet care. However, that backlink from the pet care blog would be valuable to a pet store's website. The value of a backlink depends on where it's pointing. You can read more about how linking works in Book VI.

In the search engines' eyes, the number of mentions and backlinks to a web page increases its expertness factor (and yes, that is a word, because we say so). Lots of backlinks indicate the page's popularity and make it appear more trustworthy as a relevant source of information on a subject. This alone can cause a page to rank much higher in search engine results when the links come from related sites.

You can find out how many backlinks and mentions your competitors have:

Using tools: There are a number of paid tools, such as Link Detox (www.linkdetox.com) and Majestic (https://majestic.com), that let you analyze your competitors' links. Majestic also provides a free plug-in (https://majestic.com/majestic-widgets/plugins) that provides backlink data for any page you visit, including the number of backlinks and the quality of those backlinks.

Using Google: In the regular search box on www.google.com, type the query ["domain.com" -site:domain.com], substituting the competing page's URL for domain.com, and click the Google Search button. This returns all pages that mention your site, usually as a link (and if it isn't, you can ask the site to make it a link!). You can also use [link:domain.com] but the numbers are less accurate.

TIP You may want to run these tests for both www.domain.com and domain.com (the second time, without the www. in front). Sites may have these URLs as separate web pages. Searching with the non-www version produces results from www and non-www pages, plus any other sub-domains the site may be using.
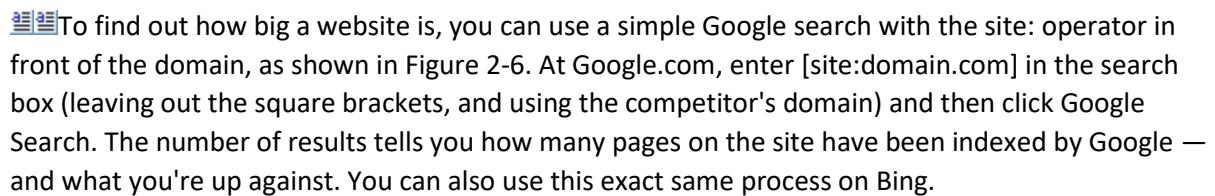
REMEMBER There is, unfortunately, no tool that provides a comprehensive list of all a competitor's backlinks. You can, however, look at the numbers to get an idea, proportionately, of how many inbound links each web page has that's outranking yours. The numbers aren't really accurate in themselves, but they give you a gauge for comparison. For instance, if you're trying to optimize your classic custom cars web page for the same keyword as a page that has 12,000 backlinks to it, and your page has only 50, you know it's going to be an uphill battle. In fact, you might decide that optimizing that page for that keyword isn't where you want to spend your energy, but we cover making those kinds of decisions in Chapter 3 of this minibook.

In any event, you want to track your competitors' backlink counts; this is very useful raw data. We suggest adding more columns to your competitor-data spreadsheet and recording the numbers given by Google and/or tools in columns so that you can compare your competitors' numbers to your own.

Sizing up Your Opponent

If you walk onto a battlefield, you want to know how big your opponent is. Are you facing a small band of soldiers or an entire army with battalions of troops and air support? This brings us to the discussion of the website as a whole, and what you can learn about it.

So far we've focused a lot on the individual web pages that rank well against yours. But each individual page is also part of a website containing many pages of potentially highly relevant supporting content. If your competition has an army, you need to know.

To find out how big a website is, you can use a simple Google search with the site: operator in front of the domain, as shown in Figure 2-6. At Google.com, enter [site:domain.com] in the search box (leaving out the square brackets, and using the competitor's domain) and then click Google Search. The number of results tells you how many pages on the site have been indexed by Google — and what you're up against. You can also use this exact same process on Bing.

Larger View
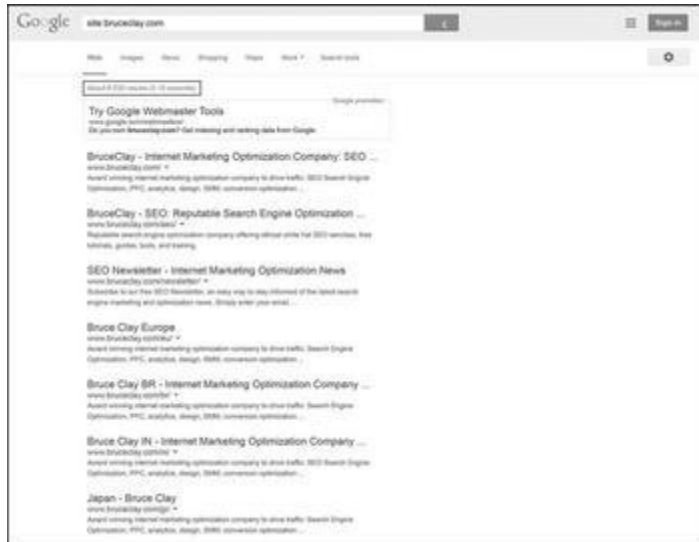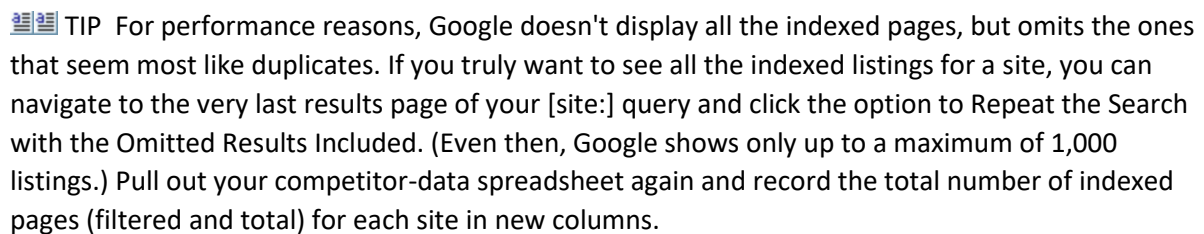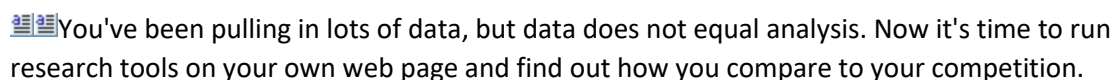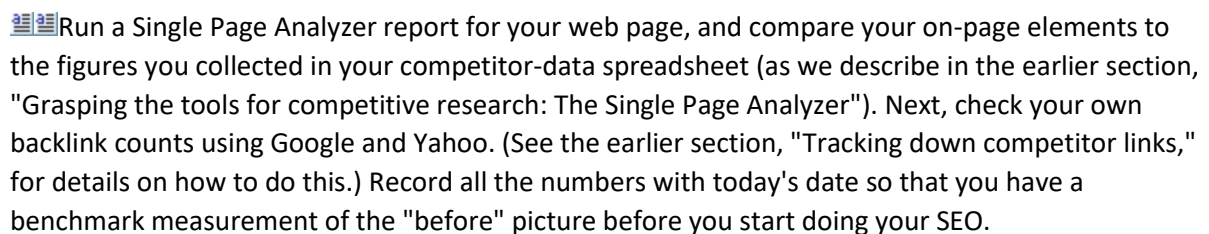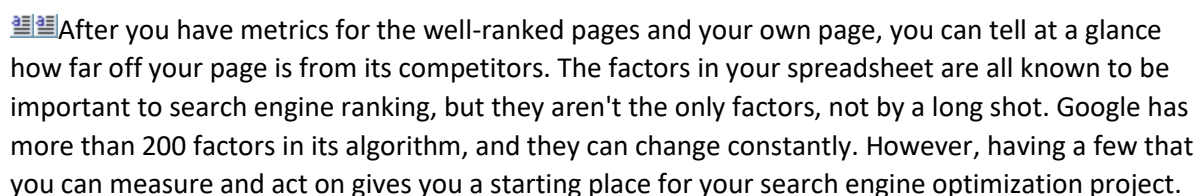
Figure 2-6: By searching for [site:bruceclay.com], you can identify how many pages Google has indexed for a site. In the case of www.bruceclay.com, we see Google has indexed 6,530 pages

TIP For performance reasons, Google doesn't display all the indexed pages, but omits the ones that seem most like duplicates. If you truly want to see all the indexed listings for a site, you can navigate to the very last results page of your [site:] query and click the option to Repeat the Search with the Omitted Results Included. (Even then, Google shows only up to a maximum of 1,000 listings.) Pull out your competitor-data spreadsheet again and record the total number of indexed pages (filtered and total) for each site in new columns.

Comparing Your Content

You've been pulling in lots of data, but data does not equal analysis. Now it's time to run research tools on your own web page and find out how you compare to your competition.

Run a Single Page Analyzer report for your web page, and compare your on-page elements to the figures you collected in your competitor-data spreadsheet (as we describe in the earlier section, "Grasping the tools for competitive research: The Single Page Analyzer"). Next, check your own backlink counts using Google and Yahoo. (See the earlier section, "Tracking down competitor links," for details on how to do this.) Record all the numbers with today's date so that you have a benchmark measurement of the "before" picture before you start doing your SEO.

After you have metrics for the well-ranked pages and your own page, you can tell at a glance how far off your page is from its competitors. The factors in your spreadsheet are all known to be important to search engine ranking, but they aren't the only factors, not by a long shot. Google has more than 200 factors in its algorithm, and they can change constantly. However, having a few that you can measure and act on gives you a starting place for your search engine optimization project.

Penetrating the Veil of Search Engine Secrecy

The search engines tell you a lot, but not the whole story. Search engines claim that the secrecy surrounding their algorithms is necessary because of malicious spammers, who would alter their sites deceptively for the sole purpose of higher rankings. It's in the search engines' best interests to keep their methods a secret; after all, if they published a list of do's and don'ts, and just what their limits and boundaries are, then the spammers would know the limits of the search engines' spam catching techniques. Also, secrecy leaves the search engines free to modify things any time they need to. Google changes its algorithm frequently. For instance, Matt Cutts of Google said the search engine makes more than 500 changes to the algorithm per year. No one knows what changed, how big the changes were, or when exactly they occurred. Instead of giving out the algorithm, search engines merely provide guidelines as to their preferences. This is why we say that SEO is an art, not just a science: Too many unknown factors are out of your control, so a lot of finesse and intuition are involved.

Other factors can complicate rankings as well. Here's a brief list of factors, which have nothing to do with changes on the websites themselves, that can cause search engine rankings to fluctuate:

- The search engine changed its algorithm and now weighs factors differently.
- The search engine may be testing something new (a temporary change).
- The index being queried is coming from a different data center. (Google, for instance, has many data centers in different locations, which may have different versions of the index.)
- The search engine had a technical problem and restored data temporarily from cache or a backup version.
- Data may not be up-to-date (depending on when the search engine last crawled the websites).

Diving into SERP Research

You can use the search engines to help you analyze your competitors in many ways. You're going to switch roles now and pretend for a moment that the high-ranking site is yours. This helps you better understand the site that is a model for what yours can become.

Start with a competitor's site that's ranking high for your keyword in the search engine results pages (SERPs). You want to find out why this web page ranks so well. It may be due to one of the following:

- **Backlinks:** Find out how many backlinks the web page has. Run a search at Google for ["www.domain.com/page.htm" =site: *domain.com*], substituting the competitor's web page URL for *domain.com*. The number of results is an indicator of the site's popularity with other web pages. If it's high, and especially if the links come from related industry sites with good PageRank themselves, backlinks alone could be why the page tops the list.
- **Different URL:** Run a search for your keyword on Google to see the results page. Notice the URL that displays for the competitor's listing. Keeping that URL in mind, click the link to go to the active page. In the address bar, compare the URL showing to the one you remembered. Are they the same? Are they different? If they're different, how different? Although an automatic redirect from http://domain.com to http://www.domain.com (or vice versa) is normal, other types of swaps may indicate that something fishy is going on. Do the cache check in the next bullet to find out whether the page the search engine sees is entirely different than the one live visitors are shown.
- **Cached version:** If you've looked at the web page and can't figure out why it would rank well, the search engine may have a different version of the page in its *cache* (its saved archive version of the page). Whenever the search engine indexes a website, it stores the data in its cache. Note that some websites are not cached, such as the first time a site is crawled or if the spider is being told not to cache the page (using the `Meta` robots `noarchive` instruction) or if there is an error in the search engine's database.

To see the cached version of a page, follow these steps:

1. **Run a search on Google for your keyword.**

2. **Click the drop-down icon next to the URL and click Cached.**
3. **View the cached version of the web page.**

At the top of the page, you can read the date and time it was last spidered. You can also easily view how your keywords distribute throughout the page in highlighted colors.

You can also view a cached version of a page on Bing following the same steps.

Sizing up Your Page Construction

It's time to look at your own website and see how it's measuring up. Examine your main landing pages, which are the pages best suited for searchers looking for your main keywords. You generally need a minimum of one landing page with at least five secondary or supporting pages/articles dedicated to each of your main keywords so that users searching for those keywords click your link and arrive at a page that delivers just what they're looking for. You should also have secondary keywords on those pages, but the point is to have focused content that has the main keyword distributed throughout.

Landing Page Construction

The way your landing pages are put together matters to search engines and helps them determine the relevance of each page. The engines count everything that can be quantified, like the total number of words, how many times your keywords are repeated on the page *(prominence)*, and so forth. It pays to make your page construction line up with what the search engines consider to be optimal for each of these elements as much as possible.

In Chapter 2 of this minibook, we explain how to do research on your top competitors using the Page Analyzer tool's report (which compiles statistics about a web page such as its *keyword density*, a percentage indicating the number of times the keyword occurs compared to the total number of words in the page). We recommended that you put your data in a spreadsheet like the one in Figure 3-1, which pulls together stats from four different competitors' web pages. Larger View

Figure 3-1: Spreadsheet showing competitor data from a Single Page Analyzer report

Notice that there are seven columns of data for each competitor, and the numbers they contain are straight off of the Single Page Analyzer report. Also notice the Averages row at the bottom, which is simply the *mean* (or average) of each column. It's a pretty simple way to figure out what's considered normal (or "natural") for the top-ranking competitors for your keyword, in the search engines' eyes. These seven categories represent on-page elements that you can compare to your own web page.

After you study your competitors, it's time to run your own web pages through the Single Page Analyzer to get your starting figures for comparison. Here's how to run the Single Page Analyzer:

1. **Go to www.seotoolset.com/tools/free-tools/.**
2. **In the Single Page Analyzer tool, enter your page's URL (such as www.yourdomain.com/pageinprogress.html) in the Page URL text box.**
3. **Click the Run Page Analyzer button and wait until the report displays.**

REMEMBER Keep in mind that for each item, the best practices just give you a starting point for your analysis. As we mentioned, the top sites are imperfect, so there is room to vary your analysis because your goal is first becoming equal to and then better than your competition. Your market may require certain page elements to be much shorter or longer than the guidelines recommend. Remember that your page construction should make you competitive for your keywords and make judgment calls backed up by real-world results. SEO requires ongoing monitoring and tweaking because the nature of rankings is transitory. Search engine rankings fluctuate, and you have to make tweaks to adapt. Your target number for each element can be changed over time as you get more of a feel for what the search engines consider most relevant.

After you have your data in hand, you can dig into your analysis. In this list, we cover what we consider to be the SEO best practice for each item and how it lines up with the competitors' natural usage based on the averages in Figure 3-1. Knowing those two things, you can decide what to do on your own page (these numbers are examples only; your industry will be different):

- **`Title`:** The `Title` tag is a line of HTML you put in the Head, or top, section of a web page's HTML code:
  - **Best practice:** Six to 12 words (up to approximately 65 characters).
  - **Competitors' average:** 10.25 words.
  - **Recommendation:** Because the search engines are rewarding these sites with top rankings and those sites' natural averages fall within best practices, you should make your `Title` tag ten words in length.
- **`Meta` description:** The `Meta` description is another HTML tag that goes in the Head section of a web page:
  - **Best practice:** Twelve to 24 words (up to 156 characters)
  - **Competitors' average:** 20.5 words.
  - **Recommendation:** The top-ranking sites seem to be following best practices here, so go ahead and match them by putting 20 or 21 words in your `Meta` description tag.
- **`Meta` keywords:** The `Meta` keywords tag also goes in the Head section and gives you a place to list all your keywords for the page:
  - **Best practice:** 24 to 48 words in length.
  - **Competitors' average:** 31 words.
  - **Recommendation:** They've done it again, falling within best practice guidelines. You should make your `Meta` keywords tag about 31 words long.
- **Headings:** This refers to the number of heading tags on the page (which are `h#` formatting tags applied to headings and subheadings):
  - **Best practice:** There's no minimum/maximum guideline for heading tags; however, you should have a single `H1` tag at the top of the page for your main headline because search engines look for this. Use `H2, H3`, and so on throughout the page for subheadings that help break up the text in natural places.
  - **Competitors' average:** 10.25 tags. However, notice that the competitors don't agree on this: Their Heading counts are 1, 15, 0, and 25.
  - **Recommendation:** Where you have one or two competitors that are completely out of range of the rest, you shouldn't try to match the average. Follow the bulk of the sites or best practices instead.
- **`Alt` tags:** `Alt` attributes are alternate text attached to images that briefly describes the image to search engines (and users). In the Single Page Analyzer, the `Alt` tags figure represents the total number of words included in `Alt` attributes on the page:
  - **Best practice:** For every image, you should include an `Alt` attribute (incorporating keywords, if appropriate). The length of the `Alt` attribute depends on the size of the image but should not

exceed 12 words per image for the largest images. (See Book V, Chapter 2 for the mathematical rule of thumb for this.)

- o **Competitors' average:** 60.25 words.
- o **Recommendation:** There's a wide disparity between the four sites (26, 104, 13, 98). You should probably follow the best practices rather than the average here.
- **Body words:** This refers to the number of words in the Body section, which is the part between the beginning and ending `Body` tags, or the main page content that users see. The count excludes *stop words* (little words like *a, an, but*, and others that the search engines disregard):
- o **Best practice:** You should fall within the range of your competitors, but a landing page needs at least 400 to 500 words of readable content as a general rule to establish its relevance to a keyword.
- o **Competitors' average:** 408.5 words.
- o **Recommendation:** All the competitors' pages have a similar count, falling within best practices, so this average is probably a sweet spot you'll want to match or slightly exceed.
- **All words:** This is the total number of words in the page minus stop words (so it includes the Body section as well as other sections that may or may not be visible to users):
- o **Best practice:** There's no minimum or maximum guideline here, so match your competitors as long as they're in keeping with other SEO best practices (such as keeping the HTML code uncluttered, and so on).
- o **Competitors' average:** 946.25 words.
- o **Recommendation:** Aim to have sufficient text in the Body section and to keep your HTML clean. This number usually takes care of itself.

Want more info on page construction? See Book V, Chapter 3 for additional recommendations on building effective, SEO-friendly page elements.

Content

To make sure that your landing pages have enough focused content to be considered relevant for their main keywords, you want to examine the distribution of keywords on a page. You can do this by looking in the search engine's *cache* (stored version of a page). Google's cached text-only version of a web page is the best way to see how much content the search engines have actually *indexed* (included in their database of web pages, from which they pull search results).

Pull up Google's cached text version of a page and then follow these steps:

1. **Press the Control key and the F key simultaneously.** (On a Mac, press Command and F.)
2. **Type the keyword or keyword phrase and press Enter.**
3. **Select Highlight All and discover an at-a-glance view of the keyword distribution on the page.**

This text-only view is what Google sees, and your keywords are highlighted. This view is useful because

- You can find out how much text Google indexed.
- You can see visually how many times you used each keyword.
- You can tell how evenly you distributed the keyword throughout the page.

TIP If you find that the page has very little textual content that can actually be read by the search engines, your design might be relying too much on nontext elements like images or Flash. (*Adobe Flash* is a multimedia software program used for building animated and interactive elements for the web.) Although these elements may be good for your users, they're not very readable to a search engine. In general, landing pages need a *lot* of text-based content so search engines can figure out what they're all about.

The Single Page Analyzer report further breaks down how keywords are used on a web page. It identifies all the single- and multiword keyword phrases. It also tells you whether the keywords are used in all the right places (for instance, search engines expect any word used in the `Title`

tag to also appear in the `Meta` description tag, in the `Meta` keywords tag, and throughout the page).

For more help using the Single Page Analyzer to optimize your landing pages, see Book V, Chapter 3.

Engagement Objects

Before leaving the subject of page construction, there's a hot topic you need to know about: engagement objects. *Engagement objects* are non-text elements such as images, videos, audio, or interactive elements on a web page that help engage users. Not only do they make your page more interesting to a user, but they are also now becoming increasingly important as a search engine ranking factor.

With the rise of *blended search* (also known as *Universal Search* in Google), search engine results pages (SERPs) are now able to show a combination of different types of files to a searcher. So a search for [1969 Ford Mustang] can return photos, videos, and so on, in addition to website links, all on the same SERP (as shown in Figure 3-2).
Larger View

Figure 3-2: Blended search results combine many different types of listings

The search engines (particularly Google) want to provide the most relevant and engaging results to their users, so having Engagement Objects on your website can actually make you rank higher in search results than your competitors.

Take a look at your top competitors' web pages as a user would and notice their Engagement Objects. Keep your own website in mind so you can make a list of things you might need to add. Besides getting an overall feel for how these sites engage their users, look to see how extensively they incorporate Engagement Objects such as

- **Images:** Notice the number of photos, infographics, illustrations, diagrams, charts, and so on. Also pay attention to size. Larger images with good `Alt` attribute text and good surrounding text can get indexed and actually returned as a search result themselves, so notice whether the competitor has anything like this.
- **Video:** Video is extremely important these days for getting noticed on the web. The best method is to embed the video right into your landing page and also upload it or a portion of it to a video-sharing site like YouTube. Include a keyword-rich description and a link back to your site, and you'll probably get traffic as a result. Consider this: YouTube's internal search function now gets more total searches than Yahoo or Bing. Depending on how you look at it, that means YouTube

is the second most visited search engine in its own right. Obviously, YouTube's site search isn't a true search engine, but you better believe that the traffic is true traffic. If your competitors haven't been savvy enough to upload videos to YouTube and embed videos on their sites yet, here's a good way to one-up them. Being where people can find you is critical.

- **Audio:** Look for embedded audio files within the site, which is another type of element that's good for user engagement. Audio files are expected on music-industry sites, but other sites might benefit from a creative use of audio, as well. Google can now parse soundtracks and generate text of the words that can be subsequently indexed. This clearly shows that audio is a valid content form.

- **Flash:** Flash files (SWF) are not recommended, from an SEO point of view. A site built completely in Flash, in particular, can't be very competitive in searches because it lacks sufficient text content and may be slow to load.

TIP There are many other types of engagement objects, and there is a lot more to say about the best ways to include them on your web pages. Please see Book V, Chapter 7 to get more information.

Learning from Your Competitors' Links

What else can you learn from your competitors? You can find out who's linking to them.

Besides your page construction, another big factor in your search engine ranking is your *link equity*, which is the value of all the backlinks coming to your web pages. The search engines consider every link to your web page to be a "vote" for that page. The more votes your page has, the more "expert" your page appears to be. Based on the links pointing to your site, the search engines either increase or decrease how relevant your site is for particular keyword searches. The quality of your backlinks also matters; one testimonial-grade link from an authoritative website in your field is an important endorsement and can be worth more than thousands of links from unrelated and inconsequential sites in terms of your link equity.

You want to have a natural variety of backlinks to your landing pages, from sites with a range of different link equity values themselves. However, it's good to keep in mind what the gold standard is so that you can recognize a nugget when you see one and go after it. The most ideal backlinks come from a web page that is

- Well-established (that is, an older site that has become trusted)
- An authority within your industry, with lots of backlinks coming to it from related sites, as well as some links out to other authority websites
- Focused on the same subject as your web page, even using some of the same keywords
- Using meaningful anchor text that contains your keywords in the link to your page

Read more about the benefits and risks of link building in Book VI, Chapter 2.

You may have some "ideal" link candidates in mind already: sites that are well-respected and established authorities in your field. It's very likely, however, that you don't have nearly enough backlink candidates in mind yet. That's where looking at your top-ranking competitors comes in handy.

You can look at your competitors' links primarily to find good backlink candidates for your own site. The top-ranking competitors for your keywords probably have vetted worthwhile links that you could benefit from, too. After all, your competitor deals with the same type of information and customers that you do. If that third-party site finds it useful to link visitors to the competitor's site, it might find your site equally useful for its visitors to know about.

You can see a list of all the indexed backlinks that a competitor has by running a search engine query on Google. In the regular search box, type the query **[link:*domain.com*]**, substituting the competing page's URL for *domain.com*, and then click the Google Search button. (Don't include the brackets.)

The results come out in pretty much random order. You can go page by page and read through them, copying the ones that look promising as possible backlink candidates into another document for follow-up. Be picky here: You don't want any spammy links, and some may simply not be worth the time to pursue.

Suppose your competition has about 50 backlinks. How many do you really need to be competitive? In most cases, reasonably close is sufficient. Focus on developing links in a natural fashion — buying links or devoting huge amounts of time to obtaining reciprocal links is not a good way to gain links. The search engines have ways to detect unnatural links, and having them could cause your website to be penalized by the search engines. (You can read about search engine link penalties in Book I, Chapter 6.)

After you decide which websites you'd like backlinks from, you can begin your link-building campaign. Spend a little time looking at the candidate's web page. You want to know what it's about so that you can make sure your own web page has something of value to those users. Another thing you might find is something amiss on the third-party site, like a broken link or a missing image, which you can present to them. This could help you forge a mutually beneficial relationship. Connecting and developing relationships with these brands may eventually lead to natural links, especially if your site offers content (such as articles) that would be useful to their audience. Social media can be an excellent way to make these connections; you learn more about that in Book V, Chapter 7.

WARNING! Never pay for a link to build your link equity. You can pay for advertising, if you want to attract more visitors or promote your site, but don't pay for links to increase your link equity. Buying links that look deceptively like regular links can get you in trouble with the search engines, especially Google. When Google detects a paid link, that link typically gets no value. Having too many paid links can trigger an algorithmic penalty (read more about penalties in Book I, Chapter 6). Selling links is also a gamble: If Google detects that you are selling links, it may drop your PageRank and you'll wind up nowhere in the search engine results. Webmasters have the right to put anything on their sites, but Google also reserves the right to take action so that the best results are delivered to its users.

Taking Cues from Your Competitors' Content Structure

You may have a lot of great content on your website, but if it's jumbled and disorganized, the search engines might not figure out what searches it relates to. This is why you should consider *content siloing*, which is a way of organizing your website into subject themes by linking related pages together. Content siloing lets you funnel link equity to your landing pages, which reinforces to the search engines how relevant those pages are for the keywords they contain. Linking is so important that it can override the actual content of the page. Siloing is comprised of two parts. One is internal linking and another relates to page and site architecture. Consider a good site map: one that, in a very detailed schematic, outlines the entire structure of a document. Siloing means that all the links on the website follow that outline exactly, without any straying from topic to topic. Literally, the anchor text links do more to inform Google than the content in those pages. Siloing is a big subject. See Book II, Chapter 4 and Book VI, Chapters 1 and 2 for more information.

Looking at the top-ranking competitors' websites, you can get some clues as to how they organize their content. This can benefit you in two basic ways:

- You can tell how well-organized the competitor's content is. If the site doesn't use siloing, your own use of siloing can give you an advantage over the competition.
- You can get ideas for beefing up your own content or for different ways of organizing your site.

Go to a competing web page from a search results page. What can you learn from this landing page about how it fits into the entire site and whether it uses siloing?

First, looking at the navigation structure may give clues. The following navigation example shows how a fairly clear directory structure would be organized by car make (Ford) and then by model (Mustang). This site may have its content siloed:

www.some-car-domain.com/ford/mustang/customize-your-mustang.htm

Now look at this URL, which contains codes and *parameters* (auto-generated URL characters that carry information to the receiving page about the user) that make it impossible to read:

www.another-car-domain.com/svcse/php?t=37481&_cthew=13%3A2

Obviously, sometimes the URL structure is informative and sometimes it isn't. Because the URL is another piece of communication that the search engines use to try to understand what a page is about, you want your pages to have meaningful keywords in your URLs. Although very little weight is placed on keywords in the URL, don't miss that opportunity. Human visitors appreciate the clarity even if the search engines don't. And if the sites you're competing against have gobbledygook in their URLs (like the second preceding example), you'll have another advantage.

Second, you can tell whether a site is well-organized into silos by looking at its internal links. We're not talking about the main navigation menu so much but about the related hyperlinks on the competitor's landing page. See whether there are links to pages full of supporting information on the same topic. Then as you click to view those supporting pages, look to see whether they contain links back to the landing page but not to other pages outside that topic. If so, that site is probably siloed.

If they don't have a siloed linking strategy, you might see
- No links to related pages on the landing page
- The same set of links on every page you look at
- A haphazard assortment of links to various areas of the website, with no clear subject focus

Here are some questions you should answer about your competitors:
- Does the competitor's site organize the main content categories in a clear, readable hierarchical and empirical structure with clear indexable (spiderable) navigation?
- Does the competitor's site have quality content on each major category section?
- How well does the site link to related articles and site guides?

If the competitor *isn't* siloing, and the vast majority of sites are not, that could give you an advantage as you create a theme for your site contents and implement linking within silos.

Detecting rel="nofollow" links

For the purposes of siloing, you need to look only at the links that are "followed" by the search engines. Links that have a `rel="nofollow"` attribute attached to them in the HTML code don't count for passing link equity. (By the way, the presence of a `rel="nofollow"` attribute on a website may itself provide a clue that there's an SEO expert on staff, and the site may be siloed.)

To see "`nofollow`" links more easily, you can install a free plug-in for the Mozilla Firefox browser called SearchStatus (http://www.quirk.biz/download-searchstatus). If you install this plug-in, links with a "`nofollow`" attribute automatically show up highlighted in pink on any web page.

After you figure out whether the competitor's site is organized into silos, take a look around and see what tips you can take from it. First of all, you might discover that it's covered something that you missed, like an article about how to preserve the original upholstery of a classic car so that it lasts for decades. Your site visitors probably want to know that, too, so make a note to write a new article to fill that hole.

A well-siloed website might also give you good ideas for organizing content. For instance, your silos might be set up by type of service (body work, reupholstering, complete restoration, and so on), whereas a competitor's silos might be set up by car make and model. The test of a good silo

structure is how much traffic you're bringing in by being relevant to important keywords. If your structure is bringing in visitors and giving you enough *conversions* (sales, sign-ups, orders, or whatever action you want people to take on your site), you shouldn't tear it down.

You might still learn something from another site's silo structure, however, that you could apply as a horizontal silo within your current structure. A *horizontal silo* involves linking across silos very deliberately to create a secondary silo structure that can rank for other types of search queries. So if your silo structure is by services, you could consider linking your page titled Reupholstering a Ford Mustang to your pages for Restoring a Ford Mustang and Ford Mustang Body Work, and so on. That would create a set of horizontal silos that might help you rank higher for searches that include [Ford Mustang] as a keyword.

For more help with siloing and overlaying a horizontal silo, check out Book VI, Chapter 2.

Chapter 1: Selecting a Stylefor Your Audience

In This Chapter

- **Knowing your target audience**
- **Looking at your current customers to understand their demographics**
- **Interviewing and researching to analyze your target audience**
- **Choosing the right tone to engage your audience**
- **Using a blog to build a relationship with your audience**
- **Using personas to define your audience**
- **Understanding the benefits and drawbacks of using personas**

The slogan "Content is king!" has been stated and restated in every blog, forum, conference, and seminar that has anything to do with search engine optimization (SEO) or Internet marketing. Content includes all the stuff inside your website: everything from the words you read, to the pictures and videos you view, to the audio you listen to. In this chapter, we teach you all about the most important content element for SEO — the words on the page. The text content draws people to your site, starting with the brief title that shows up on a search results page. Content holds a visitor's interest long enough to read your page and, hopefully, move on to do more. Content is what gives your website credibility with both your visitors and other sites so that they want to endorse you with a link or purchase. Content tells the search engines what you're all about. Content proves (or disproves) that you know what you're talking about.

And content takes hours and hours and even laborious days to create. If you feel overwhelmed by the need to write tons of new content, we understand. The prospect of writing page after page of content may make you want to crawl under the nearest desk, but the truth is, your website really cannot do without it. Good content and plenty of it is needed if you want to rank well with the search engines and attract users who convert into customers (however you define that conversion). For this reason, Book V, which deals with content creation, may contain the most valuable pages in this book.

Good, relevant content is your single most potent SEO tool. It allows you to do the following:
- Differentiate your site from the masses
- Attract expert links to your site
- Develop a loyal site following and brand
- Launch your site higher in the search engine rankings

In this chapter, you think through how to create the best content for your site's purposes and target audience. You first need to understand whom your site needs to appeal to, so we begin by discussing what demographic information you need to know about your target audience and how you can find it out. Next, you discover how to choose a dynamic tone and style that can

effectively communicate with your audience and yield conversions. Last, you find out how to create a *persona* (a profile that represents your target audience based on calculated averages of their buying processes and demographics) so that you can design appropriate content that satisfies a specific, highly targeted group.

Knowing Your Demographic

Before you communicate anything, asking "Who is my audience?" is a great first step. You might be an expert in your field, but unless you can explain what you know in a way that your target audience understands, you can't communicate your expertise. With your website, your job is not only to communicate but also to persuade, because you want *conversions* (visitors who make a purchase, sign up for a newsletter, or take whatever action your website requires). Understanding who your audience is becomes even more essential in order to better target your conversions.

Many new web marketers make the mistake of thinking they don't have a target audience: They see the Internet as a vast crowd of people and just want them to come to their sites. But attracting visitors to your site who then convert requires specific targeted marketing. The Internet population includes many types of people, and the more precisely you can figure out who your target visitors are, the more effective you can be at attracting and holding their interest and making conversions.

Finding Out Customer Goals

Beyond knowing who your target audience is, you also want to find out what they need. You know what your website offers. Now turn your chair around and look at your site from the other direction. Why would people come to your site? What goal would they be trying to meet?

You want to be sure to meet your visitors' needs first before trying to motivate them to do anything else. Imagine you've spent two hours working and sweating in the hot sun to fix a broken sprinkler in your yard. You finally get it under control and walk toward the house for a cold drink. You have only one thing on your mind: your thirst. If another family member meets you at the door to show you something, how attentive will you be? You're probably not going to give her much attention until your need for a cold refreshment is satisfied.

Similarly, your website visitors come to your site with a need in mind, and your first priority should be to meet that need. It may be to get information. It may be to research a product to buy. It may be to find a better price, free shipping, or some other special deal on a product they've already decided to buy. When you figure out what your site visitors' goals are, you can make sure your web pages deliver.

Meet each visitor's goal in the easiest, quickest way possible. If your site sells choir robes, help your visitor pick out the right styles, fabrics, sizes, and quantities as smoothly as possible. You can present lots of textual information to help him make the best choices, but be careful not to distract him with cute videos of choir performances, or clutter up your shopping cart page with Flash animations. His goal is to purchase choir robes. Your goal is to help him do it as directly and pleasantly as possible. Do this by leaving clues in your web content for your visitors. Tell them how to accomplish their goal. Remember that the trigger words for shopping and research differ: *buy, free*, and *sale* appeal to different visitors than *how-to, step-by-step instructions*, and *more information*.

TIP A visitor who's using a smartphone, tablet, or other device to come to your site may have different goals than someone using a desktop computer. Consider tailoring the options you provide to the user's device type. Check out Book IV, Chapter 3 for help with designing for mobile versus desktop users.

REMEMBER The more you know about your target audience — who they are and what their goals are — the more effective your website can be.

Looking at Current Customer Data

The best way to begin researching your target audience is to look at your existing customers. (We call them "customers" for ease of writing, but depending on your business model, you might call them subscribers, members, clients, or another term.) What do you know about the people already on your customer list? You probably won't succeed in gathering all this information in the following list, but here are a few types of demographics to look for. These facts are helpful in profiling your target audience:

- **Gender:** Are most of your customers male or female, or are they evenly split?
- **Age:** Maybe your customers fall into a single age group; for example, tweens, teenagers, college students, young adults, 30-somethings, and so on.
- **Location:** Do you know where your customers live? They may be concentrated within a given geographic area, in which case being included in local search engines and utilizing local ads might be part of your strategy. Geo-targeting is becoming an important factor to ranking. A study by Chitika found that as much as 43 percent of all Google search queries are meant for local businesses, products, or services (http://www.reviewtrackers.com/43-percent-google-searches-local-business-listed-sites-find-you/).
- **Marital status:** Do you know whether your customers tend to be single, married, or divorced? You can cater differently to married couples than you would to singles by using certain elements in site design and style.
- **Education:** What level of education do your customers have? This ties into the age category, too, but if your audience is made up of adults, knowing whether they never attended college or hold master's degrees definitely impacts how you can communicate with them.
- **Occupation:** Do you know what field your customers are in specifically? If your website offers an industry-specific product, it's obviously an important factor for your target audience. But even if you offer products to the general public, knowing customer occupations can help you with more targeted web marketing. If you know, for instance, that a lot of nurses like your product, one place you might want to develop links to your site (or run ads, and so on) could be on sites that are popular with nurses.
- **Beliefs:** What do you know about their religious, political, or philosophical beliefs? For instance, if your site collects signatures for various petitions, knowing how your typical petition signer leans politically helps you target the right audience for your site.
- **Lifestyle/situational:** What do you know about their lifestyles? You may find a trend among your customers to be single parents or married couples with children; apartment renters or homeowners; city dwellers, suburbanites, or farmers; boat owners or horse owners; or other. Whatever extra information like this you can gather gives you useful clues about your target audience.
- **Much more:** Customize this list with other types of pertinent information for your website marketing. You probably won't be able to get all the information you want, but having a wish list is a good start. Income level, ethnicity, and hobbies are all excellent things to know about your customers. Much of this information is easily obtained just by asking for it. The registration process on many sites often asks for these facts. If your registration process includes the capability to do so, turn it on and see what you learn.

Researching to Find Out More

In addition to examining the customer data you have, you can look at industry statistics. Find out what data is available out there. Do some homework online and track down information sources. If there's a trade association for your industry, see if it can provide statistics, member rosters, and other types of information. You might find news articles, court cases, studies, or who knows what else, but see what's out there that gives you more information about your typical customer.

Interviewing Customers

Consider interviewing past and current members of your target audience to find out more about them. A typical method is to ask users to complete a form on your website. It might be a sign-up form at the beginning of your conversion process or a feedback form you pop up on the screen at the end of a process. Or you might prefer to interview the old-fashioned way and directly contact people by mail, phone, or email. A survey can work great, although you may need to offer some incentive to the user for filling it out (a discount, a coupon, or some other prize).

TIP You can ask people to complete a survey online. Sites like QuestionPro (www.questionpro.com) make setting up an online survey very easy to do; you just need to plan the questions you want to ask (see Figure 1-1). The costs can be nominal, depending on what services you use.
Larger View
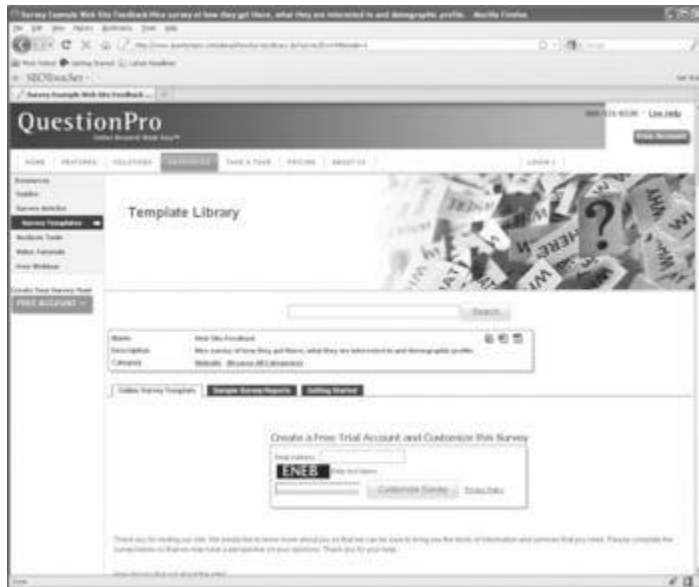
Figure 1-1: Online surveys are easy to set up and can be inexpensive, too

When interviewing people, try to gather some personal demographic information (such as the items in the section "Looking at current customer data," earlier in this chapter) as well as some feedback about their experience on your website. It's a golden opportunity for valuable feedback from past customers. Here are some good things to learn during your interview:

- How they found your website
- What their impressions were of the site
- Whether they had any difficulty getting around your site, or whether they found it easy to use
- Whether they were pleased with the service or response they received (if applicable)
- What type of product or service they were looking for

Include these two questions in your survey to get a technical picture of your customers' awareness:

- How often do you go online, and how long do you spend there?
- Which of this website's competitors' sites do you visit?

You can also use surveys in conjunction with the data your analytics tool gathers (for more on analytics tools, read on) to discover information about your customers' browsing habits. You can easily get the following data:

- The type of computer they use
- The ISP (Internet service provider) they use to access the Internet
- The type of Internet connection and device they use

- What Internet browser they prefer

  TIP The answers to these questions can give you an idea of how tech-savvy your customer base is. For instance, website if your users get to the Internet through an AOL interface and stay there throughout their web session, you know you're probably dealing with a less-technical user base.

  TIP If you have any professional associations in your industry (the SEO community has the Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization, or SEMPO, for example), check with them to see if they've done any demographic research, which is likely more cost-effective than conducting your own research. This is a particularly good idea for a new site that might not yet have a large user base to interview.

Using Server Logs and Analytics

Your website's server logs contain valuable data about your visitor counts and their behavior. It's also a good idea to have *analytics* embedded in your web pages, which are program routines a website can use to track user behavior on the website. Talk to your IT department or webmaster and see what they can tell you about your web traffic and the user behavior on each page.

TECHNICAL STUFF If you would like more analytics operating on your website or want to know all the choices out there, we cover web analytics in detail in Book VIII. We also recommend you check out the following resources:

- **Google Analytics** (www.google.com/analytics): This is free analytics software and resources from Google that we recommend you take advantage of.
- **Adobe Marketing Cloud** (www.adobe.com/solutions/digital-marketing.html): Adobe is one of the top vendors for analytics programs.
- **The Digital Analytics Association** (www.digitalanalyticsassociation.org): The trade association for web analytics professionals is a good source for information.

Analytics tools can look at your recent website traffic and tell you where visitors came from. Further, demographics reports inside Google Analytics can give you statistics about your web audience such as percentages by gender, age, and so on. And reports in your free Google Search Console account (www.google.com/webmasters/tools/) can even tell you what search terms people have used in Google searches to find your website.

Analytics tools are extremely valuable for SEO. Knowing where your users come from can give you clues to their goals. For instance, if your site sells shoes and you find a lot of visitors coming from youth soccer sites, they're likely looking for children's soccer shoes and cleats. This information can help you style your site to help those visitors find exactly what they need.

Creating a Dynamic Tone

The way your content comes across to your potential customers is as important as the services and actions you have to offer visitors. When you write content for your website, your text should
- **Engage your target audience with an appropriate style and tone.** For example, this book uses a conversational tone that wouldn't be appropriate in a scholarly journal. A site targeting teens might rely more heavily on modern slang than a site targeting baby boomers. As a general rule, effective website copy should be *dynamic*, meaning always changing, purposeful, and energetic.
- **Lead visitors to the goal you have for each web page.** As we discuss in the section "Finding out customer goals," earlier in this chapter, each of your web pages should have a goal that matches the visitor's perceived goal, which may be to gather information, clarify a question, sign up for something, make a purchase, or do something else.
- **Meet the visitors' needs with relevant content as directly and quickly as possible.** The text on each page should immediately engage the readers' attention and interest and lead them to

fulfill the goal. Proper design can help the content create conversions, but the content must be engaging on its own.

The tone of a written piece can make or break it. *Tone* refers to the writer's attitude toward the subject matter and toward the reader. Tone creates an emotional response in readers. The wrong tone can turn off an audience within the first sentence or two.

When people talk about the way a piece "comes across," they're talking about its tone. In speaking, people call it the "tone of voice," and it affects communication powerfully. Dogs, for example, can tell a lot by the sound of their master's voice: They might come running or hide their tails based solely on their master's tone. In written communication, an author's tone comes through in more subtle ways. Word choice, sentence length, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure — all these and more convey the tone.

Your writing tone should support your site goal and be appropriate for your target audience. For example, if you're a heavy-metal band promoter, you wouldn't want to greet your visitors with rainbows and ponies and a jaunty message like, "You've arrived! Mr. Ponypants wants you to have a super fun day!" The bouncy, enthusiastic tone is all wrong for the target audience and would probably have visitors heading straight for their Back button. There's nothing wrong with heavy metal or ponies, but typically fans of each aren't found in the same audience. Instead, you'd want the tone to come across as rebellious or rowdy, meeting your target audience in the same spirit they're showing. Only then would you be able to achieve your site's conversion goal, which is to engage people and interest them in becoming clients.

TIP Look at your current website and ask yourself how you feel when you read it, but don't just stop there. Read it out loud to yourself or someone else to see if it flows nicely to the ear. This is usually an enlightening experience. Ask someone you know to read it with fresh eyes to give you this feedback. Ask her to tell you what attitude comes through the writing. How does it make her feel: happy, lighthearted, positive, hopeful, enlightened, or wanting more? Or does it make her feel uncomfortable, belittled, creepy, angry, annoyed, or frustrated?

Think about what response you would want your target audience to have when they read your website. The emotional response your tone evokes in your readers can make them want to stay or run away, so choose it carefully.

Choosing a Content Style

After you know who your target audience is, you can adjust your website to be appropriate for them. We talk in Book IV, Chapter 1 about tailoring your website design to your target audience. In Book V, we focus on tailoring the content style to your target audience.

TIP Listen to your customers. The words they use to talk about your industry and your products and services could be very different from how you describe the same things. Jargon that may be commonplace in your offices won't necessarily be familiar to your potential clients. You want to incorporate their words into your website. Not only does this ensure that people understand what they're reading on your site, but it also adds keywords that people search for when they to try to find you.

TIP You also must listen to the way in which your customers talk — not just the words they're using, but how they're using them. If your target audience is children, you don't want your website to read like a dry academic text, or you'll just bore them. If your target audience is medical researchers, your website can be written in a more academic style with longer words and sentences. You want to make visitors feel that they've come to the right place. You can do this when you support relevant content with a style and tone that feel natural and appropriate. So use a style that reaches your target audience and feels natural for the content.

Developing a Blog

A *blog* (originally short for "web log") on your website can provide a platform to let your voice be heard and interact with your target audience. Content marketers often consider their site's blog to be the axis of their community outreach. The blog connects people to your website and pulls them in with a regular supply of fresh, timely content that can be linked to and shared across various social media channels.

Blog posts can be published more quickly and easily than static web pages. Blog posts can cover anything related to your business or industry. If new legislation is passed, write a timely article explaining the new law's impact on your customers. If you attend an industry event, you can use your blog to share ten takeaways you learned that might help others. The possibilities are endless; the point is, blog software makes creating a post fairly painless.

Your tone in a blog post can usually be quite conversational and more personal than on your main website. On the Bruce Clay, Inc. blog, for example, writers often inject their own thoughts ("Seriously?") and reactions ("That's awesome!") into their posts. Have a conversation with your reader, as if he or she were sitting across from you asking questions about your subject. If you think about what your reader needs to know, you can break down any topic into useful information that's friendly and interesting.

The blog environment is perfect for showing personality and helping people feel like they can relate to your company or organization. Far more than static web pages can, a blog lets you "put a face" on your brand. It's not just the company owner or CEO who can create this kind of genuine human interaction for a brand. The best brands encourage trusted employees to use their own names and faces, representing the company but also becoming known as recognizable individuals in the industry. As an example, the writers' names and faces appear alongside the articles on the Bruce Clay, Inc. blog, as shown in Figure 1-2. When a brand empowers its blog writers (and social media writers) to be themselves as they work, the audience sees the people behind the logo. Suddenly, your brand becomes more human and more trustworthy. And people feel like they know you.
Larger View

Figure 1-2: Readers get to know blog writers if their names and faces are visible, such as in the Bruce Clay, Inc. Blog sidebar

Most blog software is fairly simple to set up. We cover more of the benefits and how-tos of blogging in Chapter 7 of this minibook.

Using Personas to Define Your Audience

To help you evaluate your website from your target customer's perspective, you can create a fictional web persona based on all the customer data you accumulated.

A *persona* is like a role, and it includes how a person acts, talks, thinks, believes, and so on. The customer web persona you create is a profile that represents your target audience based on calculated averages of your customers' buying processes, goals, and demographics.

Companies use personas as user "archetypes." These *archetypes* are a compilation of general personality traits, behaviors, wants, and needs attributed to a type of target customer, which can be applied to a larger category of customer types. This helps guide their decisions concerning product launches, new features, customer interaction, and site design. It's easier to evaluate your website from a particular Jane Doe's or John Doe's perspective than just imagining a vague customer group. By understanding the goals and patterns of your audience, your company can create archetypes to help create services to satisfy a specific, highly targeted group.

Your goal is to create a persona that encompasses the most complete picture of your target audience. In fact, you may want to create several personas, depending on your website's various goals and how varied your customers are. Linda, the mother of two, has different motivations for being on your site than Debbie, the high-powered sales exec, or Fred, the college student. Creating more than one persona allows you to produce the maximum amount of appeal to your real-life customers. Creating effective personas helps you

- Understand (and keep in mind) your target audience's goals and beliefs.
- Develop the most effective voice (your brand's representation in its web content) for your company's website.
- Determine what products/features are and are not accepted by your audience.
- Get to know your audience on a more personal level.
- Build a shared vocabulary between you and your audience to avoid confusion.
- Enable your company to make informed decisions.

Creating Personas

Creating personas helps you identify your customers' buying decision processes to allow you to maximize your conversion rate. Acquiring and analyzing the type of data listed in the sections, "Looking at current customer data" and "Interviewing customers," earlier in this chapter, can help you develop a more complete picture of who your audience really is, how they spend their time, and what they value as being important. After looking at this information, you can start to see patterns emerge. These patterns are the basis for the personas you create.

In looking for patterns, notice the similarities and differences between your customers through your research. Keep in mind that personas represent your audience's behavior patterns, not job descriptions, locations, or occupations. Although it's important to be aware of this information, these details should not be the basis of your archetypes. A properly defined persona gives you a well-rounded picture of your customers' attitudes, skills, and goals; it's not just a résumé that only offers a surface view.

After you have your data, group the information in a way that makes the most complete picture of a person. This includes assembling key traits (such as behavior patterns and similar buying processes) to try to form a cohesive "person." You should be able to use the collected information to form a small group of "people" that you feel represent your audience. Each persona (like your real audience) should be different, wanting and looking for different things.

REMEMBER When you are creating your personas, *do not* model them after someone you know. Creating personas based on familiar people in your life alters how you work with those personas. A persona should be a purely fictional character that you feel best represents some segment of your audience.

After you have your persona, don't keep her (or him) to yourself. Share it with the other members of your company to get their insights. They may have valuable opinions that help you narrow or fill out the personality of your customer. Use this time to fill in any blanks. Name your persona to differentiate her from the others: Don't just call her *Jane Doe*. Choose a name that you can believe in, not one that's just a stand-in.

Using Personas

You now have your persona: You've named her, you know where she comes from, and you know what she's looking for. But you're not done. It is now time to put your persona into action. Use your persona to role-play the following:

- **Case studies:** Imagine your persona coming to your website for various purposes. Walk through the types of steps any given persona would go through.
- **User testing:** Using your persona, try out a feature of your website. You can also use your persona when running different keyword searches, starting at a search engine, and find out how quickly that persona can find relevant information on your site.

- **New feature evaluation:** Try out any new pages or features of your website from your various personas' points of view and see how easy they are to use.
- **Product decisions:** Coming from each of your personas' perspectives, think through how useful a new product would be. You may be able to identify whether the product meets a typical user's need as is, or needs some value-add to have better marketability.
- **Design decisions:** See your website design through a persona's eyes to determine whether the colors, placement, layout, bells and whistles, and other design elements make it easier or harder for visitors to achieve their goals.
- **Customer service:** Use your personas to find out how easy it is to get help when using your website. Remember, your web persona doesn't know that you have an exhaustive help system linked from the site map or that clicking a tiny link somewhere in the footer launches a live chat window. The persona only knows what it can easily see during the user-engagement process, so this is a valuable way to find weaknesses in your website.

Persona Type Scenarios

Here is an example of a persona and how you can put it to use. Alice is a competitive personality. Social status is very important to her, and she appreciates it in others. She tends to be impulsive and doesn't mind the impersonality of doing things online as long as she is able to get what she needs quickly and efficiently. She is looking for verifiable results and quantifiable bottom lines. Social interaction is not important to her. She is willing to pay more to get a little extra. She is unmarried and does not see marriage in her near future.

Alice is very Internet-savvy and uses the Internet for ten or more hours per day. She has multiple email accounts from various service providers and does all her shopping and banking online. Alice works for an Internet company and has just purchased a modest condo in the suburbs outside a large metropolitan city.

By analyzing the profile of Alice, you can better target her needs. Based on this, you can see that her primary concern is for quick, expert information. Alice is an impulsive buyer; the key to acquiring her conversion is to give her information in a quick, easy-to-read format while touching on her desire for prestige and quality. She considers convenience, as well as easy access, important. You can guess that when she first visits your site, her eye quickly scans the content for keywords. If you lose her interest for a moment, she's gone.

The profile also gives you an idea of Alice's experience level with your product. This information can help you decide how to target her. Here are two example scenarios:
- **Scenario A: Alice at a technology-related website:** If you're a technology company, you know that Alice has a certain experience level with your breed of product. You can assume that Alice likely understands the basic workings of your merchandise without you having to break things down step by step. Based on her Internet savvy, you know she likely has little or no problem navigating through your site, but if she doesn't find what she's looking for immediately, she will likely take off and visit one of your competitors' sites. For Alice, brand loyalty comes second to quick service.
- **Scenario B: Alice at a non-technical website:** If your product is home- or garden-related, you know that Alice needs a lot of detailed information to better understand how your product or service could benefit her. You need to make sure your information is presented upfront so that Alice doesn't wander away from your site. You know that Alice just purchased her first home. It's likely she is looking for easy ways to spruce it up. How can you gear your marketing campaign to address this goal? Perhaps there's a way to market your product as a "timesaver" so that she can focus on other things. Is Alice likely to have a pet? Maybe your product can do a better job of keeping her pet safe. By understanding Alice, it allows you to target her more efficiently.

Using Alice's persona helps you identify the language that most likely appeals to her and satisfies her motivations and needs. When you're testing out new features or campaign plans, make sure to keep Alice in mind. Ask yourself these types of questions for each of your personas:
- **Benefits:** Does this feature offer a clear benefit to this persona?

- **Level of explanation:** What, if anything, do I need to provide this persona with to help her understand this benefit?
- **Wording:** What kind of language should I use? Does this persona understand industry jargon, or do I need to define terms in the page content for her?
- **Style:** How can my writing style fit this persona and give her what she's looking for most naturally and directly?
- **Tone:** What tone would seem most natural to this persona? Would a tone that's friendly, professional, enthusiastic, subdued, energetic, calm, or other best suit her goals and influence her to stay on the site and move toward my web page's goal?
- **Clarity:** Does this persona realize the problem this feature is supposed to address? How much do I need to spell out?

Benefits of Using Personas

Personas provide many benefits. First, by speaking with your customers directly while gathering the data to create your personas, you have taken the first important steps to creating brand loyalty. Taking time to ask them about their needs and their interests shows them that you are interested in who they are, not just that you are out to make a sale. You want to learn about them, their goals, and what is important to them so that you can make your product better for them. Customers are likely to remember such a move and are more likely to do business with you in the future. By investing in them, you have made it easier for them to invest in you.

Secondly, your personas can alert you to problems you might not have known about. For example, while doing your research, you may discover that your customer base is larger and wider than you imagined. Knowing this shows you that there are two or more very different audiences that you must address. This could lead to creating a whole new product or set of instructions to fit more advanced users, while still catering to your more inexperienced ones. It could also lead to adding more pages to your website or incorporating more appropriate text on each page.

Drawbacks of Using Personas

Many companies resist the idea of personas because they don't understand how they work. They may design personas that are too vague to be efficient in helping with the direction of their company. If not done correctly, personas may cause companies to pigeonhole their audience, negating the basic purpose of creating personas.

Another drawback of using personas is that no matter how much research you do or how deeply you analyze it, you can never know for sure that your customers feel exactly the way that your fictional personas do. If you tailor your campaigns too closely to a persona, you risk alienating some of your other customers. This is why it's important to create multiple personas: You have a better chance at targeting the largest number of users.

At the end of the day, despite your best efforts at analyzing your customers' personalities, all you are left with is a best guess about what they're looking for and who they really are. Using web personas allows your guess to be an educated one and provides your company with an invaluable tool to help keep users' interests in mind.

Chapter 2: Establishing Content Depth and Page Length

In This Chapter

- **Writing for maximum readability**
- **Varying content to increase user interest and search engine ranking**
- **Optimizing images and video**
- **Enabling user-generated content**
- **Writing an effective call to action**

Search engines find out what your web pages are about by reading them. They read everything they can find on your site — the text on your pages, the text in your HTML code, the names of your files and directories, and the *anchor text* in all your links (which is the text someone clicks to follow the link). They also read the anchor text of any inbound links to your site from other people's websites to find out what those sites have written about you. Using all this textual information along with a few other factors like links and Engagement Objects (described in Book III, Chapter 3), search engines determine what your site is about, what search terms your web pages are relevant for, and how much of a trusted authority you are on your topics — and then rank you accordingly.

Because of this focus on written words, a successfully optimized website must have a lot of content. A home page with a single graphic and no textual content can't rank well with the search engines, no matter how cool it looks. On the other hand, a page with a lot of words but no cohesive theme also won't rank well, and for the same reason: The search engines can't figure out what the page is about. The right balance is to have enough content *and* to have it focused on a theme. Then the search engines can index your site and know exactly what it's about.

In this chapter, you find out how to develop content ideas, how to integrate various types of content for a blended approach, and all about the rules for optimizing images and video. You also discover the importance of formatting text so that it's readable and how you can allow user input to build a stronger site. Finally, you find out how to create user engagement by writing effective calls to action.

Building Enough Content to Rank Well

How much content do you need in terms of words per page and pages per subject? Before we tell you our SEO best practices, we want to stress that the answer greatly depends on what is normal for your industry and keywords. When you research your competitors' sites that rank well for your keywords, some of the things you want to find out are how many indexed pages they have and how many words are on the pages that outrank yours. (Note that Book III explains how to do competitive research in detail.) Analyzing these figures among your competitors gives you an indication of what level of content is currently succeeding in the search engines for your keywords. This helps you know how many pages and words you need to play in their league.

Now for the best practices. Depending on the type of web page it is, the general length recommendation varies. First, for research pages (where a visitor's goal would be to get information), we recommend that you have a minimum of 500 words of text content per page. That's a general rule, based on our experience across multiple niches, for research-type pages. If all the top-ranking pages for your keywords have more than 1,000 words each, you may want to consider 1,100 words on your page in order to compete. (Remember that the search engines' algorithms include many factors, and amount of content is only one of them.) But if your research hasn't indicated that you need an unusually high number of words for your industry, 500 words gives the search engines enough content to work with and gives users a satisfying amount of information, as well. It's about one page of typed copy using a 12-point font and single line spacing. In fact, the page that you're reading right now has a little more than 500 words on it, so you can get an idea of what that amount of content looks like. Also, the number of words you need on a page has been steadily increasing over the years. When we first started recommending adding content back in 1997, we set our minimum at merely 75 words per page. Today, the number of words on top-ranked pages in competitive markets is actually closer to 1,000. This variance is why analyzing your competitors is so crucial.

Other types of web pages don't need quite as many words. Blog posts, for example, can range in length based on their purpose, but a best-practice guideline would be at least 200 words per post. E-commerce or shopping pages, which tend to have lots of product pictures, have a recommended minimum of 300 words of content. Just be sure that some of it, at least, is original. If all you include are manufacturer-provided descriptions, what will distinguish your product page from all the other retail sites selling the same product with the same text? Not only will your page

not rank, but also you could suffer a search engine penalty for having "thin content," something that Google's Panda algorithm update is particularly sensitive to. See the "Google's Panda: Enforcer of quality content" sidebar for more information on avoiding a Panda penalty.

As a general rule, you need at least five pages to support each theme, meaning at least five supporting pages for every theme landing page on your website. (A *landing page* is your primary page of information on a particular topic or subtopic, so it's the page where you want users to land when they search for those keywords and click your listing.) Keep in mind that the required minimum number of pages varies depending on what your competitors have. The search engines want to return the most relevant results to a user's search query, and they want their users to be satisfied. It makes sense that the search engines would rank most highly the sites that seem to be the experts, or authorities, in the subject the user is interested in.

For instance, if you're trying to rank for the keyword phrase [Ford Mustang], you're going up against sites that have dozens of related pages about Ford Mustangs including facts, forums, customer reviews, multimedia, and so on. That kind of competitive environment would require you to have a lot more than five pages of content on Ford Mustangs to be considered as much of an authority as the other sites are. You'd need to really beef up your site to make it into the top 10 to 20 search results.

Google's Panda: Enforcer of quality content

Google introduced the Panda update in February 2011 as a filter to remove low-quality content from search results. Since then, many sites have suffered a Panda "penalty," or a ranking demotion, and have been forced to remove or rewrite large portions of their web content. It is possible to recover from a Panda penalty, but not without first cleaning up the low-quality content that caught Panda's attention in the first place.

Panda goes after sites whose content is "thin" (in other words, generally lacking) or does not provide any unique value for users. Too much duplicated content can cause a Panda penalty. An example is a site with many copies of the same page, each with just one or two words changed (as through a find-and-replace operation). Pages with no content or no original content can also be penalized, such as product pages that show only the manufacturer-provided picture and description with no extra text. Panda also targets machine-generated, or "spun," content.

To prevent Panda from hurting your rankings, be sure that you have unique content on every page that gets indexed. For instance, does your in-site search function create category pages with unique URLs but nothing except links on the page? Add a short paragraph of text about the category above the linked results. The best you can do to stay clear of Panda is to give each page at least some unique and valuable content.

If you've already worked on categorizing your website into subject themes, as we explain in Book II, Chapter 4 and elsewhere, you should have a good idea of what "holes" you need to fill in your website. As you go through this chapter, keep in mind your list of landing-page topics and what you need in terms of new content either on those pages or on supporting pages. Figure 2-1 shows a sample website in the construction stage. As you can see, it looks like Topic A needs more pages.
Larger View
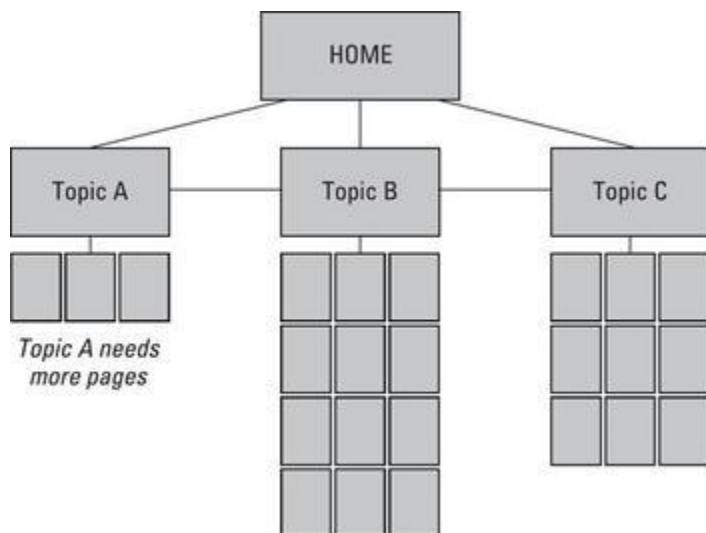
Figure 2-1: You can diagram your website to see where additional pages are needed

Developing Ideas for Content

You may feel overwhelmed at the thought of writing pages and pages of content for your website that have at least 500 words each, but take heart. There are lots of ways to get ideas for content, and even some shortcuts for creating it.

In the following sections, we help get you started with four ways to find content ideas:

- **Brainstorming:** You want to tap into your own creative juices first. Get input from your employees and coworkers, too.
- **Looking at competitors:** Don't copy them, but you can definitely get ideas from them.
- **Utilizing your offline materials:** Repurpose what you've already written.
- **Listening to customers:** Find out what they want to know.

Brainstorming to Get Ideas

The best source of original content for your website may be yourself. You and the other people in your website business are authorities in one thing: your own business. You know the most about your website's goals, products, services, clientele, methods, expertise, history, personnel, and so forth. You might discover that a lot of that information would be interesting and useful for your site visitors. For example, you could ask the founder to write a three-paragraph history of how the company got started (or have someone interview him and write it up). Or you might write about your operations or your facilities like a tour guide, complete with pictures. When you write about your company, industry, and products, it's easy and natural to include lots of keywords, which benefits your SEO efforts. You probably have a wealth of interesting information about your company and its products and services that could be turned into website content.

Brainstorm other kinds of content ideas, too — at this stage, accept any idea that could be useful and engaging to your target audience. Make a list of all possible articles, stories, topics, tidbits, quotes, and so on. Don't stop at just what you're able to create. Consider things that you could write about as well as subjects you could find someone else to create content about. You're just idea-gathering now, so be as creative as you can.

Looking at Competitors for Content Ideas

One of the best ways to fill content holes on your website is to do some competitive research to see what others in your industry are writing about. You want to see what they're doing right, where they're missing the mark, and what you could add to your site that they haven't even thought of yet.

Travel your competitors' websites like a user and discover what they have to offer. In particular, look at the landing page that is competing with your own for the same keyword. Notice its content, as well as the various supporting pages linked from it. (**Note:** You also can do some serious analysis of these pages by using the procedures we describe in Book III, Chapter 2, but right now you're just trying to get some ideas for new content.)

When you go through your competitors' sites, you're essentially looking for anything they have that gives them an advantage — any special content that appeals only to a certain sector or that is attracting links. You are not using their site as a blueprint to copy. You can get ideas for original content that are just as good as, or better than, your competitors'.

What you're looking for depends on your content needs. If you're looking to beef up the number of pages on your site, look at what your competitors offer and how they're marketing themselves, and then find ways to differentiate yourself. You want to make yourself equal to the competition before you can set yourself apart. Make sure you match what they offer in your own way, and then provide content that explains why you're unique, more trustworthy, and overall just better-suited to fit a visitor's needs.

TIP One thing you can notice is how they structure their information compared to how your site does it. For instance, if the two websites sell competing products, compare how they're each presented. Your page might offer a description in paragraph form only, whereas your competitor may include a complete bullet list of features with links to view a schematic diagram, product dimensions, installation instructions, and consumer reviews. In that situation, you know you have some writing to do to boost your content about that product.

You also could get ideas for how to present similar information more effectively than the competition. For example, say your product is cowboy boots. A brief mention on a competitor's site about the importance of breaking in your boots before the beginning of rodeo season could spark the idea to write a whole article about this topic on your site. Or your competitor's site might have a chart showing boot sizes compared to normal shoe sizes. That's useful information that could help the consumer make a purchase decision, so you want to add this feature to your website — but do it better. You might add a third column with the corresponding sock sizes. Or make it a neat, interactive tool rather than a static chart. Or enhance it with illustrations of different-sized feet … you get the idea. Develop a page debating the eternal question: to tuck your jeans into your boots or not to tuck? Have customers respond and send in pictures with their explanations.

By looking at competitors, you can identify holes in your own site as well as ideas to set your site apart. You want to be continuously looking for creative ways to make yourself more interesting and more useful to your visitors. As much content as there is on the web, a lot of it can be improved. It can be written to be clearer, updated to be more relevant, or tweaked to allow users to interact with it in a fresh way. Be on the lookout for these types of opportunities to make your site stand out.

Utilizing Your Offline Materials

One shortcut to creating website content is to pull material from what you already have. Review everything your business has ever written to see if it can be repurposed for your website or blog. Brochures, flyers, catalogs, articles, manuals, tutorials, online help resources, and even customer correspondence may contain volumes of helpful content. Do you have a user manual

or instructions to go with one of your products? Consider replicating it online in HTML. The same goes for marketing materials, text on packaging, or other printed collateral. The writing may need to be updated, but starting with content makes your job much easier than starting from a blank page.

REMEMBER Frequently asked questions (FAQs) can be a popular website feature, and they're very useful in helping site visitors find the information they need. If your company maintains a support staff for customer assistance, that staff may already have an FAQ list started. If you work for a company, ask around to find out what your various departments already have documented that could be polished a bit and used on the web.

Listening to Customers

You want your website to serve your customers and target prospects, so try to address what they'd like to know. Talk to your customers. Ask some questions. Also talk to your support people to find out what customers ask about frequently. You may find great ideas for articles to add to the website (and help out your support department as a bonus). If you have a site search, you can mine those queries as well. What is of interest to one customer might be valuable to more customers, particularly if variations on the same keyword phrase keep popping up.

You might also check blogs and social media sites for your industry, your area, or your target demographic (whichever of those apply) to see what people are talking about related to your keywords. Search for your keyword phrases, your company name, and other pertinent search terms. You can get some excellent ideas for website content by listening to what's being talked about. Just make sure that the ideas relate closely to your web business so you don't dilute your themes with unrelated content

Using Various Types of Content

Search engines may be deaf, dumb, and blind, but users aren't, and search engines understand that. So far in this chapter, we've focused on writing text that not only gives the readers content to consume but gives the search engines additional reasons to rank your site. In this section, we want to turn to the other side of the equation: creating content to engage your users.

Pictures, movie clips, sounds — all these things help hold a visitor's interest on your website. Including other types of content besides text is a good idea for many reasons. The advent of blended search made these files important for search engine rankings, as well. (*Blended search* is the search engines' method of combining different types of listings in a search results page, such as web pages, news articles, pictures, videos, blog posts, and so on.) Google and the other search engines consider these *Engagement Objects* (images, video, audio, interactive technology, and so on) among the factors that help a web page rank well. If two pages are otherwise equal, it makes sense that the search engine would prefer to send its users to a page that has pictures, videos, or other types of content to make the experience more engaging.

Optimizing Images

When you include pictures, video, or other non-text elements in your website, you need to describe them in the surrounding text. This is the key to optimizing your multimedia elements so that search engines know what they're about. Search engine spiders can't watch a video or see a picture accurately yet, though they are working on it. So you must explain the image, video, or any other non-text element using words.

For images (including JPEG, GIF, and other types of picture files), you have several places where you can put descriptive text that the search engines can read. You can refer to what the image is about in the following locations:

- **Text surrounding the element:** Include descriptive text either above, below, or next to the picture, video, or other non-text element. A caption or a lead-in sentence that explains what the image shows works well. This gives search engine spiders text they can read and index, but it also helps communicate your intended meaning to users.
- **Filename:** The filenames of your image, video, and other types of multimedia files should contain actual words.
- `Alt` **attribute:** You can also put brief descriptive text into the `Alt` attribute attached to any image. For example, `alt="image"`. Find out more about `Alt` attributes in the Images section of Book I, Chapter 4.

Alt attributes and the law

You want to help all types of visitors access your website, including people with disabilities. It turns out that there's an easy thing you can do to make your site easier to use for people with vision impairments, and that is to use `Alt` attributes on your images. Not only does that improve your site for visitors, but the law also requires you to use them.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that persons with disabilities may not be denied equal access to goods and services. In 2006, a court ruled that this applied to websites as well as physical retail establishments. The case, which was between the National Federation of the Blind and Target.com, resulted in a ruling that websites must accommodate vision-impaired users by putting `Alt` attributes on every image. Vision-impaired people navigate the web using screen-reading software. The software vocalizes the text and describes the graphics by reading their `Alt` attributes. If an image doesn't have an `Alt` attribute, the screen reader actually says the image's URL out loud! This doesn't help anyone, and not getting a description of the image is definitely user-unfriendly!

Put `Alt` attributes in your image tags to communicate what the image is about and include your keywords. It's a win-win for you, the search engines, and your users.

Naming Images

Because both people and search engines are going to read your filenames, make sure to use good, descriptive words when naming your image, video, and other types of multimedia files. Here is another opportunity to provide readable content (with keywords, if appropriate) to the spiders. Instead of naming your image `A1234.jpg`, call that photo of a skier falling on his face `skier-faceplant.jpg` so that the search engines know what it is, too.

To separate words, don't use a space or an underscore (underscores are seen as an alpha character, rather than as punctuation). Instead, use a hyphen or a period to separate words in your filenames. But try not to overuse them either — just because you can have many dashes in a URL doesn't mean that you should.

Also, keep filenames brief. Remember that long filenames cause URLs to get longer, too (such as if one of your images gets returned in an image search). Because people generally avoid clicking long URLs, keep your names to a reasonable length. Six words in a filename would generally be too much. Keep it simple: A picture of a Ford Mustang with a dented fender shouldn't be called `ford-mustang-with-a-dented-fender.jpg`, just call it `dented-ford-mustang.jpg` or `mustang-dented-fender.jpg`. You'll have on-page text and `Alt` attributes to explain to the engines what the content of the image is.

Handling Image Size

Size matters, especially when it comes to images. In this section, you learn guidelines and some recommendations for resizing your images and their Alt attributes.

Alt Attribute Length

We've already said that you want to write descriptive text around images and in their `Alt` attributes. But how much text you use depends on the size of your image. For example, if you have a 50-x-70-pixel photo of a writer's face next to an article, it's enough to just put the person's name in the caption. You could include a longer description of her credentials in the byline copy, but you wouldn't need an entire paragraph of text captioning a small image like this. On the other hand, larger pictures should have longer text descriptions. If the image is important enough to take up a lot of screen space, it's important enough to tell the search engines about. Explain the picture with at least a sentence of text.

Image Dimensions

If pictures help engage your users, big pictures can satisfy them even more. If you're offering very large images, you might want to put them on a separate page so that only users who really want to see the full-size view have to wait for them to display. However, you don't want the search engines to miss the fact that that picture is part of your page's content, and not some separate, unrelated page. To keep it related, you can show a *thumbnail* or small version of the image on your original page, with a text description, `Alt` attributes, and the works. Then if a user clicks to view the full-size image in a separate window, consider including a text description there, too — but definitely give it an `Alt` attribute and filename that describes what's in the image.

TIP When writing `Alt` attributes for images, make the length proportionate to the image's size on-screen. Create a brief `Alt` attribute for a small image, and longer ones for large images. As a general guideline, we believe the `Alt` content should not exceed 12 words.

Image Size for Mobile

Someone visiting your website on a smartphone doesn't want to wait long for your page to display. One second is about all the time you have to show at least the top of the page before a user decides your site is not mobile friendly.

Slow site speed can be caused by many things, but fat image files are a common culprit. You want to make an image's dimensions shrink so that it fits on a smartphone screen, and webmasters have several tricks up their sleeves to do that (by including responsive design; using JavaScript, which is a coding language; and specifying height and width attributes in the image tag). However, simply squeezing a big image to fit a smaller layout can cause your page to load too slowly, which may be compounded by an image-heavy web page. That's because changing the viewing size doesn't reduce the size of the image file that's being sent, sometimes across low-bandwidth connections, to a person's mobile device. So not only do you want your images to look good, you also them to download quickly.

Image optimization for mobile should involve reducing the amount of data by reducing the picture's file size, not just its dimensions. This can be done with various web design techniques including *image compression* (a method of reducing file size by simplifying the image data), JavaScript, and/or the HTML5 `<picture>` element. How to implement these technically goes beyond the scope of this book, but at least you have a starting place for a conversation with your web designer. You learn more ways to improve mobile optimization in Book IV, Chapter 3.

Mixing in Video

Video enriches your website by offering media content that search engines and users are increasingly looking for. For quick reference, here's a summary of the best practices for mixing in video, which we explain in the following sections:

- **Placement:** Embed the video on the page it relates to, rather than in a separate window.
- **Descriptive text:** Include an explanation of the video in the surrounding text on the page where it is played.
- **Saving:** Save the video file inside the current silo directory, rather than in a central video directory. (***Note:*** You can find out more about silos in Book VI.)

- **Play:** Use the HTML5 player to ensure that your video is compatible with different browsers and devices. Don't set up your page so that a video starts playing automatically. Let users start it themselves.
- **Size:** Choose a viewing size that fits your audience, and make sure that your video player can adjust the size automatically as a viewer's screen size shrinks. There are various ways to handle this. For more on this type of responsive design, see Book IV, Chapter 3.
- **Quality:** Render your video in a file size that fits your audience. Tech-savvy or urban audiences generally have faster connections and can handle larger file sizes. However, files need to be smaller for smooth mobile viewing. Find the balance between good quality and fast download speed.
- **Length:** Shorter videos obviously are easier to download and more convenient to watch. Although the content largely determines the length, short is better than long on the web. Plan to make videos no more than two or three minutes long, if possible. Five minutes is an extremely long time on the web (though certain types of videos are expected to run longer, such as live event footage or recorded video conferences).
- **Posting:** In addition to posting your video on your site, to help your video get noticed, you can upload it to a video-sharing site like YouTube (www.youtube.com), Vimeo (www.vimeo.com) or Metacafe (www.metacafe.com), and link it back to your website. Or you can upload your video directly to one of these sites and use the provided embed code to show it on your site. Both methods have pros and cons, so read on.
- **Schema markup:** Wherever a video is embedded on your site, adding a bit of *Schema markup* in your HTML code can help search engine spiders recognize and index your video more fully. We cover Schema markup more in Book IV, Chapter 4.
- **XML Sitemap:** Tell the search engines where to find your video with a *video XML Sitemap* (a text file listing the URLs of all videos on your site). See Book VI, Chapter 2 for more on creating and submitting XML Sitemaps.

Placing Videos Where They Count Most

To include a video on your website, the SEO best practice is to embed it within the applicable page. Don't show it in a pop-up window where it's isolated from the text describing it, because you want the spiders to see the video as part of the current page. Many sites move videos into separate windows with no title or text, but this is a lost opportunity from an SEO perspective. Unless you describe the video in words the spiders can read, more than likely it won't be ranked with your content because the search engine cannot tell what it's about. Figure 2-2 shows an embedded video with related text near it on the page.
Larger View

Figure 2-2: Embed a video on a page that has closely related text

TIP If you're worried that your page may load too slowly if you embed the video, here's one possible solution. The video can be collapsed when the web page initially loads, displaying only a

link to it. Then if the user clicks the link to watch the video, it can expand and play within the page. This technique uses an expandable `Div` tag that works like a toggle switch, expanding or collapsing the video at the user's choice. You may find that this improves the usability of your page because the user stays in control.

Saving Videos, plus a Word about Formats

If you upload videos you produce and save them on your own website, the search engine optimization benefit is that click-throughs go to your site directly, not to a third-party hosting site. You can do a big push to get it noticed, such as promoting your new video with a press release, a blog post, social media links, word of mouth, and so on. With any luck, your video will get talked about and linked to. Search engines following these links will understand that your site gets the credit for originating and owning that video; then optionally, you can later upload the whole video or an excerpt to a sharing site like YouTube, as well. That's one strategy to maximize the SEO value of a video.

If you upload a video to your site, where you save the video file matters. For example, if your video shows the inside of a Ford Mustang and plays from your Ford Mustang page, save the file inside a directory in your Ford Mustang silo rather than, say, in a video directory within the site. That way, the search engines know for certain that it's a video about Ford Mustangs.

For videos hosted on your own site, you'll want to use HTML5 as the player. The previous standard was to save videos in SWF format for viewing in the Adobe Flash Player. However, Flash content can be hidden from spiders and does not work on mobile (for instance, Apple does not support Flash on iOS devices such as the iPad or iPhone). HTML5 is compatible with most browsers, plays well on mobile screens, and enables native video embedding. As for the video file format, there are many acceptable types; MPEG, MP4, and WebM are just a few standard ones. Your choice should be based on your needs.

Another best practice for SEO is to use Schema.org markup to label various pieces of information about your video on the page where it's embedded. This helps search engine spiders better understand that it's a video with various properties (such as length, title, and so on) so that it can be indexed.

Finally, you want to create a *video XML Sitemap* (a text file listing the URLs of all videos on your site) and submit it to Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools. This step helps ensure that the spiders find and index your video content quickly.

WARNING! Hosting your own videos may not be the best course of action, especially if your site has limited server resources (such as shared hosting, which many WordPress and smaller sites have). A limited amount of *bandwidth* (amount of Internet space available for data to flow) can cause a problem because videos can be very large files. If you lack the server resources to allow many people to download videos from your site, playback may be very slow or, worse, your site could crash. In addition, you need a little technical know-how to make your hosted video viewable on any screen size and easily downloadable for smooth play. For these reasons, you might prefer uploading videos to a third-party video-hosting site and simply pasting the provided embed code on your site where you want the videos to be viewed. Read on for more about posting videos.

Sizing Videos Appropriately for Your Audience

When you're deciding how big to make your video, consider your audience first. If they tend to have the latest technology and fast Internet connections, you can upload large-display, good-quality videos without too much concern for their big file size. But if your audience is varied, or not technically savvy, you may want to stick with smaller files that can easily stream over lower Internet connection speeds.

Video dimensions should equate to either a 4:3 aspect ratio (standard view) or 16:9 aspect ratio (widescreen), but size varies. Save your video at the largest viewing size needed (such as for a desktop user) and then enable it to reduce in size as the user's window or screen size shrinks. The embed code provided by a video-hosting site accounts for that automatically, or your webmaster can include some JavaScript that makes a video resize responsively.

Choosing the Best Video Quality

Quality in this sense refers to the resolution of the video image (how clear it looks compared to the original) and how clean the audio sounds. The higher the quality, the bigger the file. You might be tempted to put a full-size, full-quality video on your site because it looks and sounds great on your desktop, but after it's online, it may be too large for anyone to download. Weigh what's best for your audience. Studies have been done on video quality, and if you have to pick between decent picture quality and decent audio quality, go with audio quality. Most people are willing to put up with reduced picture quality as long as they can hear the audio clearly, but not the other way around. That said, you can probably keep the audio quality at 128 Kbps (kilobytes per second) maximum and meet the dual objectives of good audio quality and good download speed.

Choosing the Right Video Length

Shorter videos are easier to watch than longer ones, download faster, and don't get "stuck" in the middle as often. People also prefer to watch a video that they know will take only a few minutes of their time. They may be reluctant to start a video that requires a lot of time to watch. A software company began creating Flash tutorials that were 15 to 20 minutes long for users to view online (modeling them after the step-by-step approach that had always worked in live trainings). The tutorials seemed like a big success until someone examined the server logs. Of all the people who started watching the tutorials, only 3 percent watched them all the way through, with 90 percent exiting within the first two minutes. Needless to say, the next tutorials were two minutes or under in length.

Posting Your Videos to Increase Traffic

Videos can attract users who wouldn't otherwise find your website or hear about your brand. One strategy for attracting a bigger video audience is to upload your videos to a video-sharing site such as YouTube (www.youtube.com), Vimeo (www.vimeo.com), or Metacafe (www.metacafe.com). YouTube is owned by Google and also happens to be the second largest search engine, though every one of these hosting sites provides free hosting that's easy to use.

TIP You may want to upload a video only on your site, at first, and give it time to gain some links that can be spidered. Then, after you've established ownership of the video, perhaps after a couple of months, you can post it on a video-sharing site to expose it to a bigger audience.

When you post a video on YouTube or another site, follow these best practices to optimize the video for searchers:
- **Upload to your channel:** Uploading self-produced videos to your *brand channel* (a customizable page with links to all the videos you've uploaded that interested viewers can subscribe to) lets viewers easily browse your other videos and also reinforces your branding because your company name appears prominently. Figure 2-3 shows an example of a brand channel on YouTube.

Larger View

Figure 2-3: Increase brand visibility and your video's viewing audience by uploading your videos to your brand's YouTube (or other video-hosting site) channel

- **Link to your site:** Entice people watching your video to visit your site by linking to your site from the video description. Also show your logo, a call to action, and your web address somewhere in the actual video.
- **Use keywords appropriately:** Video is another form of content, so before you post it, do some keyword research and pick the keyword phrase that best represents the video subject matter. Then include the keyword in the video title, tags, and description.
- **Upload a transcript:** Search engines can read text, so upload your written script or a transcript with your video. If you don't have one, in YouTube you can use the *closed captioning* feature to automatically generate text captions.

Making the Text Readable

Your text content needs to be plentiful and focused for the search engines, but it also needs to be readable for your users. Here are some tips for improving your text's readability:

- **Use a spelling checker.** When your writing includes spelling errors and typos, what does that say about your company? It may communicate that you are unprofessional, that you have no quality control, or that you simply don't care — none of which are good impressions to give your site visitors. Spelling checkers don't catch everything, but they can point out things that aren't even words. Then have someone proofread to catch any remaining problems.
- **Break your writing into smaller chunks.** When we recommend a minimum of 500 words per page, we aren't suggesting you put it all into one gargantuan paragraph. It's difficult to read large blocks of text on a screen. Short paragraphs of three to five lines are easier to track with your eyes. It's also easier to hold your readers' interest and keep them moving to the next thought when you separate a piece into short sections. You can use bullets, a Q&A (question and answer) format, lists, subheadings, and other techniques to make your text more digestible.
- **Use bullets.** Bullet points make for easy reading. They visually parse the text into small, digestible bits. Readers can see at a glance how many there are, what they relate to, and how long it's going to take to read through the list. You don't have to stick to the standard black-dot style bullet, either, but keep in mind that some bullets created in text (rather than using a graphic bullet) also signal to search engines that these are bullet points, which helps them decipher what your content is about.

For a good example of how this works, look at a news story on CNN's website (www.cnn.com), which summarizes the main "story highlights" of the article in bullet points next to the full text, making the article easy to skim while offering more information to an interested reader.

- **Choose the most appropriate reading level for your audience.** One of the metrics you should look for when you're analyzing your competitors' pages is the average reading level of those reading the pages. One scale known as the Flesch-Kincaid readability score measures the corresponding U.S. grade level of written text. So, for instance, a Flesch-Kincaid score of 8.0 would indicate an eighth-grade reading level; a score of 16.2 would mean it's appropriate for people with four years of college education. The Single Page Analyzer in the free Lite version of the SEOToolSet returns this number, as does Microsoft Word. To turn on the advanced page statistics in Word, choose File⇨Options⇨Proofing, and then in the dialog box that appears, select the Show readability statistics check box. (See Figure 2-4.) Run a spelling check on your document. After the check is complete, a dialog box pops up, containing information related to the general ease of readability of your text.

Larger View
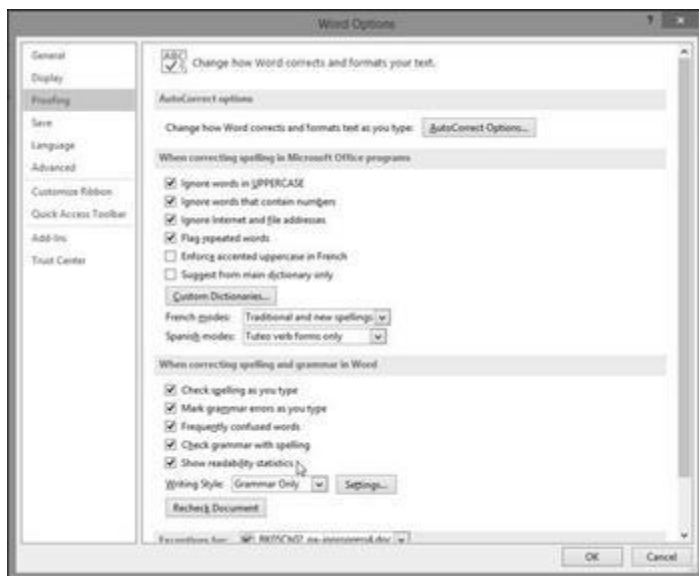
Figure 2-4: Turning on readability statistics in Word gives you the grade level and Flesch-Kincaid score of the document's text

To come up with a number, both the Single Page Analyzer and Word analyze the average number of syllables per word, words per sentence, and sentences per paragraph. For the Flesch-Kincaid grade-level score, a higher number is more difficult to read; lower is easier. The Flesch grade level corresponds roughly to the American school system. A grade of 9.6 would be about the reading level of a high school freshman midway through the year. If you find your pages scoring way too high or too low for what's natural in your market, you should adjust your word length and sentence structure.

- **Name your nouns.** Don't write about *"the thing";* call your product or keyword by name every time you mention it. Don't overuse pronouns like "it," "them," "that," or "those"; instead, spell out what you're talking about. When you clarify what you're writing about each time, you prevent reader confusion and give the search engines more uses of your keywords.
- **Be careful with acronyms.** Jargon alphabet soup — those three-letter acronyms that separate "us" from "them" and identify who's in the know from outsiders who haven't got a clue what everyone is talking about — doesn't belong on your website without being clearly defined. Not only do you risk ostracizing site visitors who don't know your acronyms, but also you risk keeping search engine spiders in the dark. Instead, use the good journalistic practice of writing out the phrase the first time it occurs on every page, followed by the acronym in parentheses. You might

also consider spelling out your phrase in every usage if it improves your keyword density. If you must use acronyms exclusively, you can use the `Acronym` HTML tag — this helps users by allowing them to hover the mouse over the word to get the full definition. There's no SEO value in the tag because search engines ignore the tag as it can be spammed.

Larger View

```
Example: <acronym title="Search Engine Optimization">SEO</acronym>
```

- **Allow white space and margins.** Empty space around text makes it easier to read, so don't think of white space as wasted screen real estate. Use margins and spacing to avoid a cluttered look. Edge-to-edge text looks like too much to read, so people won't try. Also consider indenting paragraphs by wrapping the left or right edge of your text nicely alongside a graphic. This can add visual appeal as well as reduce the width of your paragraph and increase readability.

- **Select readable fonts.** You can specify typefaces that are *serif fonts* (fonts that include little strokes at the ends of characters, such as the feet on a capital A) or *sans-serif fonts* (fonts without serifs, such as Arial, Verdana, and others) for your body text. Although users may have their own opinions on this, sans-serif fonts are considered the king of web text because serifs often make small letters less readable on a computer monitor or smartphone screen. And to keep from cluttering your HTML with inline font tags, be sure to specify what typefaces to use on headings, captions, body text, and so on, using an external CSS (Cascading Style Sheet). (For more on that, see Book IV, Chapter 1.)

  It's important to note that even if you specify what typeface you want to use, the font cannot show up if users do not have that typeface installed on their computers. For this reason, specify multiple fonts or end your font command with a generic command, such as `serif`. This way, if a user's browser can't find the exact font you wanted, it can at least substitute a similar font.

- **Choose backgrounds and colors for readability.** The most readable text is black type on a white background. You can vary from that, but do so carefully. For your main body copy, do use dark fonts against a light background for maximum contrast and readability. Using *reverse copy* (light text against a dark background) should never be applied to an entire website. Not only is it harder to read, but also you risk letting your users print out blank pages when they choose File⇨Print (white text tends to not show up on white paper).

  WARNING! Also be careful of having too little contrast between your background and type colors. You've probably watched presentations where the slides were illegible because they had peach text on a beige background, or some similar combination. It's the same principle on your website. Make the words stand out. In addition to usability, adequate contrast between text and background is an extremely important point for search engines: Text that is too similar in color to the background could be considered hidden text and marked as spam.

- **Keep mobile users in mind.** Make sure that your website text is legible on mobile screens of all sizes and shapes. In general, that means using large, clean, sans-serif fonts, high-contrast colors (such as black text on a white background), and properly implemented images. Good readability in a mobile environment depends on more than content, however. For more on mobile-friendly web design, see Book IV, Chapter 3.

- **Plan for printing.** People may want to print your web pages, so be sure to create a print style sheet that defines how all your site fonts should translate for printing and how to lay out the content on an 8½-x-11-inch piece of paper. You should also specify the images to print, removing unnecessary ones in order to save your users time, ink, and paper. Neglecting to create a print style sheet can cause printing nightmares, and people can waste tree-loads of paper in the process.

Allowing User Input

Letting users contribute content directly to your website meets at least two goals simultaneously: It adds more content to your site and stimulates higher user engagement. Although you might feel nervous about letting other people write text that appears on your website, the advantages

make it definitely worth considering. And you can still hold the reins to make sure your site contains accurate and constructive information. The primary SEO motivation for allowing user-generated content (UGC) is to add unique content to pages that would otherwise contain only duplicate content.

One of the best applications of user-generated content is reviews. Letting users write their own reviews of your products and services is a fantastic way to get content on your site. Users write about your products in their own words, which become natural-language search terms. Including user reviews might help you capture *long-tail queries* (search queries for long, specific phrases that indicate a serious, conversion-ready searcher) if you make sure those pages can be crawled by the search engines.

TIP It's great for business, too. Facilitating online user reviews of your products or services can help you sell them. Consumers also trust user-generated content more than traditional sales copy. After reading reviews, people are often more likely to purchase because they have more faith in what they will receive. Educated consumers also make better customers, with less potential for returned merchandise.

Website owners often fear that people will write bad things about their product or service and negatively impact their brand. However, statistics show that the majority of user reviews are positive. For instance, the online-reviews website Yelp (www.yelp.com) says that 85 percent of reviews are positive. Similarly, the site Bazaarvoice (www.bazaarvoice.com) claims that 80 percent of all reviewers award four or five stars.

WARNING! That being said, you can always expect a few people (or spambots) to write defaming, nonsensical, or offensive comments that don't belong on your website. To take care of unwanted reviews, you should
- Monitor your user-generated content, either automatically using a service, or manually, so that you can remove the offending entries.
- Consider tracking the IP addresses of reviewers so that you can identify someone who leaves a truly malicious comment.
- Consider requiring a *CAPTCHA* (an interface that asks the user to type the characters displayed) or an account login for anyone who submits a review. The drawback is that your security gate may dissuade people from participating, but it would give you assurance that you're dealing with real people only. (**Note:** Too much UGC spam on a page can actually cause search engines to consider the page low quality and demote it in the search engine results pages [SERPs], so this is worth policing.)
- Allow users to comment on other people's reviews (with a link such as "Was This Review Helpful?"). Then the reviews can become self-regulating to a certain extent.

REMEMBER Negative feedback can often help a business, so don't shun it entirely. Negative reviews help people understand the product's limitations and further build trust. ("It didn't work for them, but their situation is different than mine.") Online reviews can also alert you to cases where your products or services truly did fall short so that you can address the problems. When a disgruntled user has a legitimate issue that you read about in the user-generated content, you can immediately contact the person to resolve it. After the person's issue is resolved, she might be so happy that you end up getting another, completely positive review of your customer service.

Another interesting thing to note about negative reviews is that they can actually help build trust. Many people say that they don't trust a product that doesn't have anything but positive reviews. Negative reviews actually validate the user's sense that nobody's perfect.

Besides reviews, you might consider adding these other types of user-generated content to your website:
- **User forums online:** These discussions can become free-for-alls, but they also allow significant user interaction and provide you with excellent feedback from your user group. You can decide

whether to participate with "official" responses or not. Depending on how they're handled, responses from a company representative can either hurt or help the brand.

- **Comments:** News sites do this all the time. After an article, they put a Comments link and let people respond. The number of comments can even make the article appear more popular, relevant, or interesting.
- **Social media timelines:** You can display a live social media feed right on your website, in a sidebar or elsewhere, to show what people are saying related to your brand or subject. By adding just a bit of HTML code, you can embed live-streamed views of Twitter tweets or Instagram posts that mention your brand or a particular *hashtag* (a word or phrase beginning with a pound sign (#) that people include in a post to identify the topic). This content would not be spiderable but could nevertheless provide social proof to site visitors that your brand is worth talking about, and it could also build engagement with your social media community.

Creating User Engagement

A lot of what you learned in high school English class can help with your website writing and make it more engaging to read:

- **Choose strong verbs that convey action.** Avoid overusing the forms of "to be" verbs (*is, are, was, were*, and so on) because they stick a sentence together with all the excitement of white glue. Instead, generate interest with active verbs like *drive, soar, infuse, create*, and so on.

  Also avoid using the passive voice, which dulls down your writing and makes it sound like a dry treatise or a political science textbook. English teachers suggest asking, "Who kicked whom?" in order to find out what a passive-voice sentence really means. Here's a passive sentence that lacks excitement: "Up to 20 pairs of skis can be stored in the MegaRack ski hauler." You can rewrite it by identifying a subject ("you") and making it active: "You can pack skis for a 20-person ski party into this trunk-top MegaRack ski hauler."

- **Show, don't tell.** Your website needs to persuade people, interest them, and draw them in with good content. For this reason, you should write as if they're there, not just reading about an event after the fact. Newspaper reporting tells what happened: "On Friday night, Racer Rick won the Indy 100 driving a bumper car." But to engage your readers, you want to show them what you're talking about. Describe the scene when the race began; what Racer Rick looked like; how his bumper car looked compared to all the Formula Ones on the track; what people said before, during, and after the race; the blow-by-blow of the race action; and the spectacular finish. Don't just tell people about your product or service; make them feel it.

- **Use sensory words.** Your text needs to make readers feel, taste, touch, hear, and see what you're talking about — to experience it themselves — rather than to just read a report about it. You achieve this using sensory words and good descriptors. For instance, "The XJ-7 ski pole improves your downhill speed" tells the facts. But "Wrap your fingers around the XJ-7's form-fitted grips and hold on tight as you zip around curves, adjusting your descent with light touches of your diamond-tipped poles to the snow-packed ground racing beneath you" makes your readers experience it. Not to mention that you can integrate your keywords more easily into a descriptive paragraph.

- **Be specific and give details.** As we suggest in the section "Making the Text Readable," earlier in this chapter, your writing needs to call things by name. Don't be vague — it leads to ambiguity and confusion for your readers. Because *you* know exactly what you mean, you may generalize or put together phrases that don't make sense to someone unfamiliar with your business. To help you improve your text, you might ask someone who's a complete novice to review your copy and point out anything that's unclear.

- Also, try not to use pronouns like *it* and *that* or generic words like *stuff* or *thing* when you can use words packed with meaning instead. As a bonus, restating the proper name of the thing you're talking about helps the search engine understand better that your page is about that thing, whether it be ski poles, cowboy boots, or search engine optimization.

  REMEMBER Keep in mind that your website is never "done." Good writing, if you remember your high school or college composition courses, involves continuous revision. When you think you are finished and that the writing is good enough, you should put the pages away for a few

days, do something else, and then come back and look at them again. More than likely you can find a few more things that can be made better. And as always, try to have fresh eyes look at what you've written. Someone who has not seen it before can usually see shortcomings that you could not see because of your familiarity with the subject.

Writing a Call to Action

You know the goal that you have for your web page visitors — to make a purchase, sign up for your newsletter, subscribe to your RSS feed, sign a petition, become a member, or something else. *Calls to action* are the words that clearly give users that opportunity. "Buy your XJ-7 poles now," and "Try out the new XJ-7 ski poles," and "See the XJ-7's new colors" all represent calls to action that can help convert a website visitor into a customer.

For search engine optimization, include descriptive words in your calls to action. Notice that every example in the preceding paragraph mentions the name of the product (XJ-7) and something meaningful about it. If your call to action says only "Buy now" or "Add to cart," you're missing an opportunity to clearly specify (to the search engines) that this is the page where the XJ-7 can be purchased. Your website design may have a standard interface that includes generic options under every product listing, but you could consider also including a more specific text link under the product description. Or for another example, if you have links in your copy to sign up for your newsletter, include a brief description in every link like "Get the Car Restoration Newsletter" rather than just "Sign up for our newsletter." Contextual links that include specific versus generic words clarify things for users and add SEO value, if the anchor text is a natural description of the destination page and not keyword stuffed.

WARNING! With internal links, be careful not to make your pages appear "over optimized" for a particular keyword. That can happen if a page's primary keyword phrase is used through the page's head and body sections, in the site navigation, and also in anchor text from pages all over the site — each time, exactly the same. See Book VI, Chapter 1 for a full description of internal linking best practices.

To be most effective, a call to action should use an imperative verb (like *see, try*, or *buy*) and a compelling benefit. The following example could be from a business-to-business site. A call to action like this would be very motivating for an engineer seeking this type of solution:
Larger View

```
Attend our webcast "Process Excellence for Supply Chain Management"

    and learn how to reduce costs with our process-driven approach to

    aligning business processes within the supply chain.
```

Your call to action should tell visitors exactly what you want them to do:

- If you want them to buy your product, you could scatter multiple calls to action in strategic places within your copy, telling them how to do it (such as a button or text link with "Click here to buy Brand X now").
- If you want them to contact you by phone, state your phone number and instructions ("Call us Monday–Friday from 8–5 EST at 1-800-999-9999"). You could repeat the number in bold text throughout your copy and again at the end.

REMEMBER Be wary of spamming the page. Repeating your call to action works only if you don't annoy the visitor. From an SEO perspective, you can configure a page for a user, for a search engine, and for your conversion objective.

An effective call to action entices users to click. It motivates users to move further into the conversion process (leading them to whatever your goal is, whether a purchase, signup, or other). Often, you won't be able to know conclusively what phrasing works best until you've tried

them. So if you're debating between three different calls to action, you could set up a test alternating between versions, tracking how many people clicked on each version, as well as the eventual conversion rate (how many of those clicks resulted in the desired goal). Then you would know which call to action is most effective for your current audience and website.

Chapter 3: Adding Keyword-Specific Content

In This Chapter

- **Creating your keyword list**
- **Developing content using your keywords**
- **Including synonyms to widen your appeal**
- **Deepening your content for semantic search**
- **Optimizing your content for search engine rankings**
- **Finding the best tools for keyword integration**

You may have a website already up and running, or you may be in the planning stages of a brand-new site. Either way, you should be ready to identify where you have content holes that need to be filled. In this chapter, you hone your skills at creating content that can rank well with the search engines.

First, ask yourself: What is my website about? The answers to this question give you a foundation for all your content planning and writing. Some sites try to be everything to everybody, but those sites don't rank well in searches. When a site's content is unfocused and too general, search engines can't figure out what the site is about. The site doesn't demonstrate expertise in any one thing, so the search engines don't know what search queries the site is relevant for. The result? The site doesn't rank well in search results.

You must clearly know your site's main subject *themes*, or the primary categories of information in your site, as a first step to planning and writing effective content. In a nutshell, you need to identify your themes, categorize them into pages, and then create focused content on those subjects. This is what we cover in this chapter. (For more on how to choose a theme for a website, see Book II, Chapter 1.)

Creating Your Keyword List

After you know your website's main subject themes, you can begin building a keyword list. A *keyword* is any word used as a search query. Search engines try to give users what they're looking for by searching for those keywords among their indexes of websites and then displaying the most relevant, trustworthy results. You want your website to be considered the most relevant for the keywords that match what your site is about. You need to choose your keywords so that you can proactively create focused content that can be considered most relevant.

Your first step in building a keyword list should be to brainstorm. At the brainstorming stage, write down every keyword or keyword phrase that comes to mind for your themes. You can filter them later; for now, you just want to amass the longest list you can of one-word, two-word, three-word, and longer potential keyword phrases that relate to your website. (Note that the multi-word phrases are important to plan for because people tend to search for more specific keyword phrases when they're ready to make a decision, but they search for shorter keyword phrases when they're just doing research.) To get more input, ask other people what they would call the information, products, or services you offer. Ask people involved in your business or industry, but also ask your neighbor, your niece, or others who are unfamiliar with your industry. You're trying to find all the ways someone might try to find what you have to offer.

After you've brainstormed, the next step is to organize your long list of potential keywords into subject categories, broken down from the broadest to the most specific. If your website is about customized classic cars, an outline might look something like this:

```
Classic Cars
Classic Cars 1950s
Classic Cars 1960s
Classic Cars 1970s
Classic Cars American
Classic Cars Ford
Classic Cars Ford Mustang
Classic Cars Ford Mustang Convertibles
Classic Cars Ford Mustang Hard Tops
Classic Cars Ford Comet
Classic Cars Ford GTO
Classic Cars Chevrolet
Classic Cars Chevrolet Sedans
Classic Cars Chevrolet Trucks
Classic Cars Customization
Classic Cars Customization Paint
Classic Cars Customization Upholstery
Classic Cars Customization Upholstery Leather
Classic Cars Customization Upholstery Vinyl
```

These are all terms people might search for when they are looking up classic cars, or customization, or both, and all of them can be used as keywords on your website. You can go into even more breakdowns and come up with specific keywords into the hundreds or thousands, as appropriate for your site.

After you have your initial keyword list, you need to evaluate the keywords and identify which ones are your main subjects. Then organize the more specific subtopic keywords below them. You want to structure your website to assign each of your main keywords to a specific *landing page* (the page you want users to come to because it's the best source of information for that topic on your site). For instance, you'd want to build a landing page for the keyword phrase [classic cars Ford Mustang] that has focused content on Ford Mustangs and that links to subpages of supporting information about Ford Mustangs. Doing this makes it easier for search engines to know that the page is relevant to searches for [Ford Mustangs] or [classic Ford Mustangs] or [classic Mustang cars], and so on. We recommend that you include a minimum of five subpages supporting each of your landing pages to present depth of content to the search engines. Organizing your site into categories like this is part of *siloing* (subject theming), and it's covered at length in Book VI, Chapter 1.

REMEMBER Weed out keywords that don't support your subject themes: Unrelated words that show up too frequently on a page dilute the page's subject relevance. For instance, if your Ford Mustangs page lists all the possible tire and wheel options and mentions "tires" too many times, the search engines might think it's a page about Ford Mustang tires, and then they might lower its ranking for the keyword [Ford Mustang].

For more help selecting good keywords, see Book II, Chapter 2.

Developing Content Using Your Keywords

After you have your categories and subcategories mapped out, look at your website content and choose (or plan) a landing page devoted to each one. For every landing page, you also want to assign a primary keyword or keyword phrase. In other words, your site needs to have a focused page on each of your important keywords.

Your goal is to have the search engines recognize what each one of your landing pages is most relevant for so that it can show up in search results for its keywords. And the better you can focus your content on those targeted keywords, the higher your URL is likely to be in the list.

Your website's landing pages present the all-important first impression to site visitors. You want to make sure your landing pages not only put your best foot forward but also interest visitors enough to entice them to go further, and hopefully convert. The pages have to look good to users *and* search engines.

As a general guideline, the pages at the top of each silo (your landing or index pages) should have at least 500 words of text content and be supported by at least five subpages (each with at least 500 words) within the same theme. (***Note:*** The minimum word count guideline for a product page containing lots of pictures is lower; see the previous chapter for more details on length.) Writing that much content may sound overwhelming, but you can tackle it as you would any big project. Develop a strategy for adding original text to each page. Setting a schedule and producing *X* number of pages every week eventually builds up a site that can serve as a subject matter expert in the areas that are important to your business. Focus not on gimmick pages, *link bait* (short-lived attention-getters), Top Ten lists, or other flash-in-the-pan strategies, but on developing content that will satisfy researchers and convert them to buyers. (For more on link bait, see Book VI, Chapter 1.)

TIP Your landing pages need to have enough content so that people reaching them from a search engine feel satisfied that they've come to the right place. You want the content to engage visitors enough so that they want to stay. You also need your landing pages to link to other pages that offer more detailed information within the subject category and lead to opportunities to buy, sign up, or take whatever action your site considers a conversion.

Beginning to Write

When writing your web content, it's best to use simple, everyday language that people are likely to understand and possibly search for. As a general rule, we recommend including a keyword or keyword phrase often enough to be prominent so that someone who reads the page will be able to pick out what the most important word is. Don't force your keywords into your content. Let it sound natural.

Additionally, you should avoid using only general phrases; be sure to include detailed descriptive words as well. If your keywords are too general, they are likely to be up against too much competition from others targeting the same keywords. However, fewer people search for very specific terms, resulting in fewer potential visitors. It's a balancing act, and the rules aren't hard and fast. You need to find the right mix for your site by finding the keywords that bring traffic that actually converts: In other words, you want to put out the bait that brings in the right catch. Also keep in mind that the broader keywords go on the upper landing pages and more specific keywords go on the subpages, so you might need to focus on several more specific variations of a keyword phrase to rank for the broader term. For example, targeting a general keyword phrase like "used cars" could have supporting long-tail keyword variations such as "used cars in New York City" and "used 2014 Mustangs" and more.

When you start to write a new page, stay focused on the page's theme. Write as much as you can about that subject theme, even if the information seems totally obvious to you. What seems obvious to you probably would be new information to someone unfamiliar with your subject. After all, that's why someone would come to your site: to read what a subject expert has to say. Begin

by stating the obvious; it establishes your credibility when your visitors find information they already know to be true on your pages, and they'll be more likely to trust your site to give them further information.

As you write your first draft, don't worry so much about keyword placement. Do include your keywords, but let the language flow naturally around the topic. Later you can analyze what you've written and refine things like keyword density and distribution (more on that under "Optimizing the Content," later in this chapter).

To test whether your writing comes across as natural, try reading it out loud. Text that sounds like conversational language engages readers.

Keeping it Relevant

Make sure that you don't dilute the subject theme by including irrelevant information. Some pruning might be necessary if you're working on an existing page rather than starting one from scratch. If the page is all about Chevrolet Camaros, keep the discussion focused on that car model, without a lengthy discussion of how it compared to the competing Pontiac Firebird back in the 1970s. Too many mentions of another type of car can dilute your Camaro theme and confuse the search engines, thereby reducing your subject relevance to [Chevrolet Camaros].

Including Clarifying Words

You want to include secondary words that help clarify what your keywords are about. For example, if you have the keyword [apple] for one of your pages, the search engines are going to look at all the text near the word *apple* to figure out whether your page is about the fruit or the technology company. If this was your web page, you could use words like *software, iPad*, or other related terms to clarify that you mean Apple as in tech company.

REMEMBER You want to put your clarifying words close to your keywords in the text. The closer the proximity, the stronger the correlation.

Another reason to include clarifying words is to match more search queries, especially long-tail queries. *Long-tail queries* are longer, targeted search phrases that aren't frequently used, but they generally have a high conversion rate because searchers entering these queries know exactly what they're looking for. Search engine users are becoming savvier as time goes on, and they know that a single keyword is probably going to be too broad. A good example is what happens when you do a search for [security]. You might be in need of a security guard service, but doing a quick search on Google with the keyword [security] gives you the Wikipedia article on security, the Department of Homeland Security, the Social Security Administration, and many listings for computer security software. Using a long-tail search query like [security guard service Poughkeepsie], on the other hand, turns up map results listing local businesses, two local business sites for hiring security guards, and a couple of news articles about security services in Poughkeepsie.

You can see why it's a good idea to include supplemental words and phrases on your web pages. Search engines can match queries to words that can be found in proximity to each other on your page, even if they never appear as a phrase. So for instance, if your web page has the heading "Oldsmobile 98s Make the Coolest Convertibles," and the body copy contains all these words in close proximity as well, your page would be found relevant to the search query [Oldsmobile 98 convertible], even though you never used the exact phrase.

Including Synonyms to Widen Your Appeal

Synonyms of your keywords also need to show up on your web pages, in your HTML tags, and in the anchor text of links to your pages. People don't use the exact same words to describe things,

so it appears more natural to search engines to find backlinks to your pages using a variety of different terms that all mean roughly the same thing.

Including keyword synonyms also helps you match more search queries. People search for things in their own words, not yours. For instance, if you have a page on your classic cars site all about Oldsmobile 98s, you should make sure your keywords include both [Ninety-Eight] spelled out and the numeric [98], because people could search either way. In another example, a web page that sells ski boots would optimize that page for the keyword phrase [ski boots]. But they'd also want their listing to display when people search for [ski footwear], [snow boots], or [winter apparel]. Unless they have synonyms like these within the page, the search engine won't find it relevant and won't include it in the search results.

Also, don't forget nicknames! If your main subjects have common nicknames, these are important to include — possibly as keywords, but at least in your body content. For instance, on your classic cars site, your Chevrolet Camaro page should include the word [Chevy], your Ford Mustang page should include the nickname [Stang], and so forth.

TIP Of course, your hunt for good synonyms could begin in a thesaurus. Even better, find out what words Google thinks are synonymous with your keywords. Do this by searching for a keyword and then noticing the other words that Google formats in bold on the results page besides the words you typed.

Dealing with Stop Words

Stop words are small, common like *a, the, at, to, will, this, and, with* and others. Because they typically add little meaning to a query, the search engines used to ignore them almost entirely. Today, however, search engine algorithms are intelligent enough to recognize phrases that contain stop words, rather than discard them completely. For example, a search for [holiday on ice], which is the name of a touring ice show, brings back entirely different results from a search for [holiday ice], even though the preposition "on" is a stop word. Further, queries that are made up completely of stop words, such as [The Who], can be understood and processed as is. In today's world, in which search engines increasingly understand the semantics of spoken or written language, you can feel free to include stop words in your keyword phrases as appropriate.

Freshness of the Content

Content freshness can affect a web page's rankings, depending on the topic. Google likes to show current information, especially for queries on trends, celebrities, technology, and other quickly evolving subjects. With our Bruce Clay, Inc. blog, we have noticed that posts about competitive keywords show up higher in Google search results when they are newer and decline in ranking over time. We have a few notable exceptions, but overall, newer blog posts have a ranking advantage over older ones, all else being equal.

Another benefit is that the more often your site has fresh content, the more often the search engines want to index it. News sites, for example, have to be crawled constantly because of how frequently they post new stories. On a lesser scale, if you have a blog on your website that has new activity every day, the spiders crawl your site more often than a site that updates once a month.

If your site content gets indexed in news searches, you definitely need fresh content to stay near the top. Without frequent posts, news articles may fade into the oblivion of the search results' back pages. For a blog, you want to post often enough to merit frequent return visits from readers as well as spiders. Set your posting schedule based on your own and your target audience's needs, but try to make fresh, original content available on a regular basis.

Your site's ranking in normal search results does not change based on how frequently the search engine spiders crawl your site. Where you might suffer as a result of infrequent search engine indexing, however, is if you've made SEO-related changes to your site since the last time the search engine spiders crawled the site, and those changes have not yet been indexed. If that's the case, you can bring them to the search engine's attention by manually submitting the changed page URLs. See Book VII, Chapter 6 to learn about direct submission.

Periodically, you should review your site content to make sure it stays fresh. See if anything has changed, and either update or add to the text that's there. This is pretty much common sense, but it has the added benefit of providing fresh content to keep the spiders coming back to your site.

Deepening Your Content

The engines look for depth and breadth of content on a subject to confirm that a web page really knows what it's talking about and deserves to be a search result. This is even more true since the birth of Google's Knowledge Graph, which seeks to understand not just the meaning of words but also the connections between entities on the web (see Book I, Chapter 3).

When you include supplemental words and phrases beyond your keywords, you help search engines map your web page content to their Knowledge Graph data. They increasingly understand the relationships between various people, places and things (that is, entities). So when they index a web page about a subject, they expect to find words that relate to it. For example, a page about John Wayne would be expected to include supplemental words like "actor," "western" and "movies"; a page lacking these semantically connected words probably wouldn't be considered much of an expert on the subject of John Wayne. In order to be found most relevant to searches for your subjects, consider increasing your pages' depth of content.

Dynamically Adding Content to a Page

You may use a Content Management System (CMS) that takes your content and automatically builds your web pages from it. If so, you'll want to make sure it's dynamically adding content properly, taking into consideration everything you know about SEO and good content writing. For instance, the text should sound natural, use your keywords in the appropriate amount and distribution, and make sense. Also, make sure that the `Title` and `Meta` tags in the page's Head section are being created properly, emphasizing appropriate keywords, with every page unique.

REMEMBER You don't want to ever lose control of your website by using a poor-quality CMS that is not configurable. Because search engines decide whether your pages are relevant for search queries based on having keyword-rich, focused content and unique headings and tags, you can't afford to let an inflexible CMS limit how much you can customize each page.

Another thing to avoid is auto-generated text. Generally, machine-written content sounds unnatural and won't do a good job representing you either to users or to the search engines. (For more discussion of content management systems, see Book VII, Chapter 5.)

Optimizing the Content

When you have pages of content to work with, you can refine them for search engine optimization (SEO). If you haven't already set up the text content in an HTML document, do so now because part of what you need to optimize is the HTML code behind the page.

Setting up the HTML

Looking at your page in the HTML code view, your first step is to do what we call "getting the red out." (In the Single Page Analyzer tool, things that need to be corrected are displayed in red text,

so it's easy to figure out where to start.) You want to fix the blatant SEO issues, the ones that are the most obvious and often the easiest to fix. Here's what to look for:

- `Title` **tag:** The `Title` tag should appear at the top of your HTML code's `Head` section. It should be unique and contain your page's main keyword (with no word repeated). Normally the `Title` tag should be between 6 and 12 words in length (brief).
- `Meta` **description tag:** The `Meta` description tag should appear after the `Title` tag in your HTML Head section. It needs to contain all the keywords used in the `Title` tag, and it should be written like a sentence because this is often what search engines display within a result listing. Any word should not appear more than twice. The length guideline is 12 to 24 words.
- `Meta` **keywords tag:** The `Meta` keywords tag should appear after the `Meta` description tag in your HTML `Head` section and should contain all the words used in the `Title` and `Description` tags. It can be written as a list separated by commas, starting with the long phrases and ending with single words. No single word should be used more than four times, and the total length should not exceed 48 words.
- **Heading tags:** Heading tags (`H#` tags) set apart your on-page titles and subheadings, and search engines analyze them to determine your page's main ideas, so make them meaningful. You want to use an `H1` for the first and most important heading on the page only. Second-level headings should be given `H2`, third-level headings `H3`, and so forth; also, they should never be placed out of order. Just think back to school term papers, outlines …. When the search engines were built, their main purpose was to index educational, technical, and professional papers, and very little else. The engines still rely on the same basic information architecture that they started out with.

  A good heading length is from one to five words, but how many headings you should have on a page depends on the content. Only use an `H#` tag when it defines a change in the content structure, much like a table of contents outlines the structure of a book. You will almost never have multiple `H1` tags (not many pages have more than one main topic, after all), but you could have multiple `H2`, `H3`, and so on, if the content supports it.

  For example:

```
<h1>Ford Reviews</h1>
    Content about Ford Reviews (200 words)
    <h2>Mustang Reviews</title>
    Content about Ford Mustang Reviews (200+ words)
    <h2>F-150 Reviews</title>
    Content about Ford F-150 reviews (200+ words again)
```

  In the preceding example, the `H1` and `H2` tags are used properly. Think about it as a school or technical paper. It has to follow an outline format completely. You can have an `H3` heading, but only if it's below an `H2` tag. If you had a section for the engine specs of the Ford Mustang, for example, that could be considered an `H3`.

  The usage of `H4` and `H5` tags would have to be, again, related sub-content to the `H3` tag, and so on.

Digging Deeper by Running Single Page Analyzer

After you have your document all cleaned up, and the Single Page Analyzer tool doesn't report any more red items to edit, you can work on optimizing the body content you wrote. We suggest you run the page through the Single Page Analyzer by following these steps:

1. **Go to www.seotoolset.com/tools/free-tools/.**
2. **Locate the Single Page Analyzer on this page and enter the page's URL (such as** www.yourdomain.com/pageinprogress.html) **in the Page URL text box.**

3. **Click the Run Page Analyzer button and wait until the report appears.**

   The Single Page Analyzer report compiles lots of useful information for you to analyze your page content and plan improvements, as we explain in a moment. We suggest you look at the following six areas to diagnose issues and improve your page: the Heading section, frequently used words, reading level, keyword density, keyword frequency, and keyword distribution.

- **Head section problems:** You can see at a glance if you've overlooked any of the problems that need fixing; the report shows exceptions in bright red text. For instance, if you used a word in your `Meta` description tag but forgot to include it in the `Meta` keywords tag as well, under the `Meta` keywords tag heading, you would see this message:
Larger View

   META Keywords is **MISSING** a word that is in either the TITLE or META Description.

- **Frequently used words:** Figure 3-1 shows a portion of tables from the report listing one-word and two-word phrases that are used at least twice in the page.

Larger View

Figure 3-1: A portion of a Single Page Analyzer report showing one-word and two-word phrases repeated in a web page

   Looking across the rows, you can also see what section of the page each phrase appears in, whether it's in the title, description, keywords, headings, image `Alt` codes, or something else. Because search engines look for repeated words to ascertain what your page is all about, look carefully at these tables. The most frequently used words appear at the top: These should be your keywords. You also want to make sure you don't have frequently repeated words that might distract the search engines from understanding your main page theme. You can see how this report can save you hours of manual work counting instances and trying to make sure your keywords, synonyms, clarifying words, and so on are adequately used.

- **Reading level:** In the Text Metrics section, the report shows you details about your text's reading level. Because you want your site to be appropriate for your target audience, this is important. The row (not shown in the figure) labeled "Kincaid Grade Level" identifies the U.S. school grade level that your writing matches. If it says 16.0, that means your text is appropriate for someone

with four years of college education. The Kincaid score is based on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence. If you find your pages scoring way too high or too low for your target audience's education level, you should adjust your word length and sentence structure. For instance, a website directed at tweens needs to have a low Kincaid score (around 5.0 to 8.0), but that reading level would not be appropriate for a site targeting doctoral candidates.

TIP You can also check your document's Flesch-Kincaid score and Flesch grade level in Microsoft Word. Check out Chapter 2 in this minibook for instructions on how to turn on your readability statistics in Word.

- **Keyword frequency:** Because the use of keywords is so crucial to your search engine optimization, examine your *keyword frequency* (the number of times the keyword appears on the page). This number shows in the All Words column of the Single Page Analyzer report. And as with keyword density, you need to size up your competitors to find out what number to shoot for.
- **Keyword distribution:** One last measurement that affects your search engine ranking for a particular keyword is the *distribution*, or placement throughout the page. Your site might use the keyword phrase [classic cars] the right number of times (frequency) and in the right proportion to the total amount of text (density), but it also needs to distribute the phrase *regularly* throughout the page. If you use it only in the top quarter of the page, the search engines assume that your page, as a whole, isn't as relevant to classic cars as it would be if the phrase appears throughout the copy evenly.

TIP You can find out the typical keyword usage for your competition by running the Single Page Analyzer on your competition's web pages. You can also subscribe to tools that produce this comparison data in one step, such as the Multi Page Analyzer from the SEOToolSet Pro tools suite, which you find at www.seotoolset.com/tools/free_tools.html. (For more help doing competitive research, see Book III. Detailed instructions on how to approximate the results of the Multi Page Analyzer are available in Book III, Chapter 2.)

Finding Tools for Keyword Integration

In this section, we give you a handy list of optimization tools for your reference. These tools can help you analyze your web page content to make sure you've set up your keywords effectively. They are shortcuts that show you some key factors that the search engines look for to determine relevance. Remember, in almost every case, the search engines themselves are going to be your best asset in terms of analyzing your market. The following are some useful optimization tools for your site:

- **Single Page Analyzer** (www.seotoolset.com/tools/free-tools/): The Single Page Analyzer is your primary keyword analysis tool. See the previous section for more detail.
- **Copyscape** (www.copyscape.com): This free tool lets you check for duplicates of your web page text elsewhere on the web. You want to make sure you have original content on your site because duplications can cause your page to be filtered out of the search engine's index. (We cover avoiding duplicate content in Chapter 3 of this minibook.)
- **Keyword Activity** (http://www.bruceclay.com/seo/keyword-research.htm): Part of analyzing keywords is finding out how often people search for them. The free Keyword Suggestion tool lets you see suggested keywords and check their search activity (and do many other search-engine-optimization–related tasks). You can also do keyword research using the free Search Engine Optimization/KSP tool, available at www.bruceclay.com/seo/combining-keywords.htm. Alternative recommended tools that give you robust reporting (for a fee) include
  - o **Wordtracker** (www.wordtracker.com): Measures keyword traffic. Wordtracker offers both annual plans and monthly plans. The annual subscription starts at $449, and the monthly plan costs from $27 to $99 per month. You also can try it out for free.
  - o **Keyword Discovery** (www.keyworddiscovery.com): Offers a free trial for its subscription service, which runs from $30 to $200 a month, depending on your subscription level.
- **Mozilla Firefox** (www.mozilla.com) **and Google Chrome** (www.google.com/chrome): Available as a free download, Mozilla's Firefox browser is one of the most powerful SEO tools out there, with multiple add-ons that allow power users to slice and dice almost any aspect of a website.

Right out of the box, Firefox lets you do a rough keyword distribution search on a page. Ctrl+F brings up a search text box: Just type your keyword, and then select Highlight All to see where the words fall on the page you have open in the browser.

Also available as a free download, Google's Chrome browser has some nifty features. One of its best features is the ability to see how a word or phrase is distributed throughout a page visually. With any web page open, simply press Ctrl+F to activate a drop-down search box. Then type the word or phrase you want to find. Though this book is in black and white, every instance of the word searched for in Figure 3-2, "search engine optimization," is automatically highlighted in yellow. And colored bands appear in the vertical scroll bar, representing each time the selected word or phrase is used in the page content. Seeing a keyword's distribution at a glance like this can help you distribute it evenly throughout your page.

Larger View

Figure 3-2: Google Chrome lets you see a word's linear distribution using colored banding in the scroll bar

Competitive Analysis Tools

It's a competitive world, and ranking well has everything to do with what your keyword competitors are doing. The optimal keyword frequency and distribution are determined by analyzing the top-ranked sites. The search engines are clearly accepting the keyword usage of the top sites, so being better than these competitors is often simply a matter of careful page editing.

- **Single Page Analyzer:** The tool we cover in the section "Digging deeper by running Single Page Analyzer," earlier in this chapter, can also help you analyze the keywords and content of the top-ranked web pages.
- **Multi Page Analyzer** (www.seotoolset.com): A tool that looks at multiple competitors' web pages and analyzes them in one fell swoop for you is ideal for competitor research. There are several products on the market, so check your existing SEO tools subscription to see if you already have access to a similar report. If not, a subscription to our SEOToolSet Pro costs $89 per month, or you can do the comparisons by hand (see Book III, Chapter 2 for instructions).

Chapter 4: Adapting Your Content for Local Search

In This Chapter

- **Exploring the formats of local results**
- **Maximizing your visibility in organic local results**
- **Understanding the need for local SEO**
- **Meeting Google's Pigeon algorithm**
- **Optimizing content to be found in local searches**
- **Creating local landing pages the right way**
- **Answering common questions for the mobile searcher**

Do you have a brick-and-mortar storefront and want to make sure the locals can find you in online searches? Or maybe you have a service business and you serve all the towns and cities within driving distance. Perhaps your business has multiple locations around the region or country, or maybe just a national headquarters. Regardless, you still want to show up in location-based searches and compete against local businesses for your keywords.

How can you make your business visible to local searchers? For each of these business scenarios, the answer varies a bit. In this chapter, you learn how to create and optimize content to help secure a local presence in the search engines. We also cover some factors besides on-page content optimization that can help strengthen your local visibility. Getting your business to appear for relevant searches that have local or geotargeted intent is what this chapter is all about.

Taking Advantage of Local Search

The search engines logically interpret some types of search queries as local, or location-based, searches. For example, you might search for any of the following:

- [dog groomers]
- [dry cleaners]
- [tires near me]

The search engines know that these search queries most likely mean you are looking for someone in your local area who can provide a service. If you live in Poughkeepsie, New York, you're unlikely to be looking for a dry cleaner in Miami. You're also unlikely to be interested in dry cleaning techniques, or the history of dry cleaning, or any other research-type information. Because the search engines want to satisfy you with relevant results (they want you to keep coming back to them), they assume that your intent is to find a local business, and they give you a list of dry cleaners in and around Poughkeepsie.

TECHNICAL STUFF The search engines know where you're located. If you're searching on a desktop computer, they have two ways of figuring this out: First, you might have specified a city in your profile (if you're logged in to your account for the search engine you're using) or in a previous web search. Second, your computer's *IP address* (the numeric "Internet Protocol" code assigned to your computer) identifies your approximate location. If you're using a web-enabled mobile device or tablet, your exact current location can be pinpointed.

You can do local searches in three ways:

- **Logical local searches:** Sometimes search queries just logically bring up local businesses or services (such as [dry cleaners] and so on). This is especially true for mobile searches, because search engines expect that if you're out and about, you're likely to be searching for some place nearby.
- **Geographic search terms:** Search queries can include a city or ZIP code, such as [dry cleaners Miami], [dog groomers in Sacramento CA], or [new tires 90210].
- **Map searches:** People can search directly on a physical map (using a map interface) to find local businesses in a selected area.

Understanding Local Search Results

If you run a local search in Google, you usually see a handful of local business listings pinpointed on a handy map, as shown in Figure 4-1.
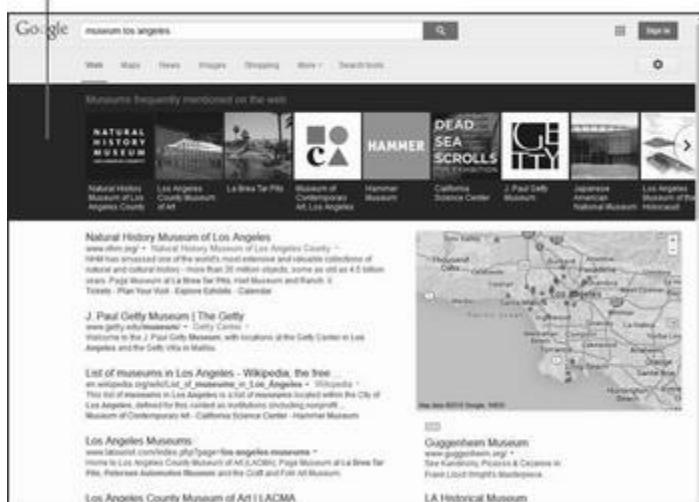Larger View
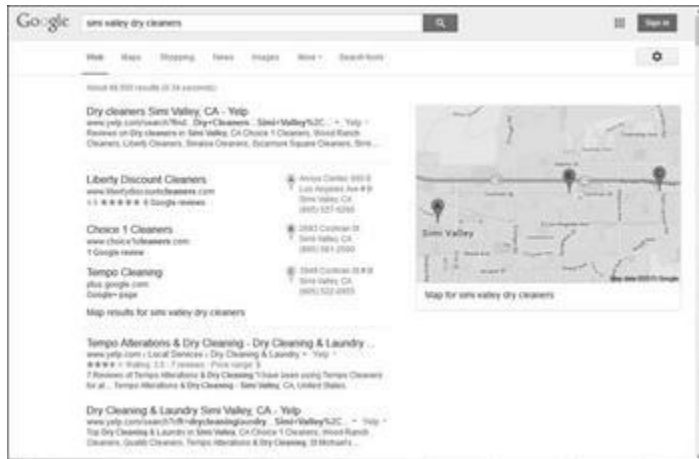
Figure 4-1: Business listings display at the top of a local Google search results page

Search engines use a variety of layouts for displaying local business results, depending on the query. These *local-pack results*, any of the formats that Google uses to display local results, come in a variety of forms. Google may show local results in a sidebar or box, or, as in Figure 4-1, within a map next to local listings.

Google may also display local business listings at the top of the page in a carousel formation, as shown in Figure 4-2. Another arrangement for serving local results is an expanded three-pack, as shown in Figure 4-3.
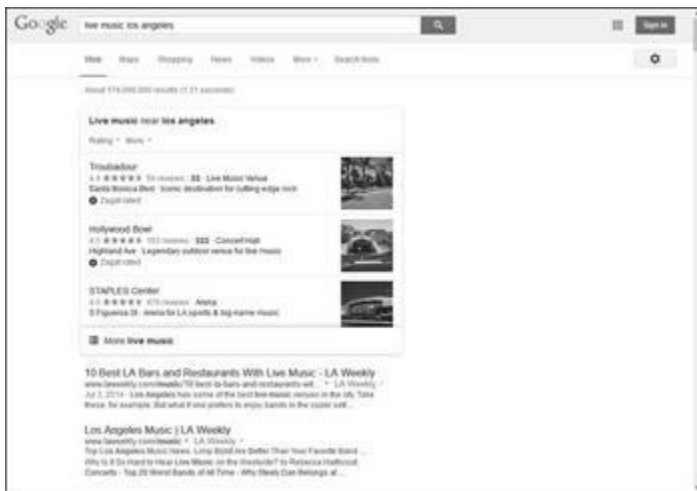Larger View

Figure 4-2: For some location-based queries, Google displays results in carousel display

Larger View

Figure 4-3: Google may display local business listings in an expanded three-pack

Local Pack
All these local pack display formats pull listings from the search engine's local database, not from its web index. To be included in these local pack listings, the business owners of these sites at some point completed a business listing form with Google. If you haven't done this yet, take a little time now and register your business with the local directories for all the major search engines (Google, Yahoo, and Bing). For detailed instructions, see Book I, Chapter 4.

After you have your business listing set up with each search engine, you can enter the race. All the relevant businesses then jockey for position. While different areas and industries vary in competitiveness, having content that's locally optimized and high quality helps you gain one of those coveted local pack spots.

TIP To qualify for a local profile with Google My Business, you need to have a physical presence where in-person contact with customers during stated business hours is available. Google allows certain exceptions that change from time to time, so be sure to check the current Google Guidelines here: https://support.google.com/business/answer/3038177.

Organic Geotargeted Results
If your business doesn't have a physical location in a community and can't have a Google My Business profile there, it will not be able to appear in local pack listings. However, your web pages can still show up in the regular organic results for local and geotargeted queries. Search engines display organic results below the local pack results, and often one or more organic results appear above the local pack as well.

In a nutshell, the way to show up for geotargeted organic results is by creating content relevant to the search query *that's also optimized for the geographic location*. This is a large part of what we call local SEO.

Introducing Local SEO

Local SEO is the process of optimizing a business to be found when someone searches for a specific geographic location. Local SEO is often overlooked in a company's marketing strategy because it's a step beyond the usual SEO goal of optimizing for products or a service category. Local SEO can also be pretty complex, requiring attention to things like maintaining consistent business information in search engine databases and local directories, obtaining local citations, amassing positive customer reviews online, and more.

Local SEO is worth the effort for many marketers for two main reasons:

- **Demand:** A huge percentage of searches have *local intent* (that is, people want to find businesses near them or in a certain geographic area). On mobile, that percentage is about half. So if your business can meet a nearby searcher's need, make sure that it can be found in local search.
- **Supply:** Search engines give local listings the lion's share of space on Page 1 of search results when they detect local intent. Why not take your rightful place?

Of all the factors influencing local search engine rankings, a survey of digital marketers conducted annually by David Mihm of Moz continues to find that the largest single piece of the pie goes to on-page signals — elements of the web page itself, such as its title, body length, and so forth, rather than external factors such as links. The way you build your web pages and the content you put in them matters most. (The complete survey results are worth reading: http://moz.com/local-search-ranking-factors.)

Google's Pigeon: Local search algorithm

Google's update, dubbed "Pigeon," has radically impacted the way local search results are ranked since its release in the U.S. in July 2014. Pigeon affects Google's web and map searches, with the goal of making the local ranking algorithm align more closely with the way Google's core search algorithm works. In effect, it rewards sites for following traditional SEO best practices as well as using local optimization techniques.

Pigeon also boosted some third-party review sites and directories in results for geotargeted queries. Yelp, Zagat, TripAdvisor, Kayak, Urbanspoon and others began getting higher visibility in search results after Pigeon was launched. That's why a search for [manhattan deli] returns not just local delicatessens but also Yelp and other review sites' pages showing lists of different delis with customer reviews. This is good news for the deli owner who has lots of happy customers.

Google's local results format became more flexible under Pigeon. Previous to Pigeon, local results always showed a "seven-pack" of listings on a map; now, Google seems to prefer smaller local packs as well as other formats, some of which are pictured in this chapter (for example, the "three-pack" shown in Figure 4-3).

Google's plans for Pigeon are unclear. Several months after the U.S.-only release, Google released Pigeon to the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Although future roll-outs are unknown, we can be sure that local search will continue to evolve.

Optimizing Content for Local Searches

To reinforce your business's actual location and help your website appear in local searches, showing your physical address on your website is important. Your physical address is part of a trio of information about your business that's such a major signal for local search ranking that the SEO community has given it an acronym: *NAP* (name, address, and phone number). If you have a brick-and-mortar location, be sure to include the address and local telephone number where users can easily find it. Even if your business is an online-only service, you increase trust by displaying an actual address and phone number. Note that your NAP information should be consistent on your site *and* across the World Wide Web. If on your website you go by the name Classic Car Customization, don't register a Google My Business profile under the name Classic Car Customization Co.

Show your NAP information preferably on the home page as well as your contact page. Make sure that whatever page contains this information is linked from your sitemap, to make sure that search engines can easily find your address. (A *sitemap* is a page containing links to the pages in your site, like a table of contents.) Showing your name, address, and contact information to

users also makes them feel more comfortable doing business with you because you're not just a virtual company being operated from some post office box.

TIP You could put your address information in the footer that's visible at the bottom of every page. This is recommended for businesses with one or a small number of locations because a user can view your location(s) from anywhere in the site. However, if you have a long list of locations, you don't want to list their addresses on every page. Always keep in mind what makes sense for the user; that's who the search engines want to serve, too. Showing a massive block of tiny addresses probably wouldn't be good for anyone, and from an SEO perspective, you'd be better off separating geographic terms. Consider putting a single link in the footer instead for "Locations" or something intuitive that leads to more information.

Creating Region-Specific Content

Wherever you have a physical business location, you now know that you need to claim your local profile with the search engines. But that's not the only thing you can do to reinforce your business's relevance for geotargeted and local searches. In your website content, reinforce your community connection by talking about the place where you do business.

Businesses such as a plumber, roofing contractor, or other type of service area business might be located in one town but serve all areas within a 30-mile radius. Other businesses may be quite remote but still want to target a particular local area because it makes sense — for instance, if you do classic car customization nationwide, and you know that Detroit, Michigan, has a huge concentration of classic car buffs, you want to be visible in Detroit-based searches. In all these cases, you can increase your chances of being found in these other local area searches if you create region-specific content.

Creating content around geotargeted *keywords* (search terms relevant to your website) helps you optimize your site for local search. So as you read the following sections, consider that there may be several "local" areas that you want to optimize for, not just your own physical location.

In general, you need to create content pages that tie together your business offerings (by keywords) with that city. Obviously, for cities outside your own business location, you have no local address or business listing to pin down your connection. So to show up in searches for [classic car customization in Detroit], for example, you need to create location-specific content, as described in the upcoming section.

TIP In addition to creating content, you have other creative ways to attract business in a remote location. You can take out geotargeted ads on Facebook or other sites, which would appear only to someone in that local area. You can get involved in the local community by sponsoring events or helping with fundraising. Best of all is having local customers write about you in glowing terms on their websites or in review sites for that area.

Create Local Landing Pages
There's a right way and a wrong way to create content for local searches. One wrong approach is to just list a bunch of city names or ZIP codes in a text block, hoping to rank for those terms. But users won't like it, and the search engines might suspect spam and hit you with a ranking penalty.

Another wrong method is to generate a hundred copies of a web page and then use a find-and-replace method to substitute a different city name on each page. That approach creates thin, mostly duplicated content that's likely to attract a penalty from Google's Panda algorithm and damage your site's rankings. (See Chapter 2 in this minibook for more on Panda and the need for unique, quality content.) This type of find-and-replace approach also doesn't convince your users or the search engines that you really can do business in those locations.

So what should you do? The right way is to create unique, original content for each location where you want to do business. It depends on your site structure and goals, but consider

devoting specific pages to locations and then talking about what you do in that location throughout the text. For each local *landing page* (the page where you want a searcher to land when clicking through to your site), do the following:

- **Mention the location.** In your landing page `Title` tag, body text, and possibly also in a heading tag on the page, mention the name(s) of the local city or cities this page focuses on. You might have one page about your classic car services for Poughkeepsie, another for Detroit, and so on.
- **Include conversational local modifiers.** Beyond the place name itself, searchers may indicate that they're looking for something local using words such as "near me," "nearby," and "neighborhood." These words that signal interest in location-specific results are becoming increasingly common as searchers speak queries into mobile phones. Sprinkling in conversational local modifiers near your keywords may make sense, with phrases like "Looking for car customization near your Brooklyn neighborhood?"
- **Talk about things related to the location.** Don't just give the city name; instead, also mention geographic terms related to it, as you would naturally in conversation. For instance, if you're establishing that you do business in Los Angeles on a given page, you can also include "Hollywood" or "sunny Southern California" in the text.
- **Make it unique.** Think creatively about ways to vary the content on each local landing page. Here are a few ideas to get your brainstorming started:
  - Show local customer testimonials.
  - Include descriptions and pictures of work you have completed in that city.
  - Talk about local events your company attended or sponsored.
  - Offer a city-specific special (could rotate between cities).
  - Publish photos you took in the city or a video you created there.
  - Talk about information that's specific to that city, such as local regulations, data, weather, statistics, history, events, people, places, or other facts relevant to your business.

TIP If you have a blog, use the preceding list of ideas to stimulate geotargeted blog posts as well. For instance, you can write a blog post about an auto show in Detroit that showcased lots of great classic cars. Link from the blog post to the appropriate local landing page to give it added support.

Answer Common Questions

Put yourself in local people's shoes who might be looking for a business such as yours. What do they need? Local searches are often performed by people using a smartphone or other mobile device. What kind of questions would mobile users be asking?

For example, if you have a restaurant, a person living nearby who looks up your restaurant might want to know your address, directions, payment types that you accept, hours you serve lunch and dinner, and your menu options. Design your site to provide all that information, and make it easy to see and navigate through for mobile users. Further, consider personalizing your content with scenarios a local person might relate to. For instance, if a theater is down the block from your restaurant, you might talk about theatergoers coming to your restaurant before a show, or the ease of making a reservation for a relaxing dinner after the show, just half a block up beautiful downtown Main Street. Think of scenarios you can write that connect questions users have (for example, Do you take reservations? Where can we go eat after a show?) with local geographic terms (such as the theater and Main Street) in an engaging way.

Make sure that your website answers the questions local searchers ask. Doing so makes your site relevant for local search results and attracts more satisfied customers. Remember that people are searching more and more using mobile devices, and the majority of mobile searches have local intent. For that reason, mobile and local are inescapably linked. If you want to rank in local search, make your site mobile-friendly, by all means. For help making your site mobile-friendly, see Book IV, Chapter 3.

Chapter 6: Crediting Your Content

In This Chapter

- **Understanding intellectual property ownership**
- **Knowing what to do when your content is stolen**
- **Filing for a federal copyright**
- **Incorporating content from other sites**
- **Giving credit to original authors**
- **Protecting your images**

If you've applied the ideas laid out in Chapters 1 to 5 of this minibook, you are well on your way to a successful website. Your website hopefully contains lots of engaging content that your users love, with pages focused on your *keywords* (specific words or phrases entered in a search query) so that search engines can clearly establish your site's subject relevance.

In Chapter 5 of this minibook, we cover the evils of duplicate content in many of its forms (site scraping, duplicate pages within the same domain, printer-friendly pages, dynamic pages with session IDs in the URLs, content syndication, localization, mirrors, archives, spam, and stolen content). In this chapter, we want to provide the remedy. Here, you discover what to do if your content is stolen by some other website. By the time you finish reading this chapter, you'll be well-armed to deal with this inevitable problem.

We also explain how you can incorporate content from other sites, if you should ever want to do that. Because Chapter 5 of this minibook is an entire chapter on how to avoid creating duplicate content, we figured it's time to balance the subject with information on how to use content from another site the *right* way: Sometimes, as with news sites, you'll need to do it.

Factoring in Intellectual Property Considerations

Not everyone realizes that websites are the intellectual property of their owners. Your website content is your intellectual property, just as much as a book is the intellectual property of its author and publisher. And as intellectual property, your website is governed by copyright laws that protect it, especially if you've obtained a federal copyright. (We talk about that process in the section "Filing for copyright," later in this chapter.)

Nevertheless, website content is often stolen and republished. If you've created lots of great content for your site, we almost guarantee that sometime, somewhere, you'll see your content pop up on someone else's site.

WARNING! This book is not intended to replace legal advice. You should seek a copyright lawyer in order to get the full picture regarding your legal rights and options.

What to Do When Your Content is Stolen

You can expect some duplication of your content, especially if it's good quality and attracting visitors and links. After all, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, as the saying goes. Still, you might feel hopping mad to find out that your carefully crafted and possibly expensive content has been ripped off by a website, giving you no citation or link and acting as if it is that site's own work.

In the "Stolen content" section of Chapter 5 in this minibook, you learn ways to discover other websites that are using your own content. But how can you respond when your website content is copied and posted on some other website? You can do a number of things if your content or entire site is stolen:

- **Email a request.** A good first step can be a simple email request to the site's webmaster or contact person. Ask nicely to stop using your content. Often, this message is enough to get the stolen content removed.

- **Report it to the search engines.** You can file a report of copyright infringement with the search engines to have the offending web pages removed from their index. This procedure is allowed under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. For instructions for Google, see www.google.com/dmca.html. Google's support has a Legal Troubleshooter section where you can file a legal removal request to eliminate web pages that contain your stolen content from the search engine's results pages (see Figure 6-1). For Yahoo's procedure, check out http://info.yahoo.com/copyright/us/details.html. To make a similar request on Bing, go to https://support.discoverbing.com/eform.aspx?productKey=bingcontentremoval&ct=eformts&scrx =1&st=1&wfxredirect=1.

Larger View

Figure 6-1: Google gives site owners a way to request removal of search results that contain stolen copies of their website's contents

- **Report it to the offending site's ISP.** You can find out which *Internet service provider* (ISP) is hosting the site and contact the ISP. If you notify the ISP that your site has been scraped and provide some proof, it may shut down the site. (You can use the WHOIS Lookup at www.whois.net to identify information about a site's registered owners, including the domain servers that host the site, which is the same as the ISP.)
- **File a police report.** Because theft is a crime, you can file a report with your local police or sheriff's department. Make sure you have undisputed evidence that the text is yours and that it has been stolen. Print the offending page as it appears in your browser, and then print the HTML code for that page so that you have it. Call a friend to have him verify that the theft has taken place, as well.

     TIP See if the offending site contains a References or Clients page. If so, you can consider writing down the names and URLs of these sites so that you can notify them of the theft a little later. You might also run a search to discover the list of sites that link to the offending pages ([**link:***offendingdomain.com*]), and later send the emails informing them of inadvertently supporting a scraped site and inviting them to link to the "source" of the content — your website — instead.

- **Send a cease-and-desist order.** You can have a lawyer draft a cease-and-desist order, demanding that the website take down the offending web pages or face legal action. The

downsides with this approach are that it's costly and it gives the other party advance warning if you plan to file a lawsuit later. So before you do this, be sure to put together all the evidence recommended in the preceding paragraph.

- **File a lawsuit:** In serious cases in which your business has been materially damaged, you can hire a lawyer and sue the other party. But make sure that you have lots of evidence. Follow the recommended ideas for evidence gathering under the previous "File a police report" bullet.

REMEMBER The preceding list is not meant to be a step-by-step procedure. You can pick and choose from these suggestions based on your situation. But remember that you have options in case someone does steal your content.

Filing for Copyright

To protect your website content, we recommend that you do two things:
- Display a copyright notice on your website.
- Register for a federal copyright.

These are two proactive, low-cost steps that can help you defend your website against theft. When you've registered for a federal copyright of your website as software, you have legal recourse if you need to file suit. Only a federal copyright allows you to successfully fight violations of your copyrights legally. Your words also carry a lot more weight when you tell people your work is copyrighted with the U.S. government when you are asking them to remove your content from their sites. The federal copyright can be enforced throughout the United States and internationally.

The U.S. Library of Congress manages the U.S. Copyright Office. The U.S. Copyright Office considers Internet pages to be software programs. To have a copyright simply requires that the work contain a valid copyright notice as follows: © *year author name* (such as © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

Registering a copyright is not mandatory, but this is a time-proven and effective step. After you register your site, the copyright stays in effect. Unless you completely replace your site with a new one, because it is "software," your future website updates continue to be protected by your initial registration.

TIP To register, you should refer to the filing procedures required by the U.S. Copyright Office. You can handle the registration online — see the website at www.copyright.gov/.

On an international level, the U.S. government became a member of the Berne Convention in 1989 and fully supports the Universal Copyright Convention. Under this Convention, any work of an author who is a citizen of a Convention country automatically receives protection in *all* countries that are also members, provided that the work makes use of a proper copyright symbol (©). The degree of protection may vary, but some minimal protection is defined and guaranteed in that agreement. Jurisdiction for prosecuting violations lies exclusively with the federal government.

Using Content from other Sites

Now, what if you want to use *other* people's content on your site? Perhaps you've seen a chart or image online that is relevant, useful, and perfect for your site's users; or maybe you read an article in a magazine that says exactly what you want to tell your users. You also realize that reusing something that's already written is undoubtedly the fastest way to add bulk to your site. So you believe your site simply *must* have these things. Can you — should you — use them?

WARNING! Be careful! You don't want to have duplicate content on your site, because that won't help and could even harm your site rankings (as we cover in length in Chapter 5 of this minibook). You also don't want to be deceptive and make it look as if it's your original creation —

that's called plagiarism. Deceiving your users or the search engines usually backfires. For instance, your pages could be filtered out of search results, you could damage your reputation with customers, you could be sued, and so on.

But say that you've found something you know would add tremendous value for your users that's also right on topic for your website. Here are some best practices for the times you need to use external content on your website:

- **Read the site.** Often sites will have a copyright or legal page that details their use permissions. Starting with the legal page gives you guidelines on what you'll be able to reasonably expect to be allowed to use.
- **Get permission.** If you want to republish something you saw on someone else's site, ask for permission. Not every website owner will agree, but you can still ask. When you make your request, be sure to say you'll give a link back to their site and give them credit.
- **Do not use the whole thing.** Whether it's a full article, a full poem, a full page, or something else, do not republish someone else's content in its entirety (unless you have an agreement with the owner).
- **Excerpt or summarize it.** You can write a brief summary or review in your own words, rather than displaying the original text (give a link instead). Don't use more than an excerpt if you're posting the original words. For instance, if it's a magazine article you wanted, you could write a review, rebuttal, or summary and give a link to read the article on the original site. The most you should copy directly is a short excerpt in a quote.

  Excerpting and summarizing are writing methods used in *content curation*. This popular technique pulls from related resources to create a new article that cites and contains links to the sources with original, added-value text. For more on curating content, see Chapter 5 of this minibook.
- **Set the other source's content apart by using quotation marks or a block quote.** The idea is to make it clear to users that the excerpted content is quoted, not original to you. You can also make that clear to search engines by indenting the text with a `Blockquote` HTML tag.

  WARNING! Some people claim "fair use" when reusing other people's content. The doctrine of fair use says that under some circumstances, it's not a copyright violation to quote another's work. This is a confusing part of copyright law, and the line between fair use and infringement is very fuzzy. One clear guideline is that you can't use the borrowed content for profit in any way. If you have an ad or sell things anywhere on your site, it's considered a for-profit website. Basically, no business qualifies for fair use. In the area of copyright infringement, it's best to keep your website in the safe harbor and follow the best practices listed here.

Crediting Original Authors

When you do use someone else's content, be it text or other types of content such as images or video, give credit where credit is due. Attribute the work to its author or to the originating website. In addition to setting text apart with quotation marks or as a block quote, you can include a line that says something like: "Used by permission of …" or "Courtesy of …" or "Provided by …" and identify the name of the author. If you weren't able to get permission, you still can mention where the information comes from. You may also want to include the `cite` attribute in a quote or `Blockquote` tag. The `cite` attribute is used in the `Quote Q` and `Blockquote` tags to reference the source for material that originally appeared elsewhere.

The `Q` tag is used for short, inline quotes, such as
Larger View


```
<p>According to a World Research Foundation article,
    <Q CITE="http://www.wrf.org/news/news0017.htm">
```

```
    In nine double-blind studies comparing placebos to aspirin,
placebos proved

    to be 54 percent as effective as the actual analgesic</Q></p>
```

Note that you may want to include the quoted text in italics — as in the preceding example — or in quotes, because most browsers do not render the `Q` tag correctly (they don't place it in quotes or format it correctly to distinguish it).

The `Blockquote` tag is used for longer quotes, usually where an entire paragraph or more is referenced. For example:
Larger View

```
<BLOCKQUOTE CITE="http://www.wrf.org/news/news0017.htm ">
       <P>I don't believe that the use of placebos is immoral

       or unethical. In reality, it seems that the medical profession's

       lack of understanding and utilization of the mechanism of the
placebo

       in the healing process is tragic, shortsighted and cowardly.
Cowardly

       in the aspect that it has been far easier for doctors to simply
say that

       the placebo response is worthless, and nothing more than
someone's wishful

       thinking or trickery of the mind. The bottom line is the
response; for

       whatever reason, placebos seem to work... patients get
better.</P>
<P>An interesting statistic has shown that virtually all newly
introduced surgical

       techniques show a decrease in success over time. Is this also a
placebo response?</P></BLOCKQUOTE>
```

Some browsers indent blockquote text on both the left and right sides, but you should not count on this formatting to occur. Also note that `Blockquote` may contain block-level elements such as `P` (paragraphs) and `Table` (tables), but the quoted materials may not be contained within inline elements (such as `A, B, I, U,` or `Strong` tags).

Also, be sure to link to the source. Give your users a link back to view the original content in context. This keeps your "borrowing" above board, boosts your credibility, and improves the users' experience. Plus, by treating the originating author respectfully, you may just build a business relationship that yields long-term benefits.

Sourcing and Protecting Images

Images require special mention in a chapter on intellectual property considerations. Content with images satisfies and attracts readers far more than plain text does, so you want your website and social media content to include photos, diagrams, and other types of images. However, you can't just grab any photos you like and use them. You need to take care choosing, creating, and protecting your images online.

Image Sources

Most website owners and content creators do not create their own original images. When looking for images online, you ideally want to find photos and illustrations that can be used without *attribution* (naming the source) in your website or blog. Many stock photo sites let you search for an image, pick the image size you need, and then pay a small license fee to download each image. Examples include Dreamstime (www.dreamstime.com) and iStock (www.istockphoto.com). You can also find sites that let you download images that are completely *royalty free* (don't require payment or attribution to use someone else's intellectual property), but those sites are harder to confirm and may have limited inventory. One example of a free photo site we have used is Pixabay (www.pixabay.com).

Unfortunately, not everyone realizes that images are protected by copyright. As a website owner or blogger, you need to protect yourself from liability by knowing how to incorporate third-party images legally.

WARNING! Be careful to read the license terms of each image you want to use. For example, if you do an image search in a photo-sharing site such as Flickr (www.flickr.com) or in a general Google Image search (images.google.com), you must dig a little to see what restrictions the owner of that image requires.

Even if you filter your image search to find Creative Commons (CC) images only, you need to research what a photo's requirements are because there are many levels of permissions within CC. (*Creative Commons* is a license classification for sharable creative works.) For instance, if you find an image on Flickr, notice below the photo whether it has "All rights reserved" or "Some rights reserved." If all rights are reserved, you're out of luck; you need to find a different image. If only some rights are reserved, you must click the "Some rights reserved" link (shown in Figure 6-2) to find out what the owner requires you to do. Depending on the license, you may need to caption your image with a link to the source page, the license page, or both; you may need to "share alike" by uploading your modified version back to Flickr; or you may be free to use the image without any attribution.

Larger View

Figure 6-2: Be sure to check the copyright holder's "rights reserved" and abide by them when using someone else's image

Using someone's image without the proper permission to do so breaks the law. We know of lawsuits that cost ignorant website owners thousands of dollars in damages for posting images that were restricted by copyright. Although the owners complied by taking the images down right away when they were notified, a court still found them guilty. With a little due diligence, you can avoid becoming liable for a copyright lawsuit and keep your images, and your brand's reputation, clean.

Original Images

When you take the time to create a unique image such as an infographic, consider including a copyright and/or logo somewhere on it in order to brand the image. If anyone reuses it, you have a good chance of preserving your branding visibly. For example, we created the infographic shown in Figure 6-3 for our online SEO tutorial. Notice the small text line near the bottom of the image that identifies who owns the copyright.

Larger View

Figure 6-3: When possible, include your own logo or copyright statement on images you create

Protecting images that you create (even if they do not have a visible copyright or logo) may be a bit easier than protecting text content. You can prove that an image has been stolen because the evidence is visual. Discovering who has stolen your images is the real trick.

To locate places where your image may be used, we recommend that you do a *reverse image search*, which lets you find images that are like another image. If you have the actual image file, you can upload it into a reverse search engine. If not, such as if the image you want to search for is on another website, you need to copy its URL. To do this on a PC, right-click the image and choose "Copy image URL"; on a Mac, move your mouse pointer over the image and Control-click the link; next, select "Copy Image Location." Now you can search based on that URL using either of these two sites:

- **Google Reverse Image Search (http://images.google.com):** Click the camera icon to open Search by image. Then paste the image's URL into the box and click the Search by Image button.
- **TinEye (https://www.tineye.com):** You can use this free site to upload an image or simply enter the URL for an image into the search bar, as shown in Figure 6-4. TinEye compares your image pixel-by-pixel to find similar images on the web.
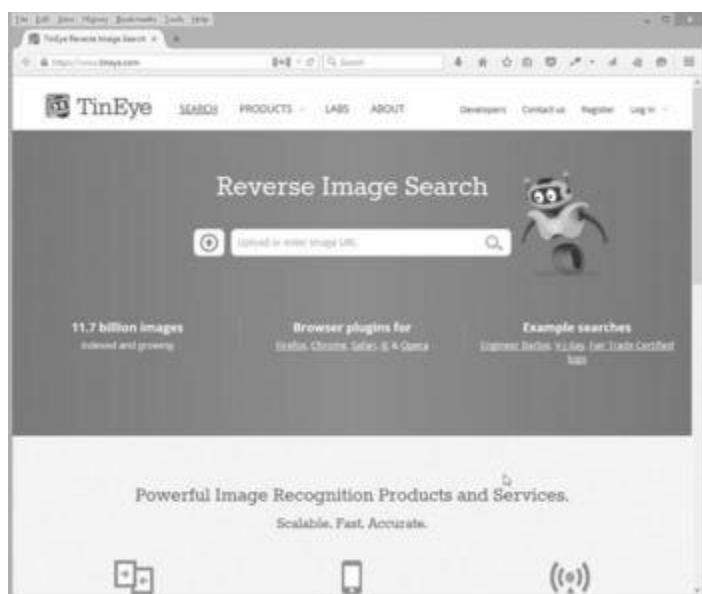
Figure 6-4: Reverse search engines let you locate where a specific image appears on the web

Chapter 7: Using SEO to Build Your Brand

In This Chapter

- **Selecting keywords that help build your brand**
- **Using search to maximize brand awareness**
- **Distributing press releases effectively on the web**
- **Increasing your chances of showing up through blended search**
- **Creating Engagement Objects**
- **Building an online community**
- **Using social share buttons to promote your brand**

Traditional marketing just isn't enough to build a *brand name* (company or product name) these days. You can't just have a good product and decent service, take out a Yellow Pages ad, print some business cards, and set up shop. Your marketing plan now needs to be bigger, more engaged, and more interactive. To build a successful brand name, you need to be where people will see you, hear what others say about you, and join in the conversation — and that's on the web. A good marketing plan today needs to consider that "word of mouth" has gone digital, and somehow tap into that online buzz.

Search engine optimization (SEO) gives you the skills you need to make sure your website can be seen where people search. That's crucial because the majority of people coming to any website get there through a search engine. But to really grow your brand, you have to stretch beyond pure SEO and do some broader Internet marketing, which means delving deeper into understanding your target audience and interacting with them, especially through social media. In this chapter, we discuss how you can raise brand awareness among your target audience. We

also cover how you can give your audience a voice and form an online "community" that supports your business goals. These are the branding activities that help you thrive in the world of Internet marketing.

In this chapter, you discover how to do online brand building from A to Z. We begin with the meat-and-potatoes of SEO, keyword selection, but approach it from a brand-building perspective. Then we move on to creating press releases, videos, images, and other objects that help engage the audience members you need to attract. Last but not least, we take you into the world of *social media* (Internet sites that enable people to share and discuss information and build relationships, like Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit). You find out how you can use blogging, content marketing, and the many available social media outlets to build your reputation and a community at the same time.

Selecting Keywords for Branding Purposes

If the goal of branding is to make your name known and respected, you want your name to be visible when people go looking for it in the search engines. To get started, for each of your notable brand names (your company name, your product name(s), and your own name, if you're trying to become an authority in your industry), run some name searches and see whether your website ranks for your brand in the search engines.

If your company name is a unique brand, like Nike, Bruce Clay, Inc., or John Wiley & Sons, Inc., you definitely want your own website to come up in searches for your brand. However, you may have chosen a brand name containing *keywords* (the terms people search for) instead. Examples are Classic Car Customization and RunningShoes.com. If you have a brand name like that, you'll be competing against lots of other sites to rank for your brand because those are their keywords, too. It takes time and a lot of SEO know-how to get your brand to the top of the search engine results pages (SERPs). However, moving your brand up in the search results should be a goal for any company that wants to build a long-term clientele. The payoff comes when past customers or people who've heard about you through word of mouth go looking for you by name in a search engine and can find your site.

Brick-and-mortar and local businesses should try to show up in mobile and geographically targeted searches for their brand name, business category, or keywords. Showing up in local and map searches requires dotting a few *i*'s and jumping through a few hoops. Read Chapter 4 of this minibook for help setting up your business for local search.

How to Build Your Brand Through Search

You have a great opportunity to increase your brand's online presence through the many different search avenues available today. Once upon a time, there was only your website to represent your company online. Like a solitary island in a sea, you just had to hope searchers would know enough about your company to notice the blip of your website on their online radar. Today, you can use search marketing to connect your website to the world. Through SEO, you can enable your site to show up when people search for your keywords. But there's also much more you can do to make your brand visible.

The goal is to increase awareness of your company and to make your brand something people recognize and even talk about; the big win is to have your brand searched for. Search marketing gives you lots of channels to accomplish this, from search engines to social networking to video sharing to press releases to blogs to news to *wikis* (information sites containing all user-generated content, such as Wikipedia [www.wikipedia.org]) to bulletin boards … and the list goes on. When you make your brand name show up in many of these, it builds an online presence that raises your brand awareness. You can think of it as *halo media* — a variety of media channels that surround your company like a halo, giving it presence and making your brand known, as shown in Figure 7-1.
Larger View

Figure 7-1: Halo media happens when your brand is visible through many online channels, not just through your own website

The flip side of using search marketing to build your brand has to do with managing your brand's reputation. It's all well and good to get your name out there, but what happens when someone misrepresents you or posts something awful about your company? And when the buzz about your company starts to turn negative, it can turn into a firestorm fast. Once again, search comes to your aid! You can monitor the online conversations and decide when to jump in and do some damage control.

The following sections cover the practical steps you can take to create halo media around your brand. We begin the discussion with press releases, and then we move on to discuss videos and other Engagement Objects and tips for effectively using social media for your business goals. Throughout the chapter, you build the skills you need to manage your brand and make it thrive in the online world.

Writing Press Releases

Distributing Internet press releases is an effective and not-too-costly way to increase public awareness of your company. To do this, write and send your press release to a third-party distribution company such as PRWeb (www.prweb.com) or one of the others we mention later in this section. That company publishes it on its site and pushes it to other news sites that may pick it up and republish all or a part of it, so for a short time, your news continues to circulate on the web and get exposure. For the long term, the distribution company archives the press release on its website, and you should also archive your press releases in a News or Press section of your site.

REMEMBER When writing press releases (as with any content), keep in mind your keywords. Use your keywords throughout the text, and especially use them within the first 200 words on each page because that's the part the search engines count more heavily when calculating a page's relevance to a user's search. Don't repeat the keywords over and over again — that's called *keyword stuffing* and should be avoided — but use them within the natural flow of your writing.

Also include a link to your site in your press release. This ensures that readers can easily find your website. Press releases used to be a good place to put additional *inbound links* (hyperlinks on an external site that take users to your site) that contained optimized *anchor text* (the link text that can be clicked) linking ideally to high-priority *landing pages* (the pages where users arrive at

your site because they're the ones most focused on particular keywords) for your most profitable and most searched services. However, Google now considers multiple links from a press release to be a type of link buying and may penalize your site's rankings as a result.

TIP To keep buzz circulating about your company, distribute press releases regularly — at least once every two to three months, but more frequently if possible. Our schedule is semi-monthly based on announcement-worthy content, so your mileage may vary. Your press release should announce some achievement or event about your company, so always be thinking of good topics that could be publicized. An effective press release should contain factual information that doesn't sound too much like marketing copy. (It's a good idea to put opinion-type statements like "Our super-fantastic new buffing tool is going to revolutionize the car customization industry!" in quotes.)

Newsworthy ideas for press releases include
- New service or product being launched
- Special deal announcement
- News about the website or company in general
- Employee promotion or new hire (especially of a company executive or notable person)
- Contest being offered through your website
- Launch of a cool interactive feature on your website
- Award given to your company
- Other significant event or announcement

We recommend you check out the following press release distribution services. Compare their coverage, options, and prices to find the one that suits you best. Also, different services feed different news outlets, so if there's a particular news outlet that you definitely want your news appearing in, that could be a deciding factor:
- **PRWeb (www.prweb.com):** Besides being a very reliable distribution service, it offers helpful tips on how to write an effective press release (see www.prweb.com/pressreleasetips.php).
- **Marketwired (www.marketwired.com):** Marketwired news stories pop up nicely at the top of Google search results and elsewhere, so they're another good one to consider.
- **PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com):** This is one of the biggest press release operations in the United States, so it's another good choice.

Optimizing for Blended Search

All the major search engines can display a mix of different types of results in the SERPs, a presentation known as *blended search*. (Google calls it Universal Search, but it's the same concept.)

Before the advent of blended search, when you went to a search engine and looked for something, your search results only contained web page links. You had to choose Images in order to search for photos, News if you wanted to find news articles, Video if you were looking for videos, and so forth. With blended search, your results may contain these types of links in addition to website listings, all presented together in a single SERP.

You can run a search for a specific well-known person or thing to see blended search in action. For instance, if you search on Google for [classic cars on display], you might get back a variety of different images, web pages, and news results all blended together, as shown in Figure 7-2. Larger View
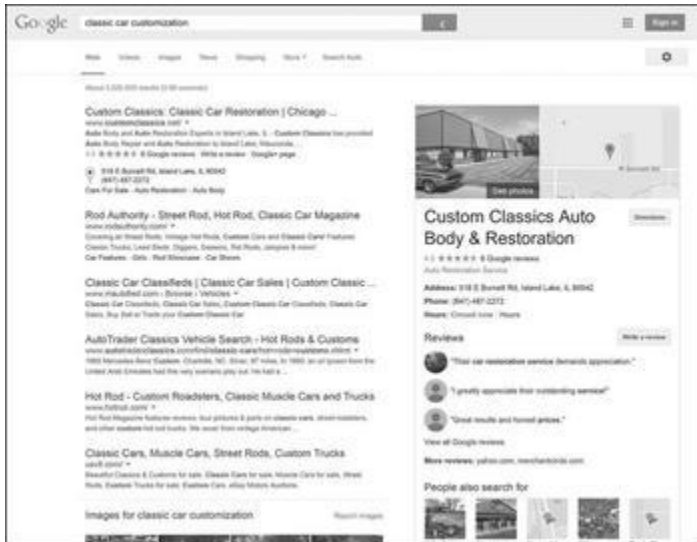
Figure 7-2: Blended search gives users various types of results mixed together

What does blended search mean to you as a website owner? It means that you can't afford to have a website full of text alone anymore. A website that includes videos, images, and other types of media has more chances to be shown in search results than a text-only site does. In fact, sites that include videos and other media elements now outrank those that do not, all other factors being equal. To develop and strengthen your brand, add video elements to your site and post your videos on YouTube.

You might wonder why a site with a video should outrank a site without one. We know that Google and the other search engines' goal is to present the most relevant content based on a user's search query. That in itself doesn't explain it. However, search engines also want people to like using them and to be satisfied with the websites they go to. The search engines want the experience of searching to be as engaging as possible. A SERP with a mix of photos, videos, news articles, and book links increases user engagement. In addition, users are better satisfied with the results if the sites themselves are more engaging.

Using Engagement Objects to Promote Your Brand

The lesson of blended search is clear: Enhance your website with Engagement Objects, and you will be rewarded for it. *Engagement Objects* are nontext elements, such as images, videos, audio, games, and applications, that help engage your website visitors' interest. When people first come to a website, they tend to decide whether to stay or leave within the first two to five seconds.

Say people are searching for [classic Mustang colors] and find your classic car customization website. If they see just a headline and several paragraphs of information, they probably head for the Back button. To grab their interest, your page needs photos of Mustangs, hopefully showing the various paint colors. You might also have a video link showing how to prep a classic car for repainting. Or you could have an interactive wheel created in Flash that shows all the manufacturer's color choices for the model year that a user selects. The more engaging you make the landing page, the more likely it is to satisfy your visitor, and, all other things being equal, the more likely Google and other search engines are to list your landing page among their top search results.

Engagement Objects are expected to play more and more heavily in search ranking as time goes on. The search engines have been working hard to "read" non-text content and understand what it's about. They're getting better at converting the various types of non-text-based files into words that they can *index* (include in the search engine's database of web page content for search

results). Google, in particular, made great strides in 2008, beginning to convert the soundtracks from video and audio files into text. Search engines can now read non-moving text created in Adobe Flash, as well. (*Flash* is a software program used to create animated and interactive objects for websites.) As search engine technology advances, you can expect Engagement Objects to continue to gain importance as a ranking factor.

You can consider including several different types of Engagement Objects to optimize your website for blended search. We've listed the most common ones in the following list:

- **Images:** Search engines scan websites to find large photos, infographics, diagrams, illustrations, or other types of image files. To help the search engine understand what your image is about, include a brief description in the surrounding text, in the image's `Alt` *attribute* (HTML description), and in the filename. Many websites use infographics and charts right now because those images provide easy visualization of complex topics. (***Note:*** You learn how to source and protect your images in Chapter 6 of this minibook.)
- **Video:** Embed your video right in your web page for maximum benefit (so people can visit and possibly link directly to your site).
- **Audio:** Include audio files embedded in your pages and be sure to explain what they're about in the surrounding text. Also, don't annoy your users — be sure to set the default audio file to "off."
- **Flash:** It's against SEO best practices to create much of your website in Flash because the search engines can't index moving text or images. In addition, Flash is generally not mobile friendly (as described in Book IV). However, if you can make your website more interactive by including Flash objects, consider using Flash to build useful or entertaining animated elements (or *widgets*) for your site that engage your visitors, and be sure to describe those widgets well in the surrounding text.
- **News articles:** If your press release gets picked up by a news organization, it could become a search engine news result. Plus, archiving your press releases on your site gives you more content and possibly search traffic if people go looking for the information later.
- **Blog posts:** Search engines scan blogs that are updated regularly, especially if many people contribute to them. Recent posts to a blog sometimes come up in related search results, so an active blog on your website can increase traffic. (More on blogging in the section "Blogging to build community," later in this chapter.)
- **Games:** Games are a great way to build user loyalty and increase engagement. High score tables, badges of achievement, and bragging rights are all ways to keep a user excited about your game and your brand.
- **Interactive applications:** This is sort of an "everything else" category. Financial calculators, AJAX apps that let someone design their own car, fun quizzes, and anything else that you could put on your page that a user can engage with and respond to all make great content for fixing the message of your brand in people's minds. HTML5 is rapidly developing as a search-friendly method of designing interactive web features.

Building a Community

Who are the people your brand appeals to? What other products, services, sports, hobbies, and things interest them, besides your brand? When you can identify their other common interests, you can work to associate your brand with those interests. If your car-customizing enthusiasts also tend to be into wine-tasting, you can research to find where wine tasters hang out online. Wherever it is, you want to be there, too! As your target audience starts to see your brand and your voice popping up around the Internet, not just when you're selling to them but particularly when you're just part of the conversation, they find out who you are and start to trust you. They begin to feel like you're one of them. That's community building.

To build a community online, you need to use blogs and the various types of social media sites. Think of these sites as channels for communication — channels that go in both directions. You can get your message out to your prospects and develop a voice in your industry, but you can also listen. Probably never before has there been more opportunity to hear what people think about your products, your services, your ideas, and your company. Social media provides that channel. So use social media first and foremost as a way to research what people like and don't

like about your brand and your industry. Approached with a willing ear and an open mind, these online conversations can give you an unlimited flow of ideas for improving your business.

Being Who You are Online

Before diving into the various places that you can be social online, take a moment to think about who you want to be when you get there. Most importantly, you want to be genuine online. Don't claim to be someone you're not, or you'll get burned. The Internet population at large doesn't take kindly to imposters, and when the discovery is made, your brand could be damaged permanently.

The perils of posing as someone else

An infamous example of a company getting caught misrepresenting itself online is Walmart. In mid-2006, a blog called *Wal-Marting Across America* featured the travels of two "regular people" driving across the country, independently interviewing Walmart employees. When it was discovered that the two people were actually being supported by Walmart and that the blog had been concocted by Walmart's PR firm, bloggers across the Internet retaliated with angry posts. Both Walmart and its PR firm were seriously embarrassed by the flap, although the impact was not seen in traffic statistics.

You need to be transparent about your identity online. Many CEOs and other company executives now write blogs online, such as Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos; Bill Marriott, chairman and CEO of Marriott International; and George Colony, CEO of Forrester Research. Writing as themselves is the key, and this allows them a platform where they can spread a message but also become a real person that customers can get to know. You don't want to *claim* to be the CEO if you're really writing the blog as a freelancer in another state.

Some companies choose to set up an alias to blog under, which is fine, as long as you make it clear that it's an alias. The *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, set up Colonel Tribune as its social media ambassador. "He" has a profile in lots of social media sites, where he posts interesting bits of news with links back to *Tribune* articles and blogs, as well as other sites. His picture is an illustration rather than a photo (see Figure 7-3).
Larger View
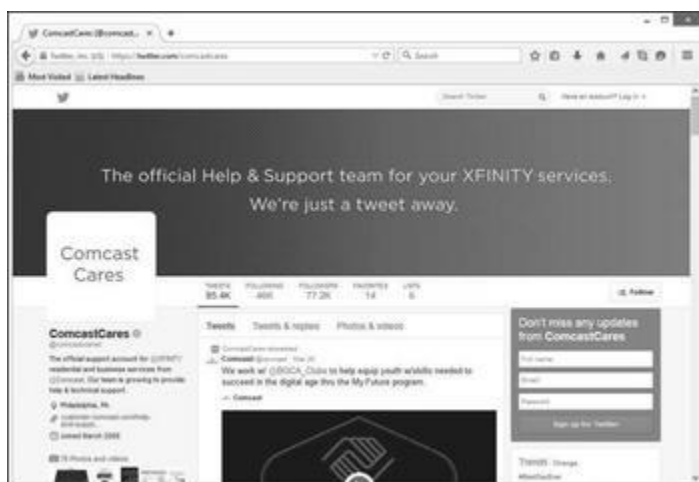
Figure 7-3: The *Chicago Tribune's* Colonel Tribune doesn't claim to be someone he's not

TIP Whoever you choose to be in the social media realm, make sure you do it authentically. After all, you're trying to build customer and industry relationships that will last. You're trying to

create trust. You have the opportunity to become a voice. You first need to know who you are and be true to that.

Blogging to Build Community

Blogging is arguably the oldest and most mature type of social media on the web. It also can be important for your company website and SEO efforts. The search engines each have a *vertical engine* (a specialized search that finds one type of result only) devoted just to blogs, and blog posts are now being linked in blended search results when they closely match a search query.

Adding a blog to your company website has many benefits beyond providing additional pages for possible search results. First of all, it's a great way to add content to your site that's fresh and original. It also invites visitors to have a conversation with you, which builds valuable relationships with your target audience. Through your blog posts, you can express your ideas and let your personality come through. You can start conversations, guide those conversations, and establish yourself as a leader. When people post comments to your blog, you get user-generated content that other people trust and want to read. You get feedback that can help you see opportunities and put out fires. With an active blog on your site, you have a community in the making.

If you're just starting a blog, you might check out the various blog software programs available either for free or for purchase/license. Blog software is a specialized type of *content management system* (software that automates web page production) designed just for maintaining a blog, such as WordPress (http://wordpress.org) and Movable Type (www.movabletype.com). There are a wide variety of choices out there, though. We suggest you consult with your webmaster (if you have one where you work) and research to find the best option for your site.

For a corporate blog, you should consider hosting your blog on your domain (for example, you can find our blog at www.bruceclay.com/blog), but if you're just blogging as yourself, a hosted blog at a site like Blogger (www.blogger.com) could be just fine although using a host site doesn't look quite as professional as hosting it yourself. Spend the money on a domain and host it yourself. (Alternatively, if you're a really big company, you can buy the hosting company and put all your official blogs there. That's what Google did. Its official blog is http://googleblog.blogspot.com. However, most of us don't have that option.)

You can use some tips and tricks to help you use blogging effectively to build an online community. Here are some blogging do's and don'ts:

- **Do** write in your blog regularly and often. Set a minimum goal of one new post per week, but write more frequently as ideas come to you.
- **Do** write in a conversational tone that's informative and entertaining to read.
- **Don't** use much profanity or vulgarity in your writing. You'll want to write appropriately for your target audience, but keep it a cut above to encourage readers to feel comfortable in your space.
- **Do** take the time to run your posts through a spelling checker (by copying them into a word processor if your blog software doesn't offer this feature) and proofread them before posting them. Keeping typos and mistakes to a minimum helps you look professional and makes people take your comments more seriously.
- **Do** include links to other people's blog posts and articles, and let the anchor text be meaningful words, not just a URL. Things you read on other blogs within your industry can be great topic starters, so feel free to summarize in your own words, and then rebut or expand on their posts in your own blog (including a link to the original post). This is another way to form industry connections and build community.
- **Don't** be afraid to raise controversial topics related to your industry. Stating a contrary opinion can generate lots of interest and comments. People are more likely to talk about what you wrote in other social media sites as well, and even if they disagree with you, they often link back to your site.
- **Do** use your blog to show you care about your industry. Talk about issues and develop a strong industry voice. This generates respect for yourself as a thought leader (people look up to you as

a person that thinks and leads in innovative and competent ways), and you also may find yourself helping to steer your industry.

- **Do** encourage conversation by approving people's comments promptly (but not the ones that are obviously spam). Also, write your own comments in reply when appropriate.
- **Do** comment on other people's blogs, too, especially other thought leaders in your industry. You can use your brand name with a link back to your blog or home page as your signature line, but other than that, be careful not to be overtly selling/pushing anything. Done with tact, posting on other people's blogs can help build community and a name for yourself within the industry.

TIP Try to avoid responding to unfounded attacks. Many people try to engage others on the Internet for the wrong reasons. Lowering yourself to their level is seldom a good move: That way lies madness.

Here's one more idea for you: Be on the lookout for other people's blogs that are popular with your target audience. When you find one that's highly read, get in touch with the blogger and let him or her know about your company and product. If you can encourage the blogger to give your product a try, you can suggest that he reviews it in his blog and give an independent opinion. People are highly influenced by a trusted reviewer's opinion, so this could generate a lot of traffic to your website and help boost your brand.

Using other Social Media to Build Community

The good news is, you have lots of ways to talk to people online. The bad news is, there are *lots* of ways to talk to people online! Because your time is probably limited, it's important to figure out which websites and methods most effectively help you connect with your target audience on the web. We give you some tips throughout this section on how to go about making that decision.

The important thing is to be where people are talking about your company and products — or, if your business isn't very well-known yet, to be involved in related conversations where you can help to make it known. Social media sites give you a way to do that.

Being connected through social media can also help you deal with a public relations crisis. If a customer slams you online, it can become a PR nightmare. Although it might be tempting to think of the offending customer as evil and clearly attacking you, try to think of it as an opportunity to demonstrate your care and interest, resolve the issue, and then thank that person. Try to turn a problem into a positive statement that you care about people's comments.

There are a few ways social media can help you deal with bad publicity:
- You hear about the complaint quickly, while it's still a small flare-up, because you're monitoring conversations about your brand name.
- You can analyze the complaint and determine its validity (or lack thereof). Self-analysis before jumping into a crisis is always wise.
- You can contact the person directly to resolve the issue, if you choose. You might turn a disgruntled customer into a loyal one through your fast response and excellent customer service.
- You can publicly post an explanation and apology, if appropriate. But do not attack the attackers! They are your clients, or should be.
- You can monitor and "control" the conversation, as needed.
- You can enlist the help of your *brand evangelists* (people who've supported your brand online in the past) to stick up for you, if you decide a response would be better coming from an impartial third-party source not directly related to your company.
- You can use social media profiles to help push down the offending sites in the search engine results pages so they do not get as many views from potential customers.

As of January 2015, nearly 1.7 billion people worldwide have active social media accounts (according to www.JeffBullas.com). Brands and businesses stand to gain — or lose — a lot by connecting with consumers on social media. Being approachable and accessible can make all the difference in your brand perception. According to www.Business.com, 39 percent of social media users expect a response from a brand *within an hour* when they take to a social network

to communicate with the brand. And when it comes to complaints, customers demand a response. Responding to a complaint made via social media increases brand advocacy by 20 percent, but failing to respond decreases brand advocacy by 43 percent. So there's a real opportunity for business owners here to connect with people online, but there's also a need to do it in order to protect their brand's reputation.

Connecting to Your Audience with Social Networking

Social networking involves "meeting" people online through a website designed for this. Popular social networking (or *social media*) sites in the United States include Google+ (http://plus.google.com), Facebook (www.facebook.com), LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), Instagram (www.instagram.com), and Twitter (www.twitter.com), although the list is very long and constantly evolving.

To participate in a social networking site, people first set up their profile page, which contains a variety of basic or trivial information about themselves such as name, age, favorite books, favorite music, or whatever they choose to enter, as well as photos and links and a customizable background. Many social media sites (including Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, and Twitter) have a way for a business to set up a business profile instead of a personal one and assign more than one person to have access.

Before jumping into a social networking site for your brand, do a little homework first. Research the demographics of the various social networking sites. About.com provides a short list of the top social networking sites (http://webtrends.about.com/od/socialnetworkingreviews/tp/Social-Networking-Sites.htm) and provides a few facts about each, including the types of content it's most popular for and some basic facts about each site's focus and purpose. We also suggest the direct approach — talk to your current customers and ask them where they "hang out" on the web. You're looking for the social media sites that are the most popular with the people you're trying to reach.

After your profile is set up, you can connect with other users. On Facebook, you send a "friend request" or in the case of a business you "like" the page; on Twitter, you choose to "follow" another user; on Google+, you "circle" a person or brand in order to see that brand's content on your home page. Another good method is to invite people to "Join our community" or "Follow us" by including links on the bottom of emails and e-newsletters you send out. You could include links to your profile pages on various social networking sites, giving people a choice. If they also have a profile on that site, they can easily request you as a friend/follower.

You have some measure of control over who you network with. After a friend request is made on Facebook, the recipient can either approve or deny it. Most other social media sites, such as Instagram and Google+, enable people to follow another user without getting permission first. However, users can choose overall privacy settings, and you can set each post to either "public" or "private." You also have the ability to block someone in every network. To build your network even faster, look at the suggested friends-of-friends that you might know or want to follow. So after you start to build your network, use the technology to help it grow. You can also use search functions within these social networking sites to find people talking about issues that matter to you (that is, your keywords). These let you dive right in to the middle of conversations where you want to have a voice. Often, you form new connections and grow your network the best by commenting and interacting on topics of common interest, whether you originated the post or not. Communication lets people get to know you or your brand, and two-way conversation is the most authentic kind.

How you choose to interact with your network depends a lot on your strategic goals. Maybe you're trying to
- Build closer relationships with your best customers.
- Generate awareness about your brand and products.
- Build trust with potential customers.

- Find people for a long-term focus group.
- Gather ideas for new products and services.
- Locate disgruntled customers and address their satisfaction issues before it becomes social news.
- Assist with Customer Service inquiries or general information.

You could have any number of different objectives for getting involved in social networking, so make sure you're starting off with your goal clearly in mind so that your time and efforts are well spent.

Many brands have a Twitter account dedicated to customer service and community building. Operated by real people who constantly monitor for any mention of their company, these accounts are useful for responding and resolving issues quickly. As an example, the airline company JetBlue Airways (Twitter account @JetBlue) is known for enhancing its customer service and company image through Twitter. Figure 7-4 shows its profile page on Twitter; notice the follower count of 1.95 million, tweet count of 286K, and the prominently displayed J.D. Power customer satisfaction award.

How to stay on top of your keywords on Twitter

Using the search function at http://search.twitter.com, you can search for a specific keyword or phrase on Twitter to find all the recent entries that contain the keyword. To keep a continuous stream of those mentions flowing, we recommend that you use TweetDeck (http://tweetdeck.twitter.com). Search for a keyword and then click "Add Column" at the bottom of the search results. The new column is dedicated to showing you any tweets with that keyword. You can monitor in real time and know instantly when someone mentions that keyword so that you can engage with the person, if desired. Also, you can respond to people talking about what's important to you online, interacting in a helpful and real way that builds your online community reach.

Larger View

Figure 7-4: Through a Twitter profile, JetBlue Airways reaches out to its customers

Spreading the Word with Social Share Buttons

Social media sites can help you generate interest in your brand and specifically in your website. Links from blog pages, social media sites, wikis, or forums help your link equity only for a short time and should not be relied on in the long term. However, many of those people who find your site through such a referral may end up liking what they see and bookmarking it or linking to it themselves. Plus, you're bringing in more traffic and building more awareness of your brand.

Social share buttons, also called social media buttons or just share buttons, let users recommend a web page to others through a social media site. There, they can also write a review, comment on it, start a discussion about it, and so on. Say someone reads your article "Making a Chrome Bumper Shine without Elbow Grease" and loves it. The reader can recommend it by sharing it on Reddit (www.reddit.com), Facebook (facebook.com), Twitter (twitter.com), LinkedIn (linkedin.com), Google+ (plus.google.com), or any number of other social networking sites.

Your goal is to get your website visitors to see something on your site and then post about it elsewhere. Social media buttons make it easy for your readers to share your articles with the rest of the world because they can post a link to your page on their social account without ever leaving your website. Somewhere on your article or web page, you can offer social share buttons, which are small icons that let the reader recommend the article to a social media site. Figure 7-5 shows a typical set of social share buttons on a web page.
Larger View

Figure 7-5: The Hollywood Reporter includes share buttons for Facebook and Twitter on its articles

You can add social share buttons to your web pages rather easily via free tools available on the Internet. Two popular free options are ShareThis (www.sharethis.com/) and AddThis (www.addthis.com), the latter of which has a Pro upgrade option that offers share buttons that are *mobile responsive* (a web design technique that adjusts how a web page displays when it is viewed on a mobile device. Read about the importance of designing a website that looks good to visitors on mobile devices in Book IV, Chapter 3.) Many share button generators let you pick and choose which social networking sites you want to offer, in case you want to channel the conversation (although we don't see any problem with being all-inclusive and offering a social share button for many popular social networks).

Book VI: Linking

Chapter List

Chapter 1: Employing Linking Strategies

Chapter 2: Structuring Internal Links

Chapter 3: Obtaining Links

📰 **web extras** Go to www.dummies.com/extras/searchengineoptimizationaio to see how to use the Free Link Analysis Report tool.

Chapter 1: Employing Linking Strategies

In This Chapter

- **Theming your site by subject**
- **Implementing clear subject themes**
- **Organizing your content with silos**
- **Making the most of outbound linking**
- **Tackling link building**

In Book II, Chapter 4, we briefly discuss *siloing*, which is a way of arranging your website according to themes that allows for prime search engine optimization. In this chapter, we go into the meat and bones of siloing.

Siloing your site is one of the most important things you can do for search engine optimization. It organizes your website so that a search engine (and a user) can get a good, clear picture of who you are and what you're about. A non-siloed site versus a siloed one is like the difference between having a bookcase with books and DVDs and CDs and knickknacks all crammed onto the same shelf versus a bookcase with books on one shelf, CDs on another, DVDs on a third, and knickknacks on the fourth. It's easier to figure out where things are on the organized bookcase versus the messy bookcase.

In this chapter, we discuss how to build categories and themes for your website and how to incorporate those into your silos. We also discuss how links to your site from others support your site's relevance in the eyes of search engines.

Theming Your Site by Subject

You can do many things to your website to provide evidence of subject relevance. One of these things is understanding what it means to theme a website. *Theming* is grouping website content in a manner that matches the way people search. One site can have many themes. Each theme can have sub-themes. In our example classic-car customization site, the main theme is customizing classic cars; a sub-theme is restoration of classic Mustangs.

In order to rank for your keywords within Google, Yahoo, and Bing, your website has to provide information that is organized in clear language that the search engines can understand. When your information has had all its design and layout stripped away, is it still the most relevant information when compared to other sites? If so, you have a pretty good chance of achieving high rankings and, in turn, attracting users looking for those products and services. In order to do so, you have to be thinking about the following things:

- The subject themes your website is currently ranking for in the search engines.
- The subject themes your website can *legitimately* rank for. False advertising is *always* a bad idea.
- How to go about properly implementing those subject themes.

As you see throughout this book, we often explain the importance of creating silos for your subject themes by using the analogy that most websites are like a jar of marbles. Search engines can only decipher the meaning of a website when the subjects are clear and distinct. Take a look at the picture of the jar of marbles in Figure 1-1 and think about how search engines would classify the theme(s) of the jar.
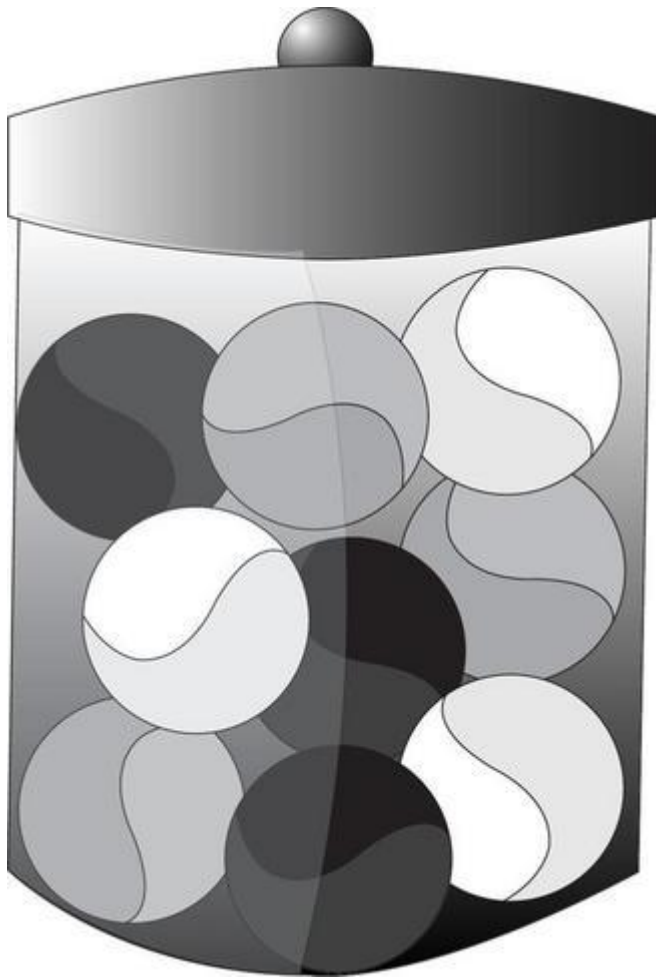
Figure 1-1: Our jar of mixed black, white, and gray marbles

In the jar, you can see black marbles, gray marbles, and white marbles all mixed together with seemingly no order or emphasis. You can reasonably assume that search engines would classify the only theme as "marbles."

If you then separate each group of colored marbles into separate jars (or sites) as in Figure 1-2, they would be classified as a jar of black marbles, a jar of white marbles, and a jar of gray

marbles. Now your site could rank for the narrow terms [black marbles], [white marbles], and [gray marbles], but you would be lucky to rank for the generic term [marbles].
Larger View
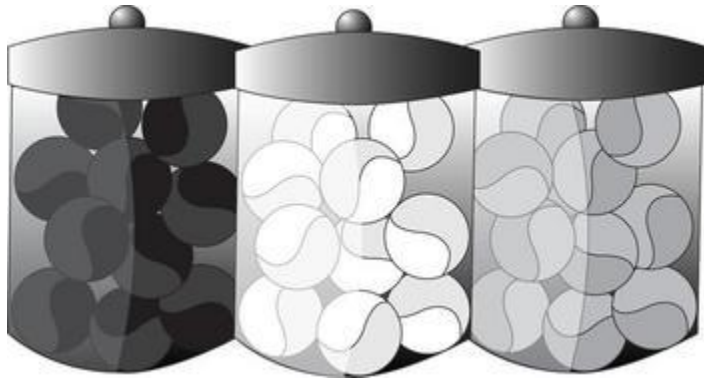
Figure 1-2: Now your marbles are easier to tell apart

If you wanted to keep all three types of marbles together in a single jar (or keep various topics on your website) and go after the very important generic term, you would go about creating distinct silos or categories within the jar (or site) that would allow the subject themes to be [black marbles], [white marbles], [gray marbles], and finally the generic term [marbles], as in Figure 1-3.
Larger View

Figure 1-3: Arranging the marbles by theme allows you to keep them in the same jar and still be able to tell them apart

Most websites never clarify the main subjects they want their site to be relevant for. Instead, they try to be all things to all people and wind up with a jumbled mess.

The goal for your site, if you want to rank for more than a single generic term, is to *selectively* decide what your site is and is not about. Rankings often are damaged in two major ways: by including irrelevant content or by having too little content for a subject on a website.

So what subject themes are you currently ranking for?

The best places to start to identify which themes are your most relevant are your keyword research and the data from your website. You can start by examining the data from the following sources:

- **Web analytics:** These are program routines embedded in your web pages that are designed to track user behavior.
- **Pay per click (PPC) programs:** You can use traffic from any paid advertisements you run in search engine results to estimate whether a keyword is worth targeting in your SEO campaign.
- **Tracked keyword phrases:** All the phrases you are tracking in your monitors are valuable sources of information when you apply competitive research tactics.

Each of these sources of information can provide the history of who visits the website and why. They won't tell you why the site isn't ranked for desired keywords directly, but they help you understand what keyword phrases your site currently ranks for organically and which visitors find your site relevant.

Web Analytics Evaluation

You have several ways to obtain the data or logs for the search engine spider history and the footprints of visitors to your site. First off, you may go right to the source and download the actual log files from your server using FTP. If your server comes with a free log file analyzer, you can use that, or you can use a program like Webtrends (www.webtrends.com/) or dozens of other desktop applications that help decipher Internet traffic data. Many businesses also use on-demand services that use cookies and JavaScript to pull live data on the patterns of search engines and visitors. These businesses do so through online services like the exceptionally powerful Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics/), which is a free service. However you access the data history, you are looking for information on how users came to your site. Book VIII focuses on web analytics and guides you through many of your options.

PPC Programs

You can also find clues to the words that your current site is relevant for by evaluating the words that you bid on with pay per click programs offered by all major search engines. Often, companies bid on words that they would *like* to be relevant for within the organic search arena, but that for one reason or another they have not yet achieved ranking success.

Tracked Keyword Phrases

The last and most accessible method of discovering your website's most important subject themes is to find out which keyword phrases rank the pages within the site best. What phrases are pulling people to your website? Running a keyword monitor and checking your web analytics program reports and server logs for the most-trafficked pages on your site, and using the search engines' webmaster tools are ways to discover which queries are already bringing you traffic. The Search Queries report under Search Traffic in Google Search Console

(https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/home) lists the top queries bringing traffic to your site from Google searches, along with stats for *impressions* (how often your result is seen by a searcher), clicks to your site from that query, and your site's average ranking on a results page for that keyword. In Bing Webmaster Tools, you find a comparable report in the Reports & Data section under Search Keywords.

Obviously these aren't the only terms that you'll want to focus on in your SEO campaign, but they are important to optimize for so that you don't lose the traffic they're already bringing you. Pair them with your new keyword list when you do your organization. See Book V, Chapter 3 for more on creating keyword lists.

REMEMBER After you identify your keywords and implement them in your campaign, you want to continue to track them, paying close attention to which keywords are bringing traffic and, of that traffic, what percentage of visitors are converting.

Keyword Research

After creating a starter list of 10 to 100 keyword terms that appear to be most relevant to your company's product or services, it's time to begin keyword research. During the process of keyword research, the first goal is to grow that keyword list as large as possible. Cover as many relevant subjects that can be remotely connected to the website's subject themes as you can. Use Trellian's Keyword Discovery tool (www.keyworddiscovery.com/) or Wordtracker (www.wordtracker.com/) to identify keywords and synonyms that are related to the site's subject matter. Another excellent tool is the Google AdWords Keyword Planner tool (https://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner). Refer to Book II for the nitty-gritty on keyword research techniques.

After you answer the question of where the site currently ranks by running your keyword monitor or analytics tool, you know two major factors: the phrases for which your site ranks and the phrases for which it doesn't rank in the search engines. The next challenge is to understand what subjects your site is legitimately relevant to and why you are ranked as you are currently.

REMEMBER Many site owners get incensed that their sites don't rank higher for terms they feel they are relevant for. These owners feel that engines misjudge the value of their sites. But a poor mechanic always blames his tools. There *are* rare exceptions where the tools are at fault, but 99 percent of the time, the problem is that the site is not focused enough on its dominant topics. Owners try to cram in too many things at once, and the search engine has a hard time figuring out what the site actually is supposed to be about. Your task is to figure out what your site is about after stripping away all the visual hoo-ha and getting down to the actual content.

Page Analyzer
A great place to begin is to run Page Analyzer within the SEOToolSet. SEOToolSet Lite includes the full-featured Page Analyzer tool and is free for sign up at SEOToolSet.com. Page Analyzer reveals the density, distribution, and frequency of keyword phrases used throughout the page (for more information on measuring keywords, see Book III, Chapter 2). By running the main pages of your site through this tool, you can begin to identify whether the major themes are used throughout the titles, `Meta` tags, headings, `Alt` attributes, and body content. If your terms are absent, make a note that the keyword densities seem low. Evaluate how often a phrase is repeated in each major category element and take note of the commonly repeated phrases and infrequently repeated phrases. Are all the terms concentrated only near the top of the pages? If so, make a note that the distribution of the keywords could stand to be more spread out. Don't bunch them all together.

Multi-Page Analyzer
SEOToolSet Pro subscribers can use the Multi-Page Analyzer to further help their siloing efforts. After evaluating, if the pages throughout your site contain keyword rich densities, compare your pages to that of the top ten competitors for your major keyword terms. Using Multi-Page

Analyzer, you are given a report that summarizes why the competitors' sites ranked highly and recommends how to adjust your own pages to have keyword densities similar to those of the top-ranked sites.

Implementing Clear Subject Themes

As we describe in the preceding sections of this chapter, you need to know what you are ranked for and what you're considered to be relevant for, and hopefully you will have performed some analysis on the data you gathered so you can determine why your competition ranks the way they do. But even if you've taken care of all that, you're still not done. For each keyword phrase you've identified, you need to make a decision: Is it worth the work to write dozens of pages of content to rank for a subject you don't *already* rank for? To make this decision, consider whether your site is really about that theme and whether adding more content about the subject could make your site become *less* relevant for more important terms. You do not want to dilute your site. You need to sit down and figure out whether you're willing to make the commitment to establish a theme and do the work required.

REMEMBER There are many ways to establish a clear theme: Begin by visualizing the primary and secondary categories that you would prefer for your site. If you don't have a clear idea of the primary theme of your website, search engines and users are going to be confused as well. You can start figuring out your primary theme by creating a simple outline. Think of this chart like a business's organization chart, except for themes. Define the major theme or primary subject that you want to become relevant for and create an organization chart or linear outline to cement your ideas in place. Often, it's not until you actually put pen to paper that major subject complications or contradictions surface. Look at Figure 1-4 and note how one main topic is supported by several smaller subtopics.
Larger View
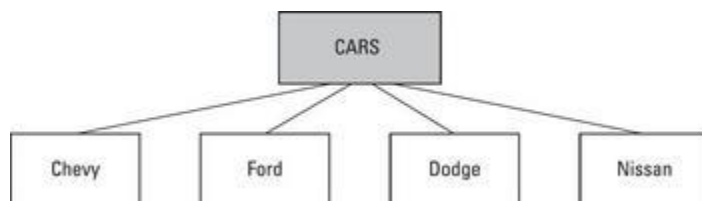
Figure 1-4: A main topic is supported by subtopics

Or you can use a simple bulleted list, like this:
- Major theme
  o Subtopic 1
  o Subtopic 2
  o Subtopic 3
  o Subtopic 4

Creating an organization flow chart is a third way to lay out your subject themes visually. The Organization Chart is an easily accessible tool that can be found within Microsoft Visio, or you can use another organization chart–creation software program. Using one of these visual representations of your themes and subtopics (outline, bulleted list, or organization chart) provides the opportunity to visually explain to others involved in the website what the focus of the website should be and what subjects actually serve to distract the search engines from the main subjects.

After completing this exercise, ask yourself what keyword phrases users actually type into the search engines when looking for this information. This helps in organizing your broad phrases for the large, traffic-heavy pages for your site and the smaller, more specialized phrases that go on your sub-pages.

Siloing

After you have your main themes and subtopics laid out on paper (or on the computer screen), you can start organizing and laying out your website content into subject silos. You may have a good *landing page* (a page that users come to from clicking a search result or an outbound link from another site) for each main topic; if you don't, put creating landing pages at the top of your list. Next, you want to make sure you have enough subtopic content, or sub-pages, to support each main topic. You also want to make sure that every page's content is focused on its particular theme. In other words, it's time to start arranging your website into silos.

One way to visualize a silo is to think of a pyramid structure. Look at Figure 1-5 and notice the top tier. That's a landing page, which has the big broad terms you want to be ranking for. The pages underneath it are the supporting pages, which are the smaller subcategories you came up with to support the main term.

```
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │     CARS     │
                    └──────────────┘
                           │
                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │    Chevy     │
                    └──────────────┘
                           │
   ┌────────────┐   ┌────────────┐   ┌────────────┐
   │  Corvette  │───│   Tahoe    │───│   Impala   │
   └────────────┘   └────────────┘   └────────────┘
```
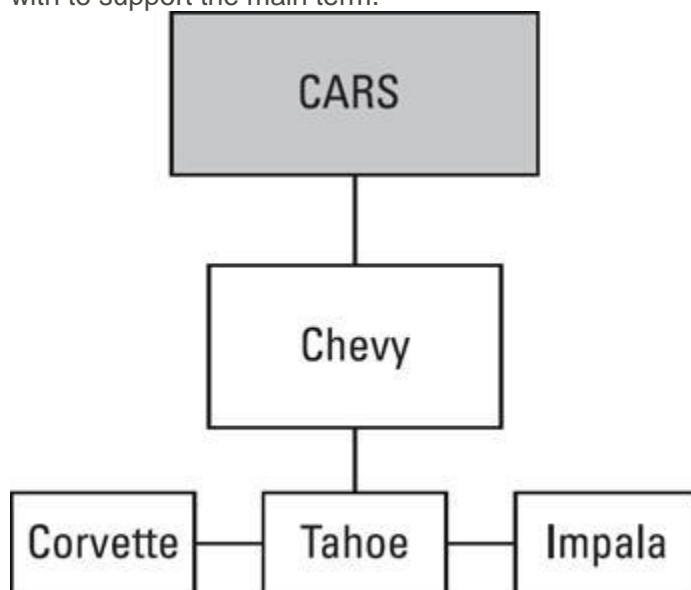
Figure 1-5: A silo looks a lot like a pyramid in that the main topic is supported by the smaller subtopics

The top page receives the most support (and hopefully the most traffic) because it's the most relevant and focused page about its particular subject. Your site proves that it's the most important by the way it's structured, with supporting pages under the top page, and by the way its links are set up. The way you set up your site should tell the search engines exactly what each page is about and which is the most important page for each keyword theme.

REMEMBER There are two ways of doing siloing. One way is *physical* (or *directory-based*) *siloing*, which involves building the directory structure to reflect your site themes and constructing your links to follow the structure of your directory, where sub-pages in a directory are also sub-pages for a particular theme. The other way is through *virtual siloing*, which establishes what your main subject themes are based entirely on links without the reinforcement of your directory structure.

Doing Physical Siloing

One way you can do your siloing is to link in the same pattern as your directory structure. (The *directory structure* refers to the arrangement of the folders where your website files physically reside.) When you upload files to your site, you place them in a directory. A siloed directory structure has a top-level folder for each main topic, subfolders within each main-topic folder for its related subtopics, and individual pages inside each subfolder (as shown in Figure 1-6). Linking then naturally follows this structure, effectively reinforcing your directories through links. Larger View
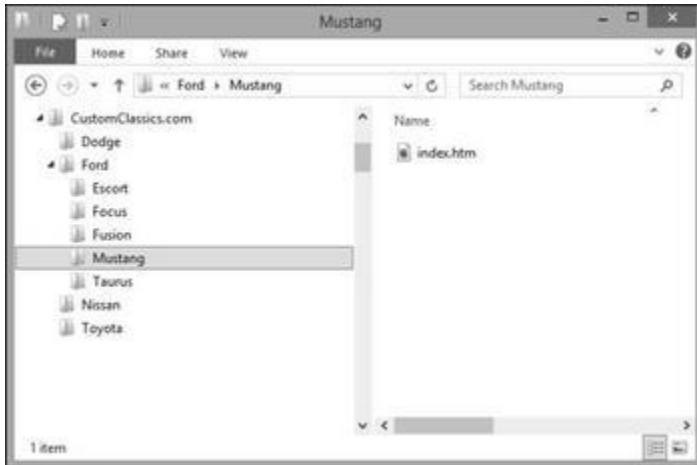
Figure 1-6: A siloed file directory structure

When building a directory structure, be sure not to go too deep. For example, take a look at the URL of the page. The full address is the directory of where the page is. Observe:
http://www.customclassics.com/ford/mustang/index.html

The URL lets you know where the page is. Notice how the page named `index.html` is saved within the folder named `mustang`, which is a subfolder of the main directory `ford`. This page is only two levels deep in the site structure, which is good.

Too many levels of subdirectories can have the following negative effects:
- The more clicks it takes to get from the home page to the target page, the less important it is deemed by the search engines.
- Long directory paths make long URLs, and studies have proven that users avoid clicking long URLs on a search results page.
- Long URLs are more prone to typos. This can discourage deep linking or even cause broken links to your web pages from other sites. Also, users can make mistakes typing in your URL.

WARNING! So don't get category-happy. Making your directory structure ten directories deep is bad, having five levels is probably too much, and even having three levels of subdirectories is still not great. Although there's no hard-and-fast rule, you should try to keep your directory structure quite shallow: One or two levels deep is usually sufficient. The closer the page is to the root of the directory, the more important your page looks to the search engine.

For example, our classic car website only has one main directory level (the car's make) and two directory levels of subcategories (model and year). The directory could look something like this:
http://www.customclassics.com/ford/delrio/index.html

http://www.customclassics.com/ford/delrio/1957.html

http://www.customclassics.com/ford/delrio/1956.html

http://www.customclassics.com/ford/fairlane/index.html

http://www.customclassics.com/ford/fairlane/1958.html

http://www.customclassics.com/ford/fairlane/1959.html

http://www.customclassics.com/ford/mustang/index.html

http://www.customclassics.com/ford/mustang/1965.html

http://www.customclassics.com/ford/mustang/1966.html

Note how shallow the directory structure is: No page is more than three directory levels away from the root.

The other thing to keep in mind when working with physical siloing is the difference between absolute and relative linking. A *fully qualified link* provides the entire URL within the link, and a *relative link* is only linked to a file within the current directory. A fully qualified link looks like this: Larger View

```
<a href="http://www.classiccars.com/ford/mustang/tireoptions.html">
```

A root-relative link looks like this:

```
<a href="/ford/mustang/tireoptions.html">
```

And a directory-relative link looks like this:

```
<a href="tireoptions.html">
```

When you use a relative link, it's only going to work in relation to the current directory (or the next directory up, if you use slash characters relative to the root of the site). So a link to `tireoptions.html` works only if there's a file called `tireoptions.html` for it to link to in the same directory as the file you are linking from.

With fully qualified linking, there is no confusion about where the file is located and what it is about. A fully qualified link has the added bonus of being very clear for the search engine to follow. Fully qualified links allow the search engine spider to have the full address when it follows a link and ensures that the pages being linked to can be found and indexed when the spider returns in the future. Using relative links, or using links that are not fully qualified, can send the spider to a wrong page. Fully qualified links make links easier to maintain and ensure that the search engine spider can always follow them.

TECHNICAL STUFF Whenever you move files, links need to be updated. Absolute links break absolutely if you rearrange folders, whereas if you picked up an entire subdirectory and moved it somewhere else, relative links actually still work. The disadvantage of relative linking is not being able to see at a glance the complete path where a file exists, which may make it tougher to maintain.

Doing Virtual Siloing

You may have your website directories currently set up in a non-siloed structure, with thousands of files and hundreds of folders already in place. Or, you may need to maintain a directory structure that does not reflect your site theme for some other reason. Never fear: As with most difficulties, you can use a technical solution that still lets you silo your site and achieve better search engine optimization.

You can make the theme of your web pages clear to the search engines even if you do not follow your directory structure, so long as you connect your pages on the same theme through internal linking. This is *virtual siloing*.

Here's how to think about it in the simplest terms possible: The Internet is a series of web pages connected by hyperlinks. A website is a part of the great Internet soup, being both a member of the whole vast network and an individual group of pages unique unto itself. What search engines attempt to do is collect information from individual sites into content groups: "This site means

this, and that other site means that, and so forth." They try to determine every site's content and give the content a category. Search engines award the websites that have the most complete subject relevance with high rankings for those keywords.

The difference between physical siloing and virtual siloing is that in physical siloing, it's about how you set up your directory structure and links. Virtual siloing is about setting up your links regardless of your directory structure. In virtual siloing, the following are your tools:

- **Anchor text:** The hyperlinked text that describes what the hyperlink actually links to
- **Internal links:** The links within your site

Anchor Text

The anchor text for a link tells the search engine what the page that's being linked to is about. Clicking a link that says "tires" should take you to a page about tires. Because if the page is about tires, and the anchor text says it's about tires, and any other links to that page all contain the word *tires* (or synonyms of *tires*), that creates a giant blinking neon arrow to tell the search engine that that particular page is about tires. *Anchor text* is the hyperlinked text that explains what the link is and what the page it is linking to is about. It sometimes helps to think of anchor text as your ability to vote for what keyword phrase the target page should rank for.

Internal Linking Structure

The last part of virtual siloing is building subject relevance using the navigation and on-page elements of your website. This means arranging the main subjects in the most straightforward way possible in order to build subject relevance, and organizing your navigation menus to categorize the content of your site. Remember the pyramid that we tell you about at the beginning of the chapter? The broader terms are supported by the lesser terms, and the lesser terms are supported by the even lesser terms, and so forth.

Every silo needs to be assigned a main landing page focused on that silo's primary subject theme. The landing page should have a substantial amount of supporting pages. Supporting pages can also have supporting pages. Linking should stay within the silos or point to other important landing pages. Look at Figure 1-7, which shows a graph of a silo with one big broad page and five smaller subcategory pages, each with its own attached supporting pages. Larger View
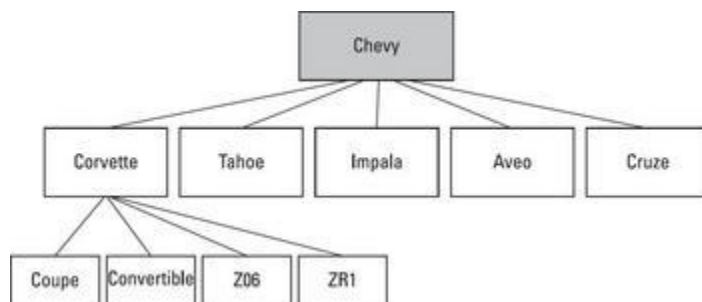
Figure 1-7: A typical silo: Note how the categories are arranged

TIP When you're building your silo, the smaller pages should not link cross-category. Your page on Ford tires should not link to a page about Chevy tires, for instance. Instead, have both pages link to a separate landing page about tires. Too much cross-linking between unrelated subjects dilutes the silo and confuses the search engine.

You can also use a couple of tricks with cross-linking in order to keep the links streamlined, but they should be used sparingly. If you must cross-link theme-supporting pages (not landing pages), you may want to add the `rel="nofollow"` attribute to a link to keep the search engine from following the link. This allows unrelated pages to link to each other without confusing the subject relevance. Alternatively, you can use one of the methods we talk about in the following section on excessive cross-linking.

REMEMBER The `nofollow` attribute is not a substitute for having a good linking strategy, and every page on your site must be linked to from at least two perfectly normal, followable links on perfectly normal, indexable pages.

Making the Most of Outbound Links

Your outbound links are the links that you have going out of your site. Having outbound links to resources and experts in your industry that help your visitors is important. Also, such links show the search engines that you recognize who the other experts in your industry are and helps the search engines define your site by association. Here are some aspects to keep in mind for your outbound links:

- **Link to other experts.** Pick noncompetitive sites that you feel are relevant to your own site and are experts in their subjects. Having these links not only increases your standing with the search engines (experts linking to experts), but also makes you appear more trustworthy to users.
- **Make sure that the link is useful to your users.** Having a bunch of irrelevant links on your site damages your expertise in the eyes of the search engines. It also makes you look bad to your users. They're coming to your site for research, and if you can't give them any useful links to follow, they're probably won't come back.
- **Relevancy is key.** Your links have to be relevant to your site, for you and for the search engines.
- **Validate links.** Make sure that your links are legitimate and won't get you in trouble with the search engines. (For more on how to avoid getting into trouble with search engines due to links, reference Chapter 3 of this minibook.)
- **Be selective.** If you're associating with another website, make sure that it's a good one — no bad neighborhoods, no irrelevant links.

Obtaining Inbound Links

Inbound linking (also called backlinks) is perhaps the most well known and often discussed of the link structure elements in search engine optimization. These *backlinks* are the links that point into your site from an outside website. You might be saying to yourself, "Hold up, I can't control what people say about me." That is true, to an extent. However, you can encourage supporters and people interested in spreading the word about you to add a mention of your site to their personal or even company websites by generally being an awesome resource.

Link building, the process of attracting inbound links, is covered in depth in Chapter 3 of this minibook, but here are a few different ways to solicit links to your site:

- Link magnets
- Link baiting
- Link buying

Link Magnets

When we say *link magnets*, we mean elements on your site that you build in such a way that people naturally want to link to them. Much like a magnet attracts iron filings, these site-content elements simply attract links. People happen upon your site, find the link magnet, and decide that it's relevant and worthy of a link, so they stick a link to your content on their site. This happens because someone finds your page both useful and interesting — and it's a process that happens over time. But it means that the link is generally going to be from someone who is actually interested in your industry, not just in your gimmick. Remember, search engines judge you based on your expertise, and good quality links from relevant sites add to that.

TIP The Search Engine Relationship Chart available at Bruce Clay's site (www.bruceclay.com/searchenginerelationshipchart.htm) is a good example of a link magnet. People in the search engine optimization industry find it relevant to their sites and useful for reference, so they link to it. We continue to keep the chart updated, so it always reflects the current state of the ever-changing search engine landscape. For this reason, the chart maintains its relevance over time, as opposed to something brief and flashy that has no long-term value.

Link Bait

Link bait is an accelerated version of a link magnet. *Link bait* is anything that is deliberately provocative in order to get someone to link to you. Examples would be a cartoon that someone did of your boss, or a video depicting wacky hi-jinks in your office that was linked to by a few well-read blogs.

Link bait, unlike link magnets, is usually more broadly appealing in scope and probably won't appeal solely to your core market. Like any other non-relevant link, a link generated from link bait is often not one that would be considered a high quality link in general. But it does have the bonus of bringing a lot of traffic to your site, and hopefully a few of those visitors may poke around your site and decide to give you a permanent link.

TIP An excellent example of link bait is any kind of viral marketing. Blendtec, a blender company, gets tons of links and traffic from its videos on its Will It Blend? site, where spokespeople put all manner of strange and surprising things into Blendtec blenders (like rakes, marbles, and iPhones) and post the videos on the Internet. Most sites linking to Will It Blend? are not directly related to blenders, commercial or retail, and certainly can't be considered blender "experts" by the search engines, so those links count for less. However, the sheer volume of links that include the relevant keyword [blend] in the anchor text helps the Will It Blend? site rank.

Link Buying

By ad link buying, we don't mean going out and selling or buying links to your own site for SEO link-building purposes. There are two loose groupings of link buying: buying advertising for traffic purposes but not for SEO, which is acceptable, and buying a link for SEO purposes that is not a qualified testimonial, which is considered deceptive and if detected could result in a spam penalty.

Acceptable link buying is paying for a link on someone's advertising site. You *must* do it strictly for advertising and traffic purposes only, and not for link popularity. Google doesn't like to consider paid links and does not assign weight to a paid link. Paid links may pass some value until detected, but after they're detected, you lose all SEO value and could incur a penalty. If you do have a paid link on someone else's site, ask that person to place a `rel="nofollow"` attribute on it. This attribute alerts the search engines that link equity should not be passed via that link. This is also important because if Google discovers a sold link on the site, it might stop passing link equity to all the links on the site. Read Chapter 3 of this minibook for the important technical requirements you'll want to do to make sure your paid advertising links are search engine approved.

REMEMBER If you decide the traffic and advertising is worth the effort, it's perfectly acceptable to pay a site to have it run your banner or text-link ad. Be aware, however, that part of the whole "paid links" issue is that you have to pay for them.

Chapter 1: Employing Site Analytics

In This Chapter

- **Discovering web analytics basics**
- **Measuring success**
- **Identifying what you're tracking**
- **Deciding on your key performance indicators**
- **Examining analytics packages**
- **Analyzing log files**

Web analytics are two words that can strike terror into the heart of any unsuspecting practitioner of search engine optimization (SEO). You've been monitoring your *pay per click (PPC) campaigns* (advertising campaigns in which you pay every time someone clicks your link), and you're watching to see how well your pages rank within the search engines. So you should be able to do web analytics, right?

Well, web analytics can be a little more complicated than that. For a lot of people, web analytics seems to consist of wild guessing and reading tea leaves. It can be pretty complex, but we walk you through it so it hopefully makes a little more sense. In this chapter, we give you a basic overview of web analytics, before we dive into the nitty-gritty later on in this minibook. We go over how to measure your success in the search engines, identify what numbers you need to be tracking, point out key indicators to be watching when measuring your performance, and cover tools and software that help you with web analytics and what a log file analysis is.

Discovering Web Analytics Basics

Web analytics involves taking the information you glean from all your research and sitting down, looking at it, and figuring out what it all means. Bear with us: This can get a little tricky because the terms are so similar. In order to figure out web analytics, you need to know the two different sets of numbers you're looking at — web metrics numbers and web analytics numbers.

Web Metrics

Web metrics is the measurement of what's happening on the Internet itself. It's focusing on the number and types of people online, the number of broadband versus dial-up connections, advertisers, advertisements (shapes, sizes, level of annoyance), and all things related to the Internet as a whole. Web metrics asks: How many websites exist? How many searches? How many emails? How many of those emails are spam? Does it make sense to promote items online for sale to certain countries or to seniors? How many people search at Google versus Yahoo versus Bing?

There are four ways of tracking web metrics data, and several kinds of companies that fall into a particular niche. These firms study the Internet as a whole. Think of them as Internet archeologists. They take all the raw data they get and interpret it in their own way, using information from many, many sites and sources out there on the Internet:

- **People:** The first kind of company that tracks web metrics data does so by using large panels of people whom the companies follow while they surf the Internet as part of their daily routine. These companies report which sites are the most popular and can have their panels check out your competitors and do a comparative analysis. These kinds of companies include Nielsen Online (www.nielsen-online.com) and comScore (www.comscore.com).
- **Hits:** The second type of web metrics firm checks out the hits on the ISPs (Internet service providers). These firms are watching the masses out there surfing on the Internet. They report on how these unidentified (and sometimes unwashed) users research cars, read the latest celebrity gossip, and watch news stories. Hitwise (www.hitwise.com) is one such firm that tracks ISP hits.
- **Responsiveness:** A third type of web metrics firm watches the responsiveness of popular websites. They track how well a popular entertainment site holds up during the Oscars or the Emmys or if sports sites can handle the traffic during the Super Bowl, and which ones run the fastest and which ones drown under the increased demand. Two firms that do this kind of web metrics are Keynote (www.keynote.com) and Tealeaf (www.tealeaf.com).
- **Commerce:** The final group tracks online commerce. They watch how much these commerce companies are spending on advertising and what percentage the consumer is spending on the Internet. They also track the growth rate of companies, as compared to their competition. One of the big tracking companies in this niche is eMarketer (www.emarketer.com).

Web Analytics

On a smaller but no less important scale is web analytics, which concerns itself with the particulars of a single website, instead of the entire web.

The people who do web analytics are looking at how successful your site is in attracting the kind of visitors who bring you *conversions*. Visitors who convert do whatever your website is asking of them: make a purchase, sign up for a newsletter, watch your videos, and so on. Using web analytics means looking beyond just finding out where you rank or how many people clicked over from the search engine listing and actually checking to see how many visitors came to your site and provided you a conversion.

Your first step with web analytics should be to determine what your visitors do and what they should be doing when they arrive on your website. Where do they go on your site? Do your visitors drill down to the product information? Do they put things in their shopping carts? Are they less costly customers because they use the online customer care tools and services? Do they leave your site right away or do they stay a while?

Hopefully they're able to easily accomplish what they came to your website to do. But if you have a website, you need to be able to measure whether your website design and development are worth the effort you've put into them.

This site-level arena in web analytics is governed by software and tracking systems that gather, crunch, and report on data from server logs, cookie data, JavaScript, e-commerce information, and so on.

Without web analytics, search marketers are obsessed only with achieving a high ranking. If they're a little more on the ball, they focus instead on generating as much traffic as they can. Unfortunately, high ranking and high traffic are only part of running a successful site. If you're getting high volumes of traffic but your visitors aren't doing what you want them to do (for instance, people aren't asking you to customize their classic cars), all that high traffic is just going to cost you money. Your server is now handling more non-converting traffic, your PPC campaigns are being clicked on with no return on investment (ROI), and even the time you spent on optimizing your site to rank organically is time that you could have spent making money. Traffic is worth the effort only if it provides ROI.

REMEMBER This is why targeted traffic is so important. *Targeted traffic* is traffic that is interested in your product or service and provides you conversions. Your success is determined not by the volume of visitors you receive but by the quality. First, however, you need to figure out what it is you want that targeted traffic to be doing. That's what we cover in the next section

Measuring Your Success

The first thing you need to figure out before you get started with web analytics is to figure out your goals for your site. Say that you have a website that specializes in classic-car customization services. The first thing you want to do is measure the amount of sales generated on your site. That's easy enough — but other activities need recording as well. Other activities you can record include email newsletter signups, file downloads, RSS subscriptions (news feeds that automatically show updates to a site that offers one), and user account creation.

REMEMBER There is no one-size-fits-all approach to measuring success. Goals differ based on what your website does and what you want users to do once they reach your site. For example, your custom car site would be tracking different user actions than a political site that wants people to sign up for a newsletter. Many advancements have been made in analytics, so if you have something you need to track, you can do it with an analytics program.

You're probably like most people building commercial sites: A website is a key component of your business, and you need to be making money from your site in order to be successful. The common adage is true: You have to spend money to make money; however, you need to be spending money in the right places or you might as well be setting the cash on fire. So, what is it that you want your website to do? This should be a fairly obvious question, but in order to accurately do web analytics for your site, you need to know what it is that gets you conversions. It's extremely important to define your business objectives.

There are four basic classifications for commercial websites: e-commerce sites, content sites, lead-generation sites, and self-service sites. In this list, we provide some basic goals for the four types of commercial websites, and you can use this information when you define your own business objectives:

E-commerce site: The objective with e-commerce is to increase your sales and decrease your marketing expenses. Basic measures include sales, returns and allowances, sales per visitor, cost per visitor, and conversion rate. Advanced measures include inventory mix, trend reporting, satisfaction, and RFM (recency, frequency, monetary) analysis.

Content site: The objective here is to increase your readership-level of interest and time the user spends on the site. The things you measure are visit length, page views, and number of subscriptions and cancelled subscriptions.

Lead-generation site: The objective is to increase and segment lead generation (things like newsletters). Basic measures include downloads, time spent on the site, newsletter opt-ins, reject rates on contact pages, and the leads-to-close ratio.

Self-service site: Finally, the objective here is to increase customer satisfaction and decrease customer support inquiries. Basic measures include a decrease in visitor length or fewer calls to a call center, as these are measures of customer satisfaction.

With clearly defined objectives and a good analytics tool, measuring your website's success becomes a whole lot easier. Your objectives state what you want to do with your website or your marketing campaigns.

Identifying What You're Tracking

In order to start analyzing whether your website is doing what it needs to be doing, you have to acquire a sample of data. This sample allows you to extract a baseline report of data on your users.

Types of data vary from site to site. A data sample from an e-commerce site reads differently than a sample from a political newsletter. For websites that aren't impacted by seasonal trends (meaning they see a spike in business around a certain time of year), a three-month sample is a great baseline range to work with. After you've determined what your baseline sample is (if you have seasonal trends, take a sample from your busy and slow periods), start recording numerical and trended data for analysis.

As someone who is going to be doing web analytics from an SEO perspective, you have to be looking at the information that makes your life easier in the long run. You can do that by focusing on the elements that are most relevant to search engine referrals — information such as

Percentage of traffic from search

Conversions (leads, sales, and subscriptions) from search

Average time a user spends on your site (or visit duration)

Share of search traffic (Google versus Yahoo versus Bing, and so on)

Pages that visitors click

The information that you use in your baseline should be unique to your business goals and ambitions.

It's also critical to separate your paid search results from your organic search results. Paid search results come from pay per click (PPC) programs, where you can buy an advertising link on Google or any of the other search engines and pay a sum every time a user clicks on your ad. You need to separate these two types of results because it can skew your data and throw off proper analysis. You have to understand how subtleties in an SEO program, like descriptions in a listing or movement in a SERP (search engine results page), can impact your traffic and productivity.

This is also true with all your PPC paid search programs when you need to calculate your return on investment (ROI) on specific engines, keywords (search terms), or ad campaigns. Many PPC programs include the ability to tag your pages and track visitors from click to purchase. For more on PPC analytics, please refer to Book II, Chapter 3.

With analytics, you can use different types of reports from any number of analytics packages as long as you know what to look for. But even without the analytics part, you need to think about a quality search experience. Regardless of how users search, you have to get them the information they want while also trying to get them to perform your desired actions.

To help get you started, here are a few tips on items that you can track and measure:

Top search queries: You would be surprised how many businesses lose out on those desired conversions simply because they're targeting the wrong keywords. This is why keyword research is so very necessary. Sometimes what you think would be a good keyword search term turns out to be quite the opposite. This is why it's so important to be thorough in keyword research. You can read more on how to properly research keywords in Book II. This can be a tricky thing to measure because it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. Targeting terms that already are bringing you traffic could mean missing out on a better term that would bring you even more traffic. Watch this metric, but don't put all your eggs in this basket.

Top landing pages: A landing page is a page that someone uses to get onto your site. It might not always be your main page, but generally that would be the one you want to be your big landing page. When dealing with top landing pages, your concern should be the source of referrals. Because we're talking about search engine optimization, we recommend looking at search engine results. This is your first contact with a potential visitor, so make sure that elements of your landing page speak to the search terms and the type of user you want to bring to your site. Changes in page titles, listing descriptions, and URLs can have an impact on a user's desire to click on your page.

Top exit pages: Something you also have to monitor are the exit pages. If users are consistently leaving your site on a common page, it's a good idea to figure out why. The process of pathing is reviewing the flow, page by page, that a user takes while visiting your site. If you begin to see that quality search referrals come into your site but are always leaving at a particular point, you need to work on the content or user experience you provide to keep those users from leaving. To figure out your exit pages, you need to perform a reverse path analysis to determine why so many people are leaving at this one particular page. If the top exit page is the Thanks for Ordering page, you have

nothing to worry about. However, these situations are rare. The most common top exit page is usually your home page.

Bounce rate: The bounce rate measures the percentage of people who leave your site right after entering a page, usually within seconds and without visiting any other page on the site. This stat goes hand-in-hand with measuring exit pages. If you have specific pages designated for SEO purposes, be sure to measure and track the bounce rate on a regular basis. You don't get desired conversions if no one wants to stay on your page. Maybe you're targeting the wrong people with that landing page — after all, just because you rank well for a particular keyword doesn't mean the page that ranks is saying the right things to the people who come to that page. You need to dig in deeper and figure out what the mismatch is. Are your images loading too slowly? Is the page layout confusing? Does the content of the page not meet the visitor's expectations?

Experimenting with web analytics is key, especially because all sites and report suites differ. So find out as much as you can about your visitors and don't be afraid to experiment with your reports and theories. There is always more information to know, and, like everything else in life, we often don't even know what it is that we don't know. The only way to shed light on the activities going on with your site is to start investing in web analytics.

Choosing Key Performance Indicators

Key performance indicators help organizations achieve organizational goals through the definition and measurement of progress. Key performance indicators (KPIs) are the yardstick by which you measure your website's success. In order to properly do web analytics, you need to know what your goals are in order to know what it is you need to be watching.

Your KPIs should be based on your overall business goals and the role your website plays in achieving those goals. KPIs should be specific to your company, they should not be influenced by the industry averages or your competitors' KPIs, and they should be specific, significant, and measurable:

Organizational goals: It is important to establish KPIs based on your own business goals rather than standard goals for your industry. For instance, a company whose goal is "to be most profitable" has different KPIs than a company that defines its goal as "to increase customer retention 50 percent." The first company has KPIs that relate to finance and profit and loss, whereas the second focuses on customer satisfaction and response time.

Measurement purpose: It's important to analyze KPIs over time, allowing you to make changes to improve website performance and then periodically reevaluate performance to verify your progress. So KPIs must be measurable. The goal of "increase customer retention" is useless because there is no real goal; the goal of "increase customer retention by 50 percent" has a definite number that can be tracked.

Managerial consensus: Having all managers on the same page is important because personnel from different functions within your company help create the KPIs. If your KPIs truly reflect your organizational goals, all levels of your company have to get with the program. Encourage company unity and enthusiasm for the project, and make sure that everyone knows what the KPIs are. People have to be on board, and they have to know what it is that they're doing. A crew can't steer a ship if one half of the crew thinks they're sailing to Zanzibar and the other half thinks they're supposed to be Saskatchewan pirates.

Goal continuity: KPIs are long-term considerations designed to help with your strategic planning. Although having targeted goals is important, those goals should also lead to an overall success. Just because something is measurable does not mean that it is significant enough to be a key performance indicator. You must define your KPIs and weigh them the same way from year to year. It's not that you can't adjust your goals, but you should use the same unit to measure those goals. For example, your website goal should be to increase the number of conversions by the same amount year in and year out.

REMEMBER Although you should be creating very specific KPIs for your business, a few metrics qualify as regular key performance indicators all across the board. These include the KPIs for measuring reach, acquisition, metrics, conversions, and retention.

Measuring Reach

Every business that promotes products and services needs to measure its reach on an ongoing basis. Basically, reach is how you reach your customers. The following metrics are useful for understanding the effects of marketing programs designed to reach new customers:

Overall traffic volumes: Tracks large spikes or dips in the requested page views.

Number of visits: Indicates how well you reach and acquire your visitors.

Number of new visitors: Gives you the number of first-time users. This number is the first part of two numbers that you need to calculate ratios that determine the quality of new visitors. Are they giving you your needed conversions? Overall conversion rate is calculated by dividing the total number of transactions (conversions) by the total number of visitors. Obviously, higher is better.

Ratio of new to returning visitors: Identifying changes in overall audience makeup. In general, keeping an existing customer is cheaper than bringing in a new one. Are you retaining your customer base? Have you made changes that alienated your core demographic? Was your core demographic converting as well as the new demographic?

Percentage of new visitors: Helps track the changes in your traffic due to marketing reach and acquisition efforts.

Visitor geographic data: Identify your traffic spikes from unexpected locations. Where is your traffic coming from? This can give you information you can use to better reach your customers.

Your top five to ten error pages: Helps you identify and resolve visitor experience problems.

Impressions served: The number of times the page loaded and a user viewed the content. You can use this metric to calculate your reach and the overall success of your marketing campaigns.

Acquisition

Measuring acquisition is easier than measuring reach. Acquisition is the measure of users that you bring to your site. The difference is that reach metrics depend on information from various sources, whereas acquisition metrics come from your own web analytics data.

Acquisition measurement focuses on the number of visitors your website acquires and where they all come from. The following list gives you the metrics that can help gauge the success of your website and marketing initiatives in acquiring prospects and customers. The metrics you should be watching for acquisition are

Percent of new visitors: You can use this number to flag big changes in new visitor acquisition and their effect on overall web traffic. You use this number in conjunction with your total conversions to help you determine whether they are giving you conversions or just slowing down your servers.

Average number of visits per visitor: This stat can help you ensure that content consumption remains stable, which is an indirect measure of user experience.

Average number of page views per visit: This metric allows you to understand the changing nature of visitors attracted to your website. Do they peruse the whole site or escape after one or two pages?

Page stick and slip (time on page and bounce rates): View big changes in stickiness (how long a user stays on a page) or slip (how quickly visitors leave a page) on your home page and key entry pages, including PPC campaign landing pages.

Average pages viewed per visitor: This is a short-term measure of how well you direct visitors beyond your home page or landing page.

Cost per visitor: This is a rise/fall metric that shows fluctuation of visitor acquisition costs due to an increase or decrease in your marketing spending.

Response Metrics

Response metrics are what your users are responding to on your website, be it an image or a newsletter or an email. These are the key items you need to be watching for:

Responses and respondents: These are important indicators of campaign success.

Cost per acquisition or cost per click: Measuring these keeps you within your campaign budget.

Referring domains/URLs: These help you watch your visitors based on needs and origin. Where are they coming from and what can you glean about their needs from the site they originated from?

Search engines: Check to see who's coming in from the search engines to ensure that the money you spend on SEO and PPC is justified.

Search keywords and phrases: Track what keywords are bringing visitors to your site. You can use this info from search queries to refine your marketing message and materials to include these keywords.

Note that the raw data for the preceding metrics is not useful by itself: Your most important metric is the relationship between your current data measurements and your previous data measurements. As indicators of change, the preceding KPIs can alert you to the ever-changing quality and quantity of your visiting traffic, and this may call for additional research.

Conversions

Conversion metrics are among the most important indicators to measure and monitor. Conversion rates are easy to measure and can be improved by fine-tuning your website; every online business should watch these numbers and have Plan B ready in case key conversion rates suddenly plunge.

When you measure conversions, you also look at abandonment — the ones who got away. Maybe they intended to complete an action but were frustrated during the process and bailed out.

Industry-neutral average conversion rates hover around 3 percent. This means that only 3 out of 100 visitors across all industries complete an intended action.

What conversion rates should you measure? There are three basic processes that can be measured for conversion versus abandonment and each depends largely on what your ultimate goal for your site is.

Activities that lead to an acquisition or conversion: The user makes a purchase or requests a service. This one is probably the easiest to measure because you know when it's done and you have the money in hand. You can see the actual impact in your bottom line.

Activities that lead to gathering important data: The user fills out a form, signs up for a newsletter, or contacts you. You haven't actually made a sale yet but you have more information about that user and probably also her permission to continue the business relationship. This might be the end in itself or just a step along your conversion process.

Activities that direct visitors to information that reduces your operational costs: This one is trickier to measure because you have to track multiple data points — how often someone accesses your FAQ or Help section, how many calls to your customer support group you're receiving, how much those calls diminish after implementing a change aimed at giving greater support up front, or any other operational changes aimed at reducing overall cost.

Retention

Retention is how many customers you keep after they come to your website. Customer retention is important to websites for various reasons. For instance, research shows that keeping existing customers costs less than attracting new customers. Studies have shown that the cost for acquisition on a per-customer basis is much more than that of customer retention. Research also says there is a small chance of converting a prospect to first-time customer status and a low percent chance of reacquiring a lost customer. So customer retention is key.

The following metrics and ratios can help you determine how you rate at customer retention:

The number of returning visitors

The average frequency of your returning visitors

The ratio of returning visitors to all visitors

The frequency of the visit

How recent the visit was

The activity of retained visitors

The views of key pages and contents

Your retained visitor conversion rate

The customer retention rate

The average frequency of return for retained visitors

Although some business models do not expect customers to make a second purchase right away (for example, auto, housing, or travel), very few websites are designed for a single visit from a visitor

without a return. The KPIs listed here should be tracked regardless of your business model or industry:

- The ratio of daily to monthly returning visitors — a quick measure of the average frequency of return for all visitors.

- The percent of returning visitors and the frequency of those returns.

- The loyalty measurements for groups of returning visitors — this monitors big changes in visitor loyalty. How many are you losing?

- Your retained visitor conversion rate; this helps in determining website or campaign success.

- Your customer retention rate; this helps you determine your website success.

Examining Analytics Packages

Analytics takes a long time, several in-depth volumes, and possibly a college course or two to really properly do on your own. Fortunately for you, several analytics packages out there do the number-crunching for you and make sense of all the metrics you're watching out for. Analytics packages are governed by software for sale and systems for use that gather, crunch, and report data from server logs, cookie data, JavaScript, e-commerce information, and so on. The free Google Analytics has the lion's share of the market. In addition to being free, Google Analytics is full of advanced functionality and is familiar to every online marketing professional. Most website owners need look no further than Google Analytics (GA) to procure information about visitors' activity on your site. We tell you more about GA in the upcoming section, but first we say a bit about your other options.

Adobe Analytics (http://www.adobe.com/marketing-cloud/web-analytics/marketing-analytics-capabilities.html) is considered one of the best analytics packages, with a price tag that only the biggest enterprises can consider. Adobe Analytics is a high-end analysis tool that can perform multidimensional queries. If you have a smaller website, knowing who showed up when, from where, and what they did would probably be enough data for you. But if you're a much larger company, you need these more sophisticated tools to help you find more prospective customers and better assess the competition. Be prepared to spend $1,500 or more for this monthly subscription service if you purchase it directly from Adobe. Installation is also expensive: Setup fees are usually around $5,000.

StatCounter (www.statcounter.com) is a free analytics package. It offers custom summary stats based on all your visitors and a detailed analysis of your last 500 page loads. StatCounter is pretty good for a free service, but the free Google Analytics has the advantage of integration with other Google products, including AdWords and Search Console, that StatCounter can't match.

Webtrends (www.webtrends.com) is a popular analytics company. It offers tools tailored specifically to your business model, such as retail, travel, technology, and so on. It has programs for international websites as well, including programs for Germany and France. Pricing is available upon request because the company tailors specifically to your needs. Contact it via its website for more info.

Other analytics software packages are available, but for the vast majority of businesses today, GA is a must.

Google

The most well-known web analytics offering is Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics). Google is putting everything it can think of in this tool in order to show you just how important it is

for you to keep buying more keywords. Google Analytics also generates detailed `statistics` about the visitors to a website. The main highlight of this program is that it's aimed at *marketers* as opposed to webmasters and technologists from which the industry of web analytics originally grew, which means it's geared specifically toward business types, not tech types.

Google Analytics can track visitors from all referrers, including search engines, display advertising, pay per click networks, `email marketing`, social networks, and even digital collateral such as links within PDF documents. Google Analytics also allows you to track your landing page quality and monitors your conversions. Remember, conversions don't always mean sales. This program can track whether users are viewing the page you want them to view. Figure 1-1 shows you the overview from Google Analytics, a listing of all verified sites in your account.
Larger View

Figure 1-1: Google Analytics is a free analytics program

You can also use Google Analytics to determine which of your ads are performing (when you use it in conjunction with Google AdWords, Google's pay per click advertising program, which we talk about in Book II). Google Analytics also provides shorthand information for the casual user and much more in-depth info for those who are a little more versed in web analytics.

Google Analytics works through the *Google Analytics Tracking Code* (GATC). The GATC is a snippet of JavaScript code that users add onto every page of their website. This code acts as a beacon, collecting anonymous visitor data and sending it back to Google data collection *servers* for processing. Data processing takes place hourly, although it can be three to four hours before you can get your data back. The Google Analytics Dashboard (shown in Figure 1-2) can give you information at a glance about traffic, site usage, and traffic sources, among much more.
Larger View

Figure 1-2: The dashboard for Google Analytics provides at-a-glance reporting on your site

The Google Analytics Tracking Code also sets first-party cookies on each visitor's computer. *Cookies* are parcels of text that are used to track, authenticate, and maintain specific information about users. The cookies are used to store anonymous information such as whether the user has been to the site before (new or returning visitor), what the timestamp of the current visit is, and where the user came from.

Google Analytics is very easy to install on your website and can be done in one of two ways. One approach is to add the code with Google Tag Manager. Google recommends this way if you want to manage all special tracking tags on your site, including AdWords conversion tracking and remarketing tags, from one place. The alternative method is copying and pasting Google's provided code snippet into your site's Global element, which means that the code snippet applies to every page across your site and you won't have to go in and add it by hand, unless you're using goal tracking or conversion tracking code. If the only tagging you plan to add to your site is for Google Analytics, this method is the easier of the two.

Log Files Analysis

Even if you never implement a full analytics software suite, you have other ways to get useful data about your site's traffic. Your website generates a lot of information. All you need to do is check out your server logs to see that. Your *server log* is something your server automatically creates showing a record of all the activity it performs. It's a record of everything that happens during a given time period, be it hours, days, or minutes. More than just recording page loads, the server log includes every image loaded, every script run, and so on. It is a moment-by-moment map of site activity that involves your server. So it should be really easy to just pull up your server logs and read who's coming into your site, what they did, and where they came from, right?

Well, not really. Figure 1-3 illustrates what your server log looks like. It doesn't make for light afternoon reading.
Larger View

Figure 1-3: A server log is extremely informative after you've learned how to read it

A server log is filled with incredibly dense information because the computer records that information in its own language, which isn't exactly readable for someone who doesn't speak server-ese.

TECHNICAL STUFF When a user connects to your server, the server records a line of data that looks a little like this:
Larger View

```
72.173.901.16 - - [06/Oct/2008:19:46:42 -0800] "GET /Mustang67red.html
   HTTP:1.1" 200 22832 "-" "Mozilla/4.7 (compatible; Firefox)"
```

Here's what the data means:

- `72.173.901.16:` The numbers at the beginning of the line tell you who asked for the file. A *reverse DNS lookup* (which finds the server the visitor is coming from) will tell you that the visitor came from www.mabelsmotors.com.
- `19:46:42 -0800:` The server log displays time in the Greenwich mean time (GMT). In this case, 19:46:42 (7:46 p.m. on the 12-hour clock); the `-0800` means the visitor is eight hours behind GMT and therefore in the Pacific time zone.
- `Mustang67red.html:` The data after `GET` indicates that the visitor came to your site and looked up a file named `Mustang67red.html`.
- `HTTP:1.1" 200:` The request was from the 1.1 Hypertext Transport Protocol, and your server returned a 200, which means it happily showed the file. A 404 or any other *error code* (a message the server sends when something goes wrong) means that the server couldn't find the file or that something went awry on your site. Errors are usually found in a separate error log.

Next, the log file shows that the server sent back 22,832 bytes of data, and the hyphen in quotes ("-") lets you know the referral link. (The hyphen indicates that the website link was entered manually rather than clicked. A visitor coming from a link would have a referring URL in place of the hyphen.) The end line lets you know that the user is using the Mozilla Firefox browser.

If your head is spinning, that's completely understandable. And here's what's worse: The preceding code is (comparatively) simple to understand and analyze. But a big website generates something in the neighborhood of more than 80 gigabytes of server logs *a day*. So it could get pretty tedious, extremely time-consuming, and definitely frustrating to try to do this all by yourself. Fortunately, that's why you have a computer.

WARNING! If you have a large site, you definitely want to host your log-file analysis on a different server than the one you use to serve up the web pages on your site. Major companies such as Google have numerous rooms full of servers because they serve millions of pages a day, but they have entire server farms dedicated to log-file analysis. Serving data is one thing; actually analyzing it is another bag of cookies altogether.

If you serve a million pages, and each page is made up of ten files, and each file is about 20 kilobytes, your server has to find, read, and send 200 gigabytes of data. To analyze the data, the software needs to categorize it, hold it in memory, compare it, and report on the findings. Sifting through a gigabyte of data is not something you want to do on the same machine that is serving those pages. The amount of work the machine has to do makes viewing your site incredibly slow, never mind making the server keel over and catch fire. So having a separate server (or servers) for your log file analysis is a good thing.

There's the human factor, as well. It takes much more than a few IT guys on entirely too much caffeine to do a log file analysis. You're going to need some tools to help you as well. But choosing the right one is a little tricky and there are some things you need to be thinking of when choosing a log file analysis tool:

- **Target audience:** You need a log analysis tool that you can tailor specifically to your website's needs. Some tools are meant for large, robust sites that have to crunch huge numbers daily; others are made for only basic use. Some tools are very user friendly, and others expect a certain level of expertise on your part. You have to take into consideration your industry, your website's ins and outs, and your promotional campaign.

- **Flexibility:** The more powerful the tool, the more flexible it can be. Generic reports can be useful, but if you want to make your log file analysis really work for you, you need a tool that you can customize to your website's goals. It's not likely you'll be able to do this with a log file report.
- **Archiving:** Log file analysis becomes more successful over time, but storing the data can become unwieldy. You need a tool that offers file compression and archiving that shrinks the files and stores them for future use.
- **Output:** Some tools just spit out numbers. Others arrange them neatly into graphs. A really good tool allows you to manipulate the data much easier than a bad tool in order to compare and contrast from outside sources.
- **Scalability:** The larger the site, the more likely it is that a low-end tool (or even a free one) is not going to cut it.
- **Speed:** The difference between getting your log reports right away versus getting them the next week depends on how powerful your machine is. Faster reporting gives you an edge, and the better tools use special indexing techniques to allow them to perform much faster.

Be aware that there is no such thing as an overnight success; you get no guarantees and no instant gratification. Log-file analysis, like all of SEO, is something that takes time and concentrated effort to do properly. Remember, the cheaper you want it, the cheaper you get it. High-performance, accurate tools that don't crash because of large amounts of data are worth what they cost you.

Log-File Analysis Tools

Several log-file analysis programs are available (usually, running a quick search on Google turns up several), but here are a few so that you know what to expect:
- **WebLog Expert (http://weblogexpert.com):** The website says, "WebLog Expert will give you information about your site's visitors: activity statistics, accessed files, paths through the site, information about referring pages, search engines, browsers, operating systems, and more. The program produces easy-to-read HTML reports that include both text information (tables) and charts." WebLog Expert offers a free demo version, and commercial versions start at $99 up to $399.
- **Sawmill (www.sawmill.net):** Three different versions are available. Sawmill Lite is the cheapest of the bunch and does the basics of log-file analysis. Sawmill Professional, the next step up, is highly customizable. Sawmill Enterprise is the most expensive and has the most gadgets, including multi-processors and e-commerce options. You can test a trial version, and the commercial versions run from $99 to $35,000. Enterprise versions for extremely large sites are also available.
- **AWStats (www.awstats.org):** The free AWStats log-file analyzer can do graphical reports by browsers used, countries of visitors, screen size, and most viewed, entry and exit pages, plus other useful stats for understanding the activity of visitors and bots on your site.

Check Out Traffic Numbers

Here is a list of things to look out for in your log files to make sure your numbers are correct. Not every visitor to your site is a human, and it's the humans you want the data on — not the robots:
- **Search engine spiders:** Search engines use programs (commonly called *spiders* or *robots*) that come to your site and "read" it to help the search engine analyze your site. You can check and see if the `robots.txt` file was requested (this is how you figure out if your site was spidered or not). When you recognize a spider, grab the IP address and let the analytics software know to ignore hits from that address. Most good log analyzers use reverse IP lookup to find spiders and ignore them for you.
- **Masked IP addresses:** Not every IP address represents an individual user. Corporations, universities, and even users from AOL can show your server a single IP address when in fact many people have visited your site. Watch for high traffic from a single IP address to see if you have more visitors than your log file suggests.

- **Cookies:** Don't expect accurate visitor counts from cookies. Many people set their browsers not to accept cookies. Cookies also can't distinguish multiple users on the same computer (like a library or school computer). Log files, however, do not contain cookie info.
- **Busting caches: Caching** is what happens when there is a saved copy of your website. It throws off your analytics numbers because you can be accidentally working off of an old copy of your page. (JavaScript doesn't cache, so you do not have to worry about this if you are running JavaScript tags.) One way to solve this problem is to create a dynamic page. A *dynamic* page is a page that is built on the fly from the database using scripts. You can also set your server to prevent caching if you have enough bandwidth.
- **Know your audience:** Some sites track only users who are logging on from home or work while filtering out users coming in from libraries and schools using public terminals. In general, this means they require a login or a persistent cookie, which public terminals are not likely to allow.

Here's the bottom line with log-file analysis as an analytics solution: It's tedious and not as useful as installing an analytics package. However, it is a way to get hard numbers about your site. If you're willing to dive into it, it can be rewarding.

Analytics is not just about gathering data. It's all about knowing what you want from your website and then being able to read the pile of data you've acquired in order to see whether those goals are being reached, and to determine what else you need to be doing differently to get a higher rate of conversion.

Chapter 2: Tracking Behavior with Web Analytics

In This Chapter

- **Measuring website usability**
- **Getting a handle on conversion tracking**
- **Tracking the success of your SEO project**
- **Analyzing rankings**

To properly do web analytics, you need to gather your data. But web analytics is not just about collecting data. It's about collecting your data in such a way that you can read it, understand it, and use it to make the necessary changes to your website. In this chapter, you discover several ways to gather analytics data.

You have to measure your website's usability in order to figure out whether your web design works for your users and brings you those conversions. Next we talk about conversion tracking. Is your site getting the number of *conversions* you want? Conversion tracking helps you measure not just the final number of conversions, but where people drop off before they make the final conversion.

To track the success of your SEO project, you need to monitor your keywords and your search engine rankings, whether they're at the place they need to be, and whether your traffic is increasing due to those rankings. Finally, we discuss how to analyze your rankings by putting them in the context of your business. Do your rankings in the search engine mean anything to your ROI (return on investment)? Read on to find out!

Measuring Website Usability

One of the first things you should do is to gather data in order to measure your website's usability. This means going through your site to test how your users see your site and measure whether the users are interacting with your site the way you want them to. A few different ways are available to do this: by using personas, A/B and multivariate testing, and cookies and session IDs. We discuss all these methods in the following sections.

Personas

You create *personas* to measure certain statistics for your website. To create a typical persona, profile a user who fits the demographic information of your target audience, but customize the profile to fit a real person.

Here are a couple of sample personas: Jill is a 20-something female from New York. She's a professional with a fairly large disposable income, but she doesn't drive. She reads through your website, and because it's about classic-car customization, she doesn't find anything of interest to her, so she clicks away. Doug is in his mid-thirties, works for a real-estate firm, and has three cars of his own already. He wants to stop and take a look at your site and quite possibly subscribe to your newsletter.

But here's the thing: Neither Jill nor Doug is real. They're made-up people, or *personas*, created by marketing or usability firms in order to go through your website to see whether your site is properly targeting its demographics. A persona can give you an idea of whether your website will work for your target demographic. A firm often designs seven to ten different personas that are then used as a preliminary test market for your website. These are people from different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ethnicities, and they go through your site and allow you to gather data on whether your pages are working the way you want them to or whether you're turning off the very people you want to entice. If your audience is the go-getter type like Jill, a long meandering trip to the conversion point is going to lose her early on. But rushing someone like Doug could make him uncomfortable and cause him to bail out, leaving a shopping cart full of unpurchased goodies behind.

If your site sells shoes, a persona can help you more effectively target your market because you can keep track of whether Jill is going through your site and actually making a purchase, as opposed to hitting your site and leaving immediately afterwards. We offer a lot more information about personas and creating them in Book V, Chapter 1.

A/B Testing

One of the most commonly used tools for testing your website usability is *A/B testing*. It's like doing a science experiment. You test your old version of your website (Version A) with the new version (Version B) to see which one measures up better. A/B testing and multivariate testing (discussed in the following section) are somewhat complex, but we explain what they mean and how they can help. Afterward, we describe options to implement testing.

The big advantage of A/B testing is that you can send half your traffic to the page(s) with the proposed changes while sending the other half to the current page. That way, you can compare your current conversion rate for at least part of your site traffic in case some of the proposed changes aren't working. A/B testing is often the best choice for a page with lower traffic.

But you can't run off and do a hack-and-slash job on the test page and expect to get any sort of meaningful data out of it. Here are some guidelines to help you get meaningful, measurable results if you plan to run A/B tests on a website change or an email campaign:

- **Change only one variable at a time.** Figuring out what exactly is working for you is harder if you've changed several variables on the site.
- **Figure out the precise process for diverting traffic.** One of the problems in A/B testing is that some marketers don't understand how to divert traffic and don't get accurate traffic numbers.
- **Establish accurate measures of volume.** Doing a comparison test is hard if you don't know how many people you're testing.
- **Look for significant differences.** If you see a difference in the conversion rate for the B test, you need to ensure that this difference is significant. A miniscule change to your goal probably won't be worth the effort, whereas a significant change will.
- **Take the time to do a null test.** A *null test* is a test that you run on two A-version pages (pages you haven't made any changes to) in order to establish a baseline and make sure the traffic isn't

coming in weird. This is to make sure that half your traffic is going to one page and the other half is going to the other page, and that you have enough people going into the test.

- **Run your test long enough to ensure results are real.** You won't get an accurate amount of data if you run the test only for a day or a week. Make sure to run it long enough to get enough data to do an accurate comparison, typically a month or more. Remember, with web analytics, the more time you take to do something right, the better your results are.
- **Run segmentation tests.** A *segmentation test* tests the variables in your incoming traffic (such as the demographics of that traffic) by asking users to answer a few questions. Really, you can test any variable as long as you set it up right. The more information you have on your different variables, the better you can target specific changes to your site to drive up your conversions.

We cover much more on the ins and outs of A/B testing in Chapter 3 of this minibook.

Multivariate Testing

A/B testing is about measuring big changes to your site. It's comparing the old site with the completely new version. *Multivariate testing* is about testing all those smaller changes to your site, like the change to a certain font, or to a button instead of an arrow. Typically, you test many small changes to the same page at one time instead of two totally separate pages, as in A/B testing. Multivariate testing works better when a page has a large volume of traffic. If you are testing a medium- or low-volume page, use A/B tests instead.

Most of the testing tools involve copying and pasting a piece of JavaScript into the code of the pages that you are testing. The control code on the top of the HTML page tells you that people are trying to load the page. The tracking script at the bottom of the code tells you that the visitors saw the page, and then you have another code on the conversion page (whatever page the users view after they have completed a conversion) that tells you they converted and what version of the page they were looking at. If you do a test, each version of the landing page has a unique sticker for you to identify it by. If you're doing the test with Google Analytics, after the test runs for a while, Google populates reports for you. Other programs work similarly.

Here are some quick guidelines to keep in mind when running your test:

- **Test a small number of variations.** The rule of thumb is less than 100 variables per combination of tested pages.
- **Test big changes.** If you can't see any difference between two variations in eight seconds, your visitors probably won't either and their reactions won't tell you anything. They can't react to what they don't notice.
- **If conversions are relatively rare in your business, consider testing for early indicators.** If you're selling a $100,000 software package, for example, you won't have a high number of sales to test. Instead, optimize for conversion indicators such as request info, view product details, and so on.
- **Don't jump to conclusions.** A two-week test is not enough time to gather your data. Run each test for at least one month, if not two.

Cookies

When we talk about cookies, we don't mean a tasty sugary snack. *Cookies* are little files that get saved in your browser to keep track of information on a particular site. A cookie is what enables you to automatically log on to your Facebook account regardless of whether you've closed your browser session or even logged off and powered down your computer.

Once upon a time, a server would send out web pages when they were requested without recording any data on who requested the page, where it went, or any other associated user behavior. Cookies were created to save this information. Cookies are used to enhance the browser experience, improve usability for customer interactions, increase purchase behavior, and improve commercial website performance by keeping track of what the user's doing.

Cookies are either first party or third party, depending on the type of website that sets them. A first-party cookie is set by the site that the user is visiting, such as www.classiccarcustomization.com. A third-party cookie is set by a third-party site, such as a web analytics vendor, that provides a service to the main website.

REMEMBER A first-party cookie can contain personal information such as username and a login ID so that users can be recognized when they visit a site. If cookies didn't store this data, websites would have to request it every time the users returned to the site.

A third-party cookie tracks a visitor's path through www.classiccarcustomization.com so it can identify which pages work and which don't, helping optimize for better site performance. The ad network cookies track user behavior across multiple sites, helping them classify user behavior. This helps in the targeting of ads to user segments. For instance, frequent visitors of sports sites are given sports-relevant ads. Although anonymous, this multi-site gathering of visitor information has also caused some controversy regarding privacy violations.

Deleting Third-Party Cookies

Your browser gives you options for deleting cookies. This, and the advent of antispyware software, has resulted in the deletion of third-party cookies. Cookie rejection is also being enabled by new software mechanisms that block cookies from ever being set on users' computers.

This is a slight problem in that mass cookie deletion and rejection can make it appear that a website's new visitors are increasing while returning visitors are decreasing, which is a change in visitor behavior that is pretty unlikely.

Solving the Cookie Dilemma

To fix this skew, client-side web analytics vendors have enabled their cookies to be set by their clients' websites, making them first-party cookies, which are less frequently deleted. Although this does not prevent all cookie-caused inaccuracies (users can still delete all cookies or use different computers), this can help.

TIP An alternate solution suggested by Juniper Research is to use Adobe Flash *Local Shared Objects* (LSOs) as a cookie replacement or backup. Similar to a cookie, an LSO is a text file that can be read only by the website that creates it. There's an extra benefit to using LSOs: Browsers and antispyware programs can't delete them, and most users don't know how. Although this works for now, it won't be long before users figure out how to eliminate these as well.

The solution to the cookie dilemma may be to better describe the cookies: Some users see cookies as adding to the browser experience, whereas others see them as an invasion of their privacy. Users can easily get confused by the difference between first-party and third-party cookies — which one is helpful and which one is of questionable value? In the end, every user has to decide for herself whether to delete cookies based on the pros and cons.

Session IDs

Instead of using a cookie, you might be tempted to use a session ID. A session ID is a way of tracking users when they come to your website. Generally, we recommend that you don't use session IDs because they are assigned no matter who the visitor is, including a search engine robot. This means that every time a session ID is used, it is possible that the search engines will treat it as a new page, and you'll wind up with duplicate content that mucks with your rankings in the search engine. Additionally, a session ID is not very useful when it comes to measuring your website usability because a session ID tracks that user only for the duration of his visit to the site. A cookie remembers that user when he returns, whereas a session ID doesn't.

REMEMBER Overall, using cookies to track your visitors is much better, if they have cookies enabled in their browsers.

Tracking Conversions

Your website's objective is to make you money, not just sit out in cyberspace and look pretty. Each activity on your site should be subtly directing the visitor toward a conversion. A *conversion* is a term used by marketers to describe the final outcome of a site visit. As long as those visitors do what you want them to do, they've completed a conversion.

Before any further analysis can be done, you need to identify which processes on your website you want to measure and how your web analytics solution will help in the measurement.

As a rule of thumb, keep these three things in mind when you decide which processes to measure:

- **Contact:** Make sure that visitors can contact you if they have difficulty with the process.
- **Collect:** Make sure that you can collect the appropriate data when visitors complete the process so that you can retain the visitors in the future.
- **Competitors:** If visitors have difficulty on your site, find out whether they can complete a similar process on a competitor's site.

REMEMBER Before going into the details of conversion metrics, it is important to note that you are dealing with two types of conversions, your *website conversions* (conversions gained from your website) and your *marketing campaign conversions* (conversions of any kind in the bricks-and-mortar world). Because this book deals with the online aspect, we concentrate on website conversions.

So what should you be tracking on your site? We've put together a list of things you should be looking for. Feel free to add to this list as needed; this is just a jumping-off point for you to get started.

Measuring Marketing Campaign Effectiveness

The first thing you should look at are your marketing campaigns. It's important to measure the effect of marketing campaigns on your website traffic. The following metrics are specific to marketing campaigns aimed at driving traffic to your site:

- **Campaign conversion rate:** Determines the effect of conversions from specific campaigns. Did the conversions rise due to the ads you placed on other websites or due to a grassroots viral marketing campaign, like These Come from Trees? (An environmental group asked its members to place These Come from Trees stickers in public restroom stalls in order to curb overuse of paper products — towels, toilet paper, and so on. These stickers included the URL of the organization's website, where it provided more information and stickers.)
- **Cost per conversion:** Figures the cost effectiveness for specific campaigns. You have a great idea for a marketing campaign, but giving away $20 bills stamped with your web address might cost more than the actual conversion you're aiming for. Make sure that you can afford the campaign before you start it.
- **Campaign ROI (return on investment):** Determines the cost effectiveness for specific campaigns. Is your campaign bringing in the conversions you need, or are you losing money?
- **Segment conversion rates:** Tracks conversion progress over time. Your conversions most likely won't change overnight. Watch them over a long period of time to make sure that your campaign is effectively working.
- **Percent of orders from new and repeat customers:** Determines the effectiveness of marketing or customer-retention programs. You want to attract new customers, yes, but you also want them to turn into repeat customers.
- **New and repeat customer conversion rates:** Helps understand barriers to online purchases. One repeat customer is worth more than a new customer because not only do repeat customers mean future conversions, they also cost less than new customers because you don't have to spend a whole lot to keep them.
- **Sales per visitor:** Measures marketing efficiency. How much is someone likely to buy? How little? Get an average so that you can figure out how to budget your campaign effectively.

Here are some key metrics you should track, regardless of whether your site is e-commerce, research, or any other kind of website:

- The conversion rates for any process that makes or saves money or that is critical to the customer experience
- The campaign conversion rate for current campaigns or the most expensive campaigns, if you have a lot of them
- The cost per conversion for the campaigns you decide to monitor
- The segment conversion rates for key or critical group conversions

Here are some specific metrics that e-commerce sites should be tracking:

- The site-wide conversion rate (all purchases to all visits or visitors)
- New and repeat site-wide customer conversion rates
- The percents of orders from new and returning customers
- The average order value, site-wide and for new and returning customers
- Sales per visitor (compare to site-wide conversion rate)

After you decide which site-wide processes you want to measure and how to measure them, the following metrics can help you understand visitor success or failure. These metrics follow whether a customer stays, searches, or actually makes a conversion:

- **Home to purchase:** The abandonment rate for visitors going through the sales path
- **Search to purchase:** The abandonment rate for visitors coming from a site search
- **Special offer to purchase:** The effect of various merchandising and pricing options
- **Lead generation:** The abandonment rate when personal data is requested

Establishing site objectives or goals and all the parts that make up these objectives (the who, how, where, what, and why) is essential when tracking the conversions on your site. One of these factors could contribute to the success of your campaign — or just as easily derail it.

Building Conversion Funnels

After your site objectives are established, you can measure your progress through the use of a conversion funnel. In Chapter 1 of this minibook, we define the four basic websites: e-commerce, content, lead generation, and self service. On an e-commerce site, a conversion is obviously a sale. For a content site, it might be the number of newsletter subscriptions. Lead-generation sites try to gather information for later contact. Self-service sites are targeted at solving a customer's problems, so the measure might be time spent on the site.

In the conversion funnel in Figure 2-1, each step in the sales process on the way to conversion is fraught with visitor drop-off. (Steps in the funnel differ based on the type of business and conversion that you're seeking.)
Larger View

Figure 2-1: Conversion funnels depict the average user drop-off

Each block on the conversion funnel becomes smaller as you go down the sales (or conversion) path. This represents the amount of users you lose along the way to a conversion, for whatever reason.

The point of using a conversion funnel is to figure out where you are getting the most drop-off. In a perfect world, there would be no conversion funnels because all visitors to your site would perform your desired action and you would have a conversion column. But because this isn't a perfect world, your main goal is for the drop-off rate to be as low as possible.

Measuring your website's conversion rate is a challenge because a number of steps lead to that final action, and sometimes visitors are thwarted in their quest to complete an intended action. You can hope that you lost them just because their browser crashed, but sometimes they simply didn't find what they were looking for, or the site was too confusing, or it took too long for them to get to their objective — and so they left. Additionally, many sites measure only their final conversion rate. This does not give webmasters the opportunity to improve their drop-off rates by analyzing the sales path and finding the bottlenecks in order to make the site improvements that result in higher conversions.

TIP Don't measure your end-result conversion rate without tracking the *path* that your customers take to conversion.

Preventing Conversion Funnel Drop-off

In a typical conversion funnel, visitors drop off along the way to the final step that completes the sale or achieves the desired action. The good news is that when your *analytics program* (such as Adobe Analytics or Google Analytics, which we discuss in Chapter 1 of this minibook) tracks the micro-steps required to reach the final conversion act, it reveals data that can be used to prevent drop-off. The analytics package you have does the work and the analysis so that you don't have to. Just be sure to implement the changes it recommends.

One of the things you can do is to eliminate all the unnecessary steps to visitor conversion to reduce the conversion funnel drop-off. The fewer steps needed for a visitor to convert, the greater the likelihood of a conversion. You should create an effective call-to-action for every step

in the sales path. Your conversion rate reflects your ability to persuade visitors to complete their intended actions.

Analyzing Your Conversion Funnel

Your conversion funnel is the path a user follows on your site on the way to a purchase. It's important to follow the conversion funnel closely and analyze where you're losing the most people by percentage. It's very unlikely that 100 percent of your visitors will continue on through every step, but you do want a high percentage of visitors to continue on your conversion path.

Say you have an e-commerce site that gets 2,000 visitors per month, your site has a three-step sales path, and your average sale is $11 per item. If half your site visitors enter the sales path, that means 1,000 prospects drop off at the first step. A 50 percent drop-off rate at the first step could be due to an impediment such as requiring site registration. If 40 percent of that total drops off at the second step, and 30 percent of that group completes the sale, you have $1,980 in sales at a 9 percent conversion rate because only 180 of the original 2,000 prospects made a purchase.

When people drop off, they have not found what they were looking for on your site. By identifying high abandonment pages, you can take a closer look to see what might be making visitors leave and test for ways that would make them want to stick around and continue on the conversion funnel. By properly analyzing this data, you can make sure you won't lose as many people along the conversion funnel. More people convert, which means more money for you.

Making Site Improvements

Using the math from the example in the preceding section, if you can improve the final step of the sales path by just 10 percent, it would bring you an additional $198 in sales, upping your conversion rate to 9.9 percent. However, if you can make improvements at the first step of the sales path, reducing your 50 percent drop-off rate to 25 percent, you can increase your sales by $5,940, resulting in a 36 percent conversion rate.

However, if you do not know what to measure and why, or you haven't a clue as to what indicators to evaluate in your analytics reports, you can't take the necessary actions to improve your site performance. So take the time to figure out the data to analyze based on your site objectives, and then follow up on the data revealed through the use of your analytics software.

Simply picking out indicators that look good at first glance — such as increasing numbers of referrals from Google and Yahoo or increasing the number of page views — might not help you improve site performance. It's not that these numbers are worthless; they just might not be the right metrics to improve your site. Knowing the basic analytic principles ensures that you know what metrics to check for when making your business decisions.

In the preceding sections in this chapter, we talk about overall site objectives, but you also need to consider objectives for the individual pages within your site, which we discuss in the following section.

Assigning Web Page Objectives

Assign individual objectives to each page, especially the ones that require the user to perform an action. Every page should be designed to have a user perform an action, even if that action is something as simple as clicking over to the next page.

To effectively implement this approach, every page on your website that requires action should answer the following three questions:

- What action is required? Examples are clicking to the next page, playing a video, or reading the text on the website.

- Who must take that action?
- What information does your visitor need to take the required action?

By answering these questions, you can define your objectives and apply good analytics solutions to test and optimize your pages for improved results. The same principles you used for site optimization can also work for page optimization.

Tracking the Success of Your Seo Project

Besides watching your conversions, you still need to keep an eye on the big picture: Is the time, effort, and money you are putting into your SEO project actually bringing you a return? You need to know whether the keywords you are using are actually working out for you. Are they affecting your rankings in the search engines? Have your rankings gone up, stayed the same, or actually gotten worse? And in particular, has your traffic increased as a result of search engine traffic?

Determining success relies on tracking your keywords more effectively. *Keywords* are the search terms that users put into the search engines (we go over them in depth in Book II). When you are tracking keywords in order to see if they're working out for you, remember that the broad phrases aren't all you should be looking at, but also the more specific keywords and longer keyword phrases, called *long-tail keywords. Keyword phrases* are groups of three or more keywords that users put into a query window, such as [classic car customization Poughkeepsie].

By using analytics data in conjunction with ranking reports and keyword data provided by the search engines, you can keep track of which keywords are working for you to gain more conversions and which ones are just not working out at all. You can keep track of how much you are spending on these particular keywords (through ad campaigns and whatnot; see Book II for more details) and whether the ROI is really worth it.

REMEMBER Remember, if a keyword is not working out for you, don't be afraid to get rid of it and find a keyword that does.

SEO is much more nebulous when it comes to identifying and tracking the metrics. A good keyword might bring you more traffic, but if those users aren't giving you conversions, they're just using up server space and costing you time and money. That's why it's essential that you have relevant keywords and that you provide your users with the information or products you are advertising. For instance, if your keywords are [Classic car customization], your site should provide information on classic car customization.

TIP There's also such a thing as too much information. The longer a person stays around your site, and the more she explores it, the more likely she is to provide you with a conversion. So do provide people with information, but don't do it all on one page. Spread it around your site, and make sure that your users have access to it.

Also keep in mind that SEO takes a while to fully work, so give it a decent amount of time before you really start to worry if you don't see a whole lot of change. The changes take time, so be prepared to be patient, and know that putting in the time and the effort is truly worthwhile.

Analyzing Rankings

Getting high rankings in a search engine is one thing. Say that you achieve a coveted second- or even first-place spot on the first page of Google results for the keywords you want. However, getting to the top of the search engine results page means nothing if it doesn't help your conversion rate or your ROI. You're not doing SEO to get high rankings; you're doing SEO to get more conversions.

A high ranking in the search engine results page only increases your traffic, and that's great if the conversions you are looking for happen to be a high volume of traffic. But if your traffic volume doesn't provide you with the conversions you need, and your bounce rate is pretty high, you need to figure out what's wrong with your site.

Analytics packages (such as those we talk about in Chapter 1 of this minibook) allow you to put these metrics next to one another; you can then pair that data with a ranking monitor so that you can see the amount of your conversions next to how you are ranking.

REMEMBER You also need to be tracking the paths your visitors took on the way to your site, so make sure that all your visitors have a cookie. That way, you can know which users arrived from the search engines and which ones came from outside links or from their own bookmarks. And if you know that, you can properly read the data coming in from the search engines. Also, be aware of seasonal trends in the search engines. Remember, some traffic is seasonal, especially around the holidays, so take that into consideration when you're watching your search engine rankings.

Chapter 3: Mastering SEO Tools and Reports

In This Chapter

- **Getting started with conversion testing**
- **Getting to know page and site analysis tools**
- **Tracking conversions from multiple referral sources**
- **Seeing how your visitors travel through your site**

In this chapter, we cover the nuts and bolts of conversion testing. We walk you through it, step by step, and hopefully demystify the process a little bit. We show you how to fix common conversion and usability problems, and we introduce you to some page and site analysis tools. Finally, we discuss how to use link analysis tools.

Getting Started with Conversion Testing

Say that you've gathered your data and done the proper analysis, and now you've decided that some things need to be changed on your website. Making major overhauls to your site requires A/B testing. A/B testing is testing the original version of the website (Version A) against the one you made the major changes to (Version B). The A/B test is a tool that tells you which changes have a better effect and to what degree.

We discuss A/B testing in Chapter 2 of this minibook, but in the following sections, we go a little more in-depth and tell you how to actually do an A/B test. Before we get started, here are some cardinal rules you need to keep in mind for running an A/B test:

Change only one variable at a time, especially when A/B testing involves major changes to your site. If you change more than one variable at a time, you can't determine which variable is responsible for the change or to what degree. Systematic testing helps you isolate important variables.

Divert enough traffic to your test page for a valid sample. The object of traffic diversion is to redirect a percentage of visitors through the page to which you made all those changes. Ideally, the

percentage of traffic to be redirected can be easily changed without having to completely overhaul those pages.

Get a visitors-per-page count from your web analytics tool. This ensures that you actually get the percentage of traffic you're expecting moving through your site based on the number of changes tested. For instance, if you expect to run half through Version A and half through Version B, you should see nearly equal numbers of visitors to the first page in the process. If you're running a three-way test (testing A/B/C pages), you should aim for a distribution of 33/33/34 percent of visitors running through each path.

Look for significant differences. If you see a difference in the conversion rate for Version B, compared to Version A, you need to ensure this difference is significant (more than .5 percent) so that you can be certain it comes from the change you made to Version B. Smaller differences can be due to variations in your visitors or any other number of environmental factors. Keep running your test until all the changes can be attributed to the exact step that was tweaked, or until you are certain there was no change.

Take the time to do a null test. A null test involves putting 50/50 traffic through two identical pages to be A/B tested. It's basically doing a control test for your science experiment. In this case, you replicate Page A, calling this copy Page B. Then, without making any changes to Page B, you test your analytics and conversions through both A and B, which should be equal. A null test verifies that you get the same conversion and abandonment rates and that your measurement tools are set up correctly. If you are not getting close to the same rates for both pages (about .5 percent), something is wrong, and your data from the A/B test will be skewed. If this happens, check that you are sending visitors into the tests exactly the same way and that you are running enough visitors through the test. Depending on your traffic volume, you need to attain a reasonable sample, and this can take time. You must run a null test to make sure the data you get back from the actual A/B test is accurate.

Run your test long enough to ensure results are real. It takes time to gather good, solid data from an A/B test. For example, you may see trends in the first few hours that reverse themselves later. You need a representative sample before you can assume that Version B is better than Version A or that Version A is better than Version B.

Run segmentation tests. Segmenting (dividing into like groups) the subjects that you're testing allows you to monitor their activities when they return to your site. This lets you target a group of visitors if it turns out that a good percentage of your B-page visitors (presuming that A/B test results favored B over A) return to the website within two months to make another purchase, especially if these were people who provided you with conversions.

REMEMBER The upside of A/B testing is that if your proposed changes don't work, not all your visitors are subjected to the bad changes, only those whom you put through the B page. This is better than just making the change without testing and crossing your fingers. The downside is that A/B testing is a long, complicated process that takes knowledge, precision, and time.

Because conversions are critical to your business's success, start up a program of A/B split testing before making final site changes. Test two different versions of your page when you're testing things like changes on a call-to-action landing page, one at a time. Table 3-1 shows the hypothetical results of such a test.

Table 3-1: Sample Results of an A/B Test

Open table as spreadsheet

	Page A (Original)	Page B	Page C
Percent of traffic received	34%	33%	33%
New sales generated	200	220	150
Percentage of change	N/A	10%	–25%

Getting Ready to Run a Conversion Test

You can use any of several different tools to run a test on pages of your website and compare which variation sees better conversions. Google Analytics has a feature for running A/B tests and multivariate tests (which are like an A/B test except that they test smaller details, like a different font color, instead of large changes, and you can test all variables at once with different permutations). In this section, we outline the broad steps you have to take before you run a test.

The first thing you need to do before running your test is to choose your test page. Not every single page needs to have a test run on it: You probably don't care about conversions from your About Us page, for example. To be a good candidate for testing, the page needs to offer an action the user can take, like purchasing, downloading, or signing up for something. The action can be as simple as a link that you want your users to click on — the point is that it has to be a measureable response.

For your first test, choose a landing page (the page that visitors first land on when they arrive at your website) that receives high volumes of traffic, like the top of a category or a pay per click (PPC) landing page. This lets you see meaningful results quickly.

The second step is choosing the objective of the test (or experiment, as it's called in the Content Experiments tool in Google Analytics that we walk you through in detail later in this chapter). Your objective is what you want to get out of the experiment, ranging from more conversions to fewer bounces, more pages viewed, and longer time spent on your site. If your test page is a conversion page, a page on which an action occurs that you want the user to take on your website, be it the aforementioned purchase, download, or sign-up, your objective for the test will most likely be more conversions.

TIP When you're doing further, more in-depth testing, choose the conversion or user behavior you wish to track in order to measure the success of your test page. Remember, these tests are to figure out whether the changes you've made are successful from a user standpoint. And although the testing process is called conversion testing, you can also test for improvements to your visitors' behaviors, like staying on a page or the site as a whole longer.

The third step is to figure out which kind of test you want to run. Content Experiments, a free tool within Google Analytics that we cover in the following section, allows you to run an A/B or multivariate test. Depending on what kind of changes to your site you want to make, you can choose to run either an A/B test between two pages (for the big changes) or a multivariate test between many pages (for the small ones).

A/B tests compare the performance of two entirely different pages, which means trying out entirely different layouts, moving around sections of the page, or changing the overall look and feel of a page. A/B tests are simpler to run, and you can obtain results must faster.

Multivariate tests allow you to test content variations in different sections of your page simultaneously. So, instead of tracking one or two big changes, you can test two different headlines, three different images, and two different product descriptions. Obtaining results from these kinds of tests takes longer, but they're more flexible than A/B tests.

The fourth step is choosing the content you want to test. Within Content Experiments, you can use up to ten variations of your original page. For a multivariate test, for example, you might test the headline and an image to go with it. For an A/B test, you indicate your original page and your test page, as shown in Figure 3-1. The differences between your original page and test page in an A/B test can be on just about anything, such as which offer brings in more conversions: free phones or free kittens.

Larger View

Figure 3-1: For an A/B test, you run Version A (top) against Version B (bottom) to see which performs better

The fifth step is creating the actual content variations you want to test. For a multivariate test, for example, you could try a heading in a new font and test out some new wording and perhaps a different image as well (see Figure 3-2). Smaller changes like this should be tested with a multivariate test, not an A/B test, because you get better results.

Larger View
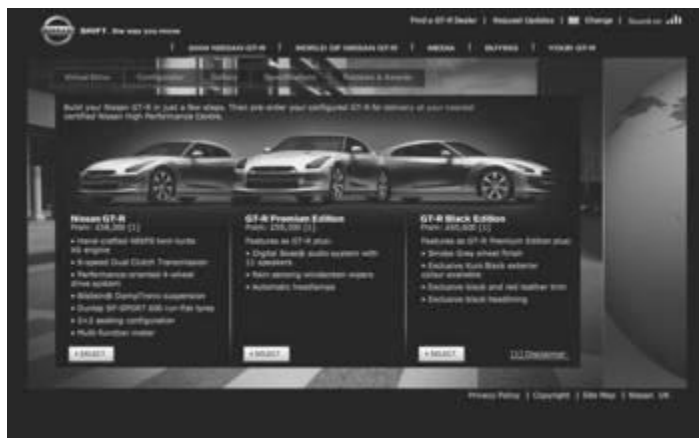
Page A-Original

Page B-Test

Figure 3-2: Multivariate tests use multiple variables on the same page

For the A/B test, you need a Page A (your control page) and a Page B (the test page that has significant changes).

During the experiment, your visitors see either your control page (A) or your test page (B). This way, you can test whether variations in the page lead to more conversions. Do people react differently with different images or text? Or does rearranging your site differently lead to easier access for your users and more conversions for you?

TIP The variations need to be significantly different than the original content. For example, you won't see much change if your headline changes from "Welcome!" to "Come on in!" Someone brand new to your page should be able to tell at a glance what's different about the page. Subtlety has no place in an A/B test.

The last step is deciding how much traffic you want for your test, the minimum length of time you want to run the experiment, and the confidence level you're comfortable with (Content Experiments lets you set this between 95 percent and 99.5 percent). You are running this test on your actual website, so you might not want to lose a whole lot of your site traffic. You can actually choose to limit what percent of your visitors see the new version of your page. But keep in mind that if you limit the amount of traffic to the test page, you'll have to wait a lot longer to get any sort of

meaningful results from this test. We recommend running your test for at least a month to get any kind of decent results, and it may take even longer than that. Don't quit too soon and make a judgment based on early numbers.

Testing with Content Experiments

Content Experiments is a free tool that's included within Google Analytics (available at www.google.com/analytics/) that runs A/B and multivariate tests. We walk you through using this tool because it's quick, accurate, and free.

Set up Your Experiment

To start the testing process with Google Analytics Content Experiments, you need to first make sure that the Google Analytics tracking code is installed on all pages you're using in the test (see Chapter 1 of this minibook for these instructions). Then you need to do the following:

Sign in to your Google Analytics account and select the site you're working on.

Click the Reporting tab, and then select Behavior and then Experiments from the left-hand menu.

Click the Create Experiment button at the top of the page.

The Experiments list page, which displays a summary of all your experiments, appears. If this is your first experiment, your list is empty, as shown in Figure 3-3.
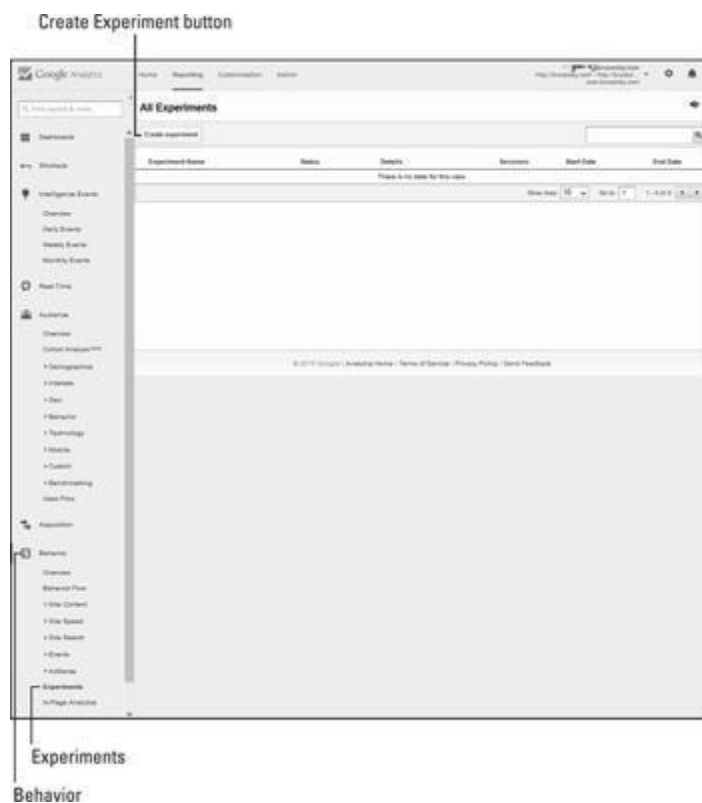
Larger View

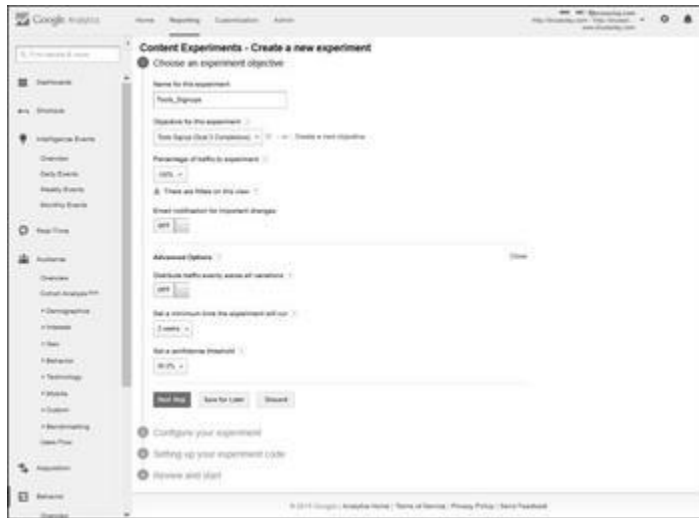Figure 3-3: Click "Create experiment" to proceed with setting up your test

The Create a New Experiment screen appears (see Figure 3-4).

Larger View

Figure 3-4: Use the Content Experiments Wizard to start running a test on your site

Name the experiment and select an objective along with the percentage of your traffic to serve the experiment.

Click Advanced Options to set the minimum length of time the experiment should run and your confidence threshold (your choices are 95, 99, or 99.5 percent confidence). Then click Next Step.

On the next screen that appears, enter the URLs of your original page and test variation page.

If you're testing multiple variations of the page, click +Add Variation and enter another URL. You see a preview of each page, as shown in Figure 3-5. When you've finished adding up to ten test variations, click Next Step.

Larger View

Figure 3-5: Enter the URLs of your original page and up to ten test pages

Choose to add the Content Experiments code to your website.

Select Manually Insert the Code if you're comfortable with copying and pasting some code in the Head section of the original page and all variation pages. If you have a webmaster to do that kind of thing for you, tell Content Experiments to send that code to your webmaster by clicking the Send the Code to Webmaster button and providing your webmaster's email address.

After the code has been added to the pages being tested, click Next Step.

Content Experiments validates that everything is set up right.

Review and Start the Experiment

After you've created your variations and tagged your pages, relax: The hard part's over. All you need to do now is turn the experiment on by clicking the Start Experiment button at the end of the Setup Wizard. But be warned: After you start running the experiment, you can't change any of the variables, so make sure that everything is as you want it to be before you start.

TIP If you do find a problem, all you need to do is return to the experiment from the list page, and then click edit for any step in the wizard. But if you change the page URLs at this point, you have to go through and reinstall the code on the new pages and revalidate everything.

Before you click Start Experiment, you get one last chance to preview the alternate page variations that are displayed to visitors during the experiment. If anything needs to be changed, click edit to change the names, objectives, or page URLs.

Ready, Set, Go!

After you click Start Experiment, you are sent back to the Experiments list page.

You also see an additional section on the page describing the progress of this experiment, including the status, number of impressions, and start and end dates of the experiment. Your test page starts showing different variations immediately, but a delay of about an hour takes place

before your reports start displaying data. The progress and duration of the experiment depends on how much traffic goes through your test and conversion pages.

After you've got some significant data, the reports have preliminary results ready for you. Click the experiment from the list to see the experiment's results.

Viewing Your Results

Be sure to check that visits and conversions are being recorded soon after starting your experiment. If you're not getting any visits or conversions, check the troubleshooting guide for some suggestions on what might be causing this error. Sometimes errors occur that don't show up until the experiment is actually running.

Hold off on checking your reports right away. Until a minimum amount of data has been collected, you get a message along the lines of Hold on There, Cowboy, We Don't Have a Complete Report Yet. (Well, okay, not literally, but you get the idea.) Check back in a day or two in order to see your results start coming in. With any test, you want to wait long enough to gather enough data for it to be meaningful. When you have enough data, you can check your reports, which look something like Figure 3-6.

Larger View

Figure 3-6: Reporting from Content Experiments provides the conversion rate of the original page and variations and predicts which is likely to perform best through the course of the test

Google Analytics support explains how to read results at https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1745152. The report tells you:

Experiment status: If an experiment is in progress, the status reads that you have no winner yet. If enough data has been gathered to meet the level of confidence you set at the outset of the test, a winner is announced.

Conversions and visits: This is the number of conversions and visits a particular page generated.

Improvement: The Compare to Original column displays the difference (positive or negative) between the conversion rate of the variation and the original.

Probability of outperforming original: While the experiment is in progress, this column displays the probability that a combination will be more successful than the original version based on the results so far. The higher the percentage, the better the test page is doing.

With enough time and data, Content Experiments identifies the winning variation. It's all a matter of how long you run the experiment and how similar the variations are. If you've run the experiment for a long time and still don't have a clear winner, your variations might be too similar to get correct data, so you may need to make some tweaks and run another experiment.

To stop the experiment at any time, click the Stop Experiment button on the Experiment page.

Always be testing

One of the cardinal rules of analytics is that you must always be testing. Analytics experts tell you that if you're not constantly monitoring, testing, changing, and improving your pages based on your analytics, you'll miss out on huge opportunities.

Set up a system that detects high-performing pages and routinely performs an A/B or multivariate test on those pages. Test every product launch page, your conversion points, your calls to action, your landing pages, and your buttons and fonts.

Never be satisfied with "good enough" on your website. As we describe in the appendix of this book, the more you test, the more you understand — so you'll be able to drive traffic and conversions better than your competitors.

Discovering Page and Site Analysis Tools

Without wisdom, data is just numbers. To use the powerful analytics tools at your disposal, you first need to know what you want your website visitors to do. This can be anything from purchasing products to signing up for a newsletter or just getting more traffic to your website. After you know what you are measuring, you can view how well you're doing in your analytics software.

Google Analytics is the free analytics package that we recommend using to see how your visitors are coming to your site and what they're doing after they get there. With Google Analytics, you can segment your view of visitors by where they came from; those segments are paid and organic Google search results, social networks, and other special campaigns that the website owner may define. To see your organic search traffic from both Bing and Yahoo, you look to the analytics reporting that's part of the free Bing Webmaster Tools. You can see your paid search traffic from the combined Yahoo and Bing ad networks in Bing Ads Reporting.

Viewing Performance of Paid Search Campaigns

When you run a pay per click (PPC) campaign, you spend money whenever potential clients click your advertisement. Because you're spending money, you want to know how much money or value you're getting back for that campaign. That's where PPC conversion reports come in.

PPC conversion reports tell you things like how many people are buying products. They can also be configured to tell you how much money you made from selling products to people who came

from a PPC advertisement. For example, in Google Analytics, you can link your AdWords account, receive reports about your paid search campaigns, and find the information shown in Figure 3-7. For Bing Ads, analytics reporting is provided in Bing Ads Reporting (https://secure.bingads.microsoft.com/).
Larger View
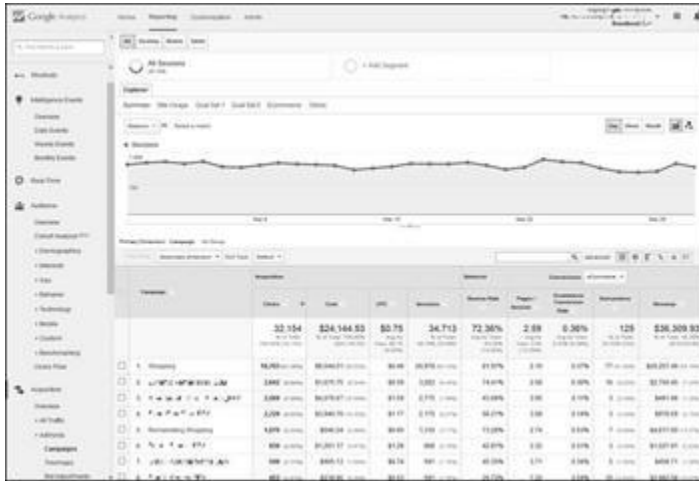
Figure 3-7: Google Analytics is a source of performance data about your AdWords campaigns

TIP You need to tell Google AdWords and Bing Ads what your conversions are in order to get an accounting of conversions by visitors from search ad clicks. Read about setting up goals in AdWords in the Google support article at https://support.google.com/adwords/answer/1722036. Creating and tracking goals for Bing Ads is explained in this support article at https://advertise.bingads.microsoft.com/en-uk/cl/256/training/campaign-analytics.

You can drill down from your campaigns to your ad groups to your keywords, seeing the number of clicks an ad received, your ad's *click-through rate* (CTR), how much your *cost-per-click* (CPC) was, your conversion rate, and how much you made from that advertisement, reported as revenue.

With these types of reports, you can analyze your spending and your revenue based on PPC ads. This information helps you decide which keywords, advertisements, and campaigns are working the best for you and which ones are not working so well. With this information, you can optimize your PPC campaigns by limiting your spending and maximizing your revenue based on the spending constraint.

Measuring Traffic and Conversion from Organic Search

Measuring how much of your traffic and conversion is from *organic* (non-paid) search is important because it tells you how much traffic and money you are getting for your SEO efforts. Every SEO campaign costs you time and money, so you want to know what you're getting back for it. Most analytics software packages come with an out-of-the-box report for getting traffic from organic search. Figure 3-8 is from Google Analytics.
Larger View

Figure 3-8: This graph from Google Analytics shows the pages on the site that received the most visitors from Google organic search

Figure 3-9 shows a similar report from Bing Webmaster Tools. The graph shows the number of clicks from a Bing organic search that a site received. Below that, you can see a list of top pages receiving organic search traffic and the keywords the search visitors queried to see your site on a Bing search results page.
Larger View

Figure 3-9: Bing Webmaster Tools reports site activity, page traffic, and search keywords from a Bing and Yahoo organic search

Defining Goals in Google Analytics

To get the most out of Google Analytics, define your conversions, called Goals in this analytics suite. You can choose from among four Goal types in Google Analytics:

- **Destination:** Triggers when a specific page loads because a goal action was completed, like a thank-you page
- **Duration:** Counted when a user is on the site for a specified amount of time or longer
- **Pages or screens per session:** Happens when a user views a specified number of pages or screens
- **Event:** Triggers when a defined action takes place, such as when a video is played or a specified link is clicked

Think of all the objectives you have for your website, and set up goals to track your visitors' completion of those objectives. If yours is an e-commerce site, set a Destination Goal linked to the thank-you page that shows up after a purchase is made. If a white paper download is a goal, set an Event Goal to trigger when the Download button is clicked. You have the option of assigning a monetary value to your goals, and if you do, Google Analytics reports dollar amounts

attributed to traffic from different segments. With Goals defined, you can measure the value of paid and organic search and social media marketing efforts. For more on creating and managing Goals in Google Analytics, review the Google Support article here: https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1012040.

Viewing Traffic from Social Networks

Another visitor segment that you can home in on through Google Analytics (GA) is traffic from *social media*. Social media refers to any sort of online environment that allows social interaction, including blogs, social news sites such as Reddit (www.Reddit.com) and Digg (www.Digg.com), social networking sites such as Facebook (www.facebook.com), Twitter (https://twitter.com), and Google+ (plus.google.com). In Book VI, Chapter 5 you learn about building a community and brand awareness through content shared on social media. With the social reports in Google Analytic, you can see what pages shared in social media brought visitors to your site. If you've set up Goals in GA, you can even see whether these visitors *converted* (took any action you want visitors to take).

Figure 3-10 shows the social network referrals reported in Google Analytics. You can reach this report by going to Acquisition and then Social in the left navigation. Social networks bringing traffic to the site are listed in order of most pages viewed.
Larger View

Figure 3-10: Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn are the biggest social networks and typically drive the most traffic from social media

Seeing Visitor Paths Through the Site

Now you know where visitors are coming from and whether a visitor converts. The final piece you can get from analytics is seeing how a visitor navigated through your site to wind up at her final destination. This helps you determine whether people are just searching through your site until they get something they are looking for or whether they are following a predetermined path that gets them to something you want them to get at.

Google Analytics shows you the path of visitors through your site, a report that you can slice and dice a number of ways. The example in Figure 3-11 is the flow of visitors who entered a site

through a social network. In this flow chart, you can see the most popular paths taken by visitors who landed on the site from a social network, with the flow from Twitter highlighted.
Larger View

Figure 3-11: Behavior Flow reports in Google Analytics allow you to track popular paths on your site

Go to Behavior and then Behavior Flow in Google Analytics' left navigation. The default view is the flow of visitors starting at the landing page they entered on. You can also view paths by these dimensions:
- Acquisition source (traffic type)
- Advertising (by ad content, ad group, ad campaign and ad keyword)
- Behavior (by defined Goals)
- Social referrals
- Users (by browser, location, language, device, and many more subdimensions)

Get more on path reports, including how to set up advanced custom dimensions, in Google Analytics support: https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/2519989.

Understanding Abandonment Rates

On the flip side of knowing how users travel through your site after they get there is learning when and from where they leave. *Abandonment rates* can be broken up into two categories: how soon the visitors left your site and what page they were on when they left your site. These both have different meanings, and understanding what they mean is important.

When visitors leave your site, you naturally want to know why. When a visitor leaves after visiting a lot of pages or going through a process on your website, that is when you want to know which page he left from. If he leaves the site on the first page of his visit, the visitor is probably not satisfied with your site at that time. Reasons for his exit can range from the site's not answering a specific need of the user to a bad design that just makes the visitor want to leave. Another reason is that the visitor came to your site for only one thing, found it, and then left — which is often the case with a blog. The percentage of visitors who leave after looking at only one page is called the *bounce rate*.

An *exit page* is the last page the visitor was on before she left the site. Most users leave because they have not found what they were looking for, or they find your site hard to use and think they can find a better alternative. Note that in most cases, the exit page that the most visitors leave from is usually the page that contributes most to your bounce rate.

Both types of reports can be found in almost every analytics suite. Figure 3-12 shows an example of a Content Drilldown report in Google Analytics. The line graph has been set to the

Bounce Rate metric and shows how often a visitor leaves after viewing only one page. In the table below the graph, you can see the bounce rate and exit rate of the pages listed. Examining these metrics on a page-by-page level can help you strengthen the weak points in your conversion funnel.

Larger View

Figure 3-12: Knowing your bounce rate and exit rate can help you fine-tune your conversion funnel

Book IX: International SEO

Chapter List

Larger View

web extras Need some help deciding whether to explore international SEO and business opportunities in Asia, Latin America, and Europe? Check out www.dummies.com/extras/searchengineoptimizationaio to get that help.

Chapter 1: Discovering International Search Engines

In This Chapter

- **Targeting international audiences**
- **Identifying opportunities**
- **Quantifying how many people search**

Throughout this book, we talk mainly about what to do to optimize for search engines in the United States, but what about the international market? What about Europe, Latin America, and Asia? This minibook covers what you need to know about working on an international level.

In this chapter, you discover all the basics you need to know to start thinking globally. Cultures and languages vary across the globe, and if you don't properly adjust your market strategy for your international audiences, you risk failure.

You also need to be aware of the different opportunities in international search and how many people out there are using search engines. Not to worry: We have an overview all ready for you in this chapter.

Targeting International Users

Say that you decide to take your business to the international markets. You know that a market exists for classic car customization, and it will generate a whole lot more revenue for you and your company.

WARNING! Before you get started, remember that when doing business in other countries, you have to be aware of laws other than those of the United States. Unfortunately, to make things difficult on all of us, there is no such thing as a standard international copyright law. National laws, to no one's surprise, apply only to businesses operating within that country. Two countries can barely agree on pizza toppings, metaphorically speaking, let alone a standard international law. Although international law goes beyond the scope of this book, we caution you to look into the laws governing copyright and business before entering an international market.

Along with the technicalities of international copyright laws, you have to think about certain challenges when you're gearing up to start working in the international markets. First of all, be aware of the different browsers that other countries use. Not all of them use Chrome or Mozilla Firefox, so when designing or tailoring your international website, you need to be aware of the constraints of whatever particular browser is popular in your target country or region. This is why good coding is so important. Remember to always test your web pages in a validator, such as the one at the World Wide Web Consortium's website, www.w3.org. (You can find more on validating your code in Book IV, Chapter 4.)

Second, the way people access the Internet varies across the globe. Mobile devices (smartphones) far exceed the number of desktop or laptop computers in developing countries. For example, in the world's most populous nation, China, 85.8 percent of the 649 million Internet users access the web with mobile devices, according to a report by the China Internet Network Information Center as of December 2014. To put those statistics in perspective, the number of Chinese Internet users already outnumbers the total U.S. population by two to one. Yet 649 million represents only 47.9 percent of China's population — so the Chinese market still has a lot

of room to grow. Marketers who want to target China must focus on mobile apps and mobile-friendly websites. A mobile-focused strategy is essential for many other countries, as well.

In countries such as Indonesia, India, and others, Internet access is not a given. There are ongoing efforts by Google, Facebook, and other tech giants to expand the reach of the web in places where connections either don't exist or are very slow (2G speed, for example, compared to the 4G or 5G networks in the U.S.). If you hope to reach these markets with your online business, your site or application software needs to have streamlined code and small file sizes that can travel well through slow connections. In 2015, Google began using *transcoding* to simplify web pages when sending results to slow connections. Google has rolled this out in Indonesia, India, and Brazil so far. Transcoding drastically reduces the elements on a web page, removing large images and so forth, so it can load faster. Therefore, if you plan to do online business in these countries, we recommend that you trim your web pages down so that Google's transcoding hatchet doesn't have to butcher them too much.

Another thing you need to be aware of is any difference in currency. It affects shipping rates and the prices of the goods you're trying to sell. For example, at the time of this writing, 1 Euro is the equivalent of 1.07 United States dollars (USD), whereas 1 Japanese yen is the equivalent of .0083 USD. But the exchange rates fluctuate continually, so you need to revise accordingly. A good currency converter is available at XE (www.xe.com/ucc).

REMEMBER The language barrier is a fairly tricky one to navigate as well. Some countries have multiple languages spoken by the populace. For example, in the Netherlands, two main languages are spoken by the population, Dutch and Frisian, but most people speak English or German as well. Marketing in the correct language can be trickier than you'd think. Having local input is the best way to make sure you're getting it right.

Be especially aware of cultural dimensions within that language. Spanish is spoken in many different countries, but it has variations, and what can be a completely innocent word in one country can be a very nasty slang term in another. For example, in the U.S., when you want to determine what's causing a problem, you say you're trying to get to the "root" of the problem. In Australia, "root" is slang for something very different, and using it in a business meeting will probably get you accused of sexual harassment. Understanding the impact of culture on the language is equally important. In Japanese culture, 4 is an unlucky number (the way 13 is in America), so if your company has "four" in its title or you use it in advertisements, you might want to make a couple of tweaks if you're going to expand into the Japanese business market.

Some other issues to think about with language include
- **Local terms:** Especially important if you hope to do local business within that country. Your classic-car customization site for southern Germany could use a listing of dealerships in Bavaria, for instance.
- **Spelling and grammar differences:** The Spanish spoken in Spain and the Spanish spoken in Central or South America all have some key differences when it comes to spelling and grammar. For one thing, in Spain, Spanish makes use of verb conjugations for the plural second person, *vosotros*, whereas Spanish spoken in Mexico rarely uses it. French natives say that the dialect spoken in Quebec sounds "wrong" to them.
- **Popular culture references:** Avoid dating yourself. Keep up on the pop culture trends in a country if you have a business that would be related (such as one that sells clothing). For example, a Bulgarian site would appear dated if it talked about a popular sitcom that hasn't been on the air in the United States in many years.
- **Translation issues:** You risk a big hit to your credibility if you're not careful translating your website content from its original language to a new one. For example, in Wales, a website that had been improperly translated for a school listed its staff as a "stave made out of wood" in Welsh. We suggest adding someone who's fluent in both English and the language to which you're translating the site (and preferably someone actually from that country) to your content building and marketing process.

- **Vocal culture issues:** You may run into issues with languages that have different sounds than English. For example, Japanese has no "t" sound. The closest approximation is "tsu," so a word such as "fruit" would sound like "fruits" when pronounced in Japanese.
- **Visual design:** Figure out a country's particular design aesthetic. Study the visual culture of the target country. In both Japan and Korea, to look professional, your website needs a lot of bright colors and a busy page full of words, images, and links. Google's ultra-clean home page doesn't play well to that audience, but Yahoo's busy portal does. In England, however, a super busy and bright page is considered completely unprofessional. Similarly, color is an important consideration. In China, white is the color of death, much as black is here in the United States — probably not the best choice for your wedding site. Use red on your Chinese site instead because it represents joy in Chinese culture.

TIP When you are doing keyword research, make sure to do it in the target language. Don't just copy/paste into an online translator to find keywords to try. You run the risk of missing out on nuances, subtleties, and all the cultural references you could be using in keywords, and you may run afoul of many tricky conjugation rules.

In order to truly succeed in a different language, we recommend you get experts in each country on your team. Do you have a German classic-car customization website? Hire someone from Germany who's an expert in classic cars. She can tell you about the different slang terms Germans use for cars, what kinds of cars are popular, and any of the cultural references you'd miss if you relied on just yourself and a German dictionary.

When translating the website copy you already have, consider language issues and don't try to translate your pages exactly from one language to another. To get the best final result for your foreign-language website, follow these steps:
1. **Break the original English down into main bullet points.**
2. **Have a professional translate this text into the second language.**
3. **Use that document to create your actual website text for your target language.**

Hire a marketer who's native to the language and region so that you know he's getting the tone and slang right. Web marketer Ian McAerin refers to this process as the *Symantec Expression Equivalency Document* (SEED) process.

If all else fails, use the local rule of thumb. Use local terms, local keywords, and local structure in order to truly succeed in your foreign market. People have started bandying about words such as *glocal*, which is defined as localizing the global market.

REMEMBER The impact of languages and culture should not be underestimated. By understanding culture and languages, you can adapt better, succeed in your efforts to localize, and get more sales and respect. Showing an interest in communicating in the native language boosts interest in your company.

Domains and Geolocating

Internationalization revolves around *domain* (where the site actually exists on the web), language, culture, and geolocation issues. *Geolocation* is the identification of a web page as belonging to or being relevant for a particular country. You also have to be aware of the country-code *top-level domain*, which is the last part of an Internet domain name — the letters that follow the final dot of any domain name. A country-code top-level domain (ccTLD) is specific to a particular country, such as `.ca`, `.cn`, `.uk`, and `.mx`. Be aware that ccTLDs are abbreviations in that country's language, so the ccTLD for Germany is actually `.de`, for *Deutschland*.

Creation and delegation of ccTLDs is performed by the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority, or IANA (www.iana.org). You can find a comprehensive list of ccTLDs on IANA's website at www.iana.org/domains/root/db.

The rules for obtaining a ccTLD are different for each country because each country can administer its own registered ccTLD as it chooses. You always need to do a little bit of research. For example, in order to obtain a `.de` (Deutschland, or Germany) ccTLD, you need to not only have your site hosted on a German server, but you have to be doing business in the country physically, as well. In Norway, a company can own only 20 domains. For more information on how to obtain a ccTLD, go to www.iana.org/domains/root/cctld.

Some countries have licensed their ccTLDs for worldwide commercial use. Tuvalu and the Federated States of Micronesia, small island countries in the South Pacific, have partnered with VeriSign and FSM Telecommunications, respectively, to license domain names that use the `.tv` and `.fm` ccTLDs to interested parties. For more information on country-code TLDs, check out Book VII, Chapter 2.

Search engines don't like to display duplicate content. If you have multiple domains that show the same page content, the search engines will display that page from only one domain. A search engine like Google may use a number of factors to decide which version of a page to display, including *link equity* (however many links lead to your site and how much authority they pass) on the page, opting for the page that has more links. Other signals that Google may take into account include the language on the page, the site's *IP address* (the location of the page on the web, called the "Internet Protocol" address) as well as the country targeting settings that a site owner indicates in Google Search Console. We tell you more about setting country and language targeting in Google Search Console in the "Single sites" section, later in this chapter.

Site Architecture Tips

To make your site accessible in the international market, you can follow some very simple architecture guidelines:

- **Have your site coded in UTF-8 (Unicode).** This is a type of code that allows your site to be translated into languages from around the globe. It is backwardly compatible with ASCII and it encodes up to four-byte characters.
- **Don't translate your `Meta` tags and page titles (HTML coding for your site that defines the characteristics of your page) from English to the language you're working in.** Work in the language itself and make all your tags individually. Plan to adjust for plurals, prepositions, special characters, and so on. Like your web page content, these are too important to just leave for a straight translation.
- **Adopt a global press-release strategy.** Many online press release portals exist for different languages. Sending out articles announcing news on your company or your products generates links and helps build your global presence.
- **Manage your 301s. 301 Redirects** automatically send users from a URL that no longer exists to one that does. This is the only type of redirect that is considered to be search engine friendly. A typical global site has hundreds of links going to Page Not Found errors. Domains around the globe are often incorrectly set up, and *meta-refreshes* (having the page automatically reload) are often present, which are not SEO-recommended methods for handling page redirects. (For more on 301 Redirects, see Book VII, Chapters 3 and 4.)
- **Make sure that your URLs contain *keywords* (words that people search for by using search engines) for which you want to rank in that country.** Just like optimization in the United States, keywords in the URL help users identify your site as relevant and can promote recognition.
- **Link to other regional sites and seek to obtain inbound links from relevant regional sites as well.** Enhance your credibility with your international users.
- **Use experts for keyword research.** What do you do if there's no direct translation for a word? Employ someone fluent in that language to help you with the translation issues.
- **Use ccTLDs.** A *ccTLD* is the domain that relates to a particular country. Using a ccTLD more likely inspires users to trust your site.
- **Have a lot of content on your website that reads well to your target audience.** Use good, clean copy and make sure you're using the right character sets.

Identifying Opportunities for Your International Site

When you expand into the international market, you have three options when it comes to your site architecture: one site, multiple sites, or a combination of the two. With one site, you can take advantage of subdomains (smaller domains linked to bigger domains) and subdirectories that point to pages in different languages or are geared toward specific countries. Multiple sites require you to build an individual site for every country with a local ccTLD, preferably hosted in the country.

Each of these three options has its pros and cons. It's up to you to do the research and figure out what's best for your company in your target markets. However, you can understand the differences by reading the details we cover in the following sections.

Single Sites

Having a single site and targeting using subdomains (such as uk.myglobalsite.com, fr.myglobalsite.com, jp.myglobalsite.com, and so on) provides you with several benefits. It's easy to set up, you only have to keep track of one server and one domain, and you can keep all your files in one place.

All the *incoming links* (links from outside sources) and all your web traffic point to one domain, rather than being split between two or more sites. Although lots of traffic doesn't necessarily mean a high conversion rate, it sure doesn't hurt.

In addition, if you use a single site, you will have more pages in the search engine's *index*, which is the search engine's database of web pages that it periodically searches to offer up to users for search queries. Grouping by language prevents duplicate content. Remember, search engines remove a site from their search results if they think it is duplicate content.

On the other hand, here are some disadvantages of a single-site approach:

If your home page is in the "wrong" language, it can be confusing for your international users. To avoid this problem, you would need to create an entry page that allows users to select what language they want to view the site in. These pages tend to be text-light, however, and not good for search engines.

Another disadvantage can be a home page that ranks highly in only one language. Having your site pop up high in the rankings for German is great, but what if you also want to do business in the English-speaking world and you're nowhere near the top 100 search results? You have to spend the same amount of effort on each section of your site, which can be time-consuming.

If you were to group by country, you are risking duplicate content. Although it's okay to have different pages in different languages, if you have separate pages for each Spanish-speaking country but don't provide unique content, the search engines read repeat pages as duplicate content and don't count them.

If you do decide that you want to maintain a single site, you can do some of the following:
- Specify the target country for each sub-domain by using Google Search Console. To set a geographic target, follow these steps:
1. *Sign in to Google Search Console by using your Google account (https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/home).*
2. *Click the URL for the site that you want.*
3. *Click Search Traffic in the left navigation menu and then click International Targeting.*
4. *Click the Country tab and then use the drop-down selection menu to choose the country you want to target with this domain.*
- Redirect country-specific domains to the appropriate sub-domain or subdirectory.
- Make internal and external links language-appropriate and use the country-specific domains.

Multiple Sites

Having multiple sites means that you set up a separate domain for each country. Expanding to new countries is technically easy. You can add sites one at a time, as needed, without impacting any of your current websites. Domains with local ccTLDs usually rank well in multiple country-specific search engines.

Certain countries require you to host your site on one of their servers in order to qualify for a ccTLD. But even if it's not a requirement, it may be a good practice if search engines try to match your server location to your physical location. However, search engines may decrease the weight of this ranking signal as more sites move to *cloud hosting* systems, where files and resources are stored and managed on virtual servers, to save costs.

But here are some of the disadvantages of a multiple site approach: The most obvious disadvantage is that maintenance is harder. Having more sites equals having more sites to update, more servers to troubleshoot, and more domains to keep registered. Additionally, you wind up putting in more time to your SEO. Having multiple sites means multiple SEO efforts. Dividing your time and resources could cause it to take longer for your main `.com` site to rise in the rankings.

With multiple sites, you're forced to target countries instead of languages. The world has many Spanish-speaking countries, for example, and maintaining a site focused on each and every country can get costly and time consuming.

Some tips for this approach include
- Target the country in Google Search Console, as outlined in the previous section.
- Make sure that external links have appropriate anchor text and link to the correct country-specific domains.

The Blended Approach

If you have an international site on the `.com` top-level domain, you can use a blended approach, which combines the methods used for both single and multiple sites. This approach might be the most realistic for worldwide presence. With this approach, you can start with a `.com` site and then build country-specific sites, as needed. Creating, maintaining, and updating this site setup can cost you, however, because you need to keep every site up-to-date and in step with all the others.

Here are some tips for implementing the blended approach:
- Specify countries in Google Search Console, but your international site — the one that serves any interest — should be left without a specific target country.
- Link your multiple country sites carefully and logically. External links should be logical. Keep the globally applicable content on the international site and country-specific information on country-specific sites.

You can use *IP sniffing* (using a program to analyze the traffic as it comes to your site) to automatically detect users' location and serve up a translation in the local language to direct them to the proper site. If you do that, always let them know that they are leaving the current domain and going to a new domain.

Realizing How People Search

In this section, we introduce you to how the rest of the world searches the web by discussing several internationally popular search engines. First up is Google, as shown in Figure 1-1. This figure shows the French, Japanese, and Brazilian versions of the site.

Figure 1-1: Google has sites for many international markets besides the flagship `.com` address

Google is available pretty much everywhere. Here's a small sampling of the languages in which Google is available: Afrikaans, Amharic, Basque, Bihari, Chinese, Dutch, Finnish, Hindi, Kazakh, Malay, Norwegian, Quechua, Slovak, Tagalog, Twi, Urdu, Yiddish, and Zulu. This list is only a sample, but our point is that Google is available pretty much across the globe.

As for the other U.S. players, statistics from NetMarketShare as of May 2015 show that Yahoo makes up approximately 4 percent of the global search market worldwide, whereas Bing, has roughly twice that. Ask (www.ask.com in the U.S.) is a relatively minor player (with less than 1 percent). One extremely important thing to note here is that YouTube actually gets more searches per month than Yahoo.

Even search engines local to the target country are mostly *backfilled* (supplemented when the local engine's index doesn't have sufficient inventory) by Google's search index and paid ads.

Not every country uses Yahoo, Bing, or Google. Hold on tight: We're going to take a whirlwind tour around the global to look at some of the most important search engine brands outside the United States.

Baidu (www.baidu.com, shown in Figure 1-2) is the leading `Chinese search engine` for websites, audio files, and images. Baidu has an index of more than 740 million web pages, 80 million images, and 10 million multimedia files, and it attracts 5.5 million visitors annually.

Figure 1-2: Baidu leads search engines in China

Yandex (www.yandex.com, shown in Figure 1-3), launched in 1997, is a Russian search engine and the largest Russian web portal. Its name comes from the phrase Yet Another Indexer.
Larger View

Figure 1-3: Yandex rules in Russian search engines

Seznam (www.seznam.cz, shown in Figure 1-4) is a Czech search engine that has a customizable home page and other features such as email, maps, and a company database.
Larger View

Figure 1-4: Seznam is a Czech search engine

Naver (www.naver.com, shown in Figure 1-5) is the most popular search portal in South Korea. Naver was launched in June 1999, the first portal in Korea that used its own proprietary search engine. Naver received 2 billion queries in August 2007, accounting for more than 70 percent of all search queries in Korea and making it the fifth most-used search engine in the world, following Google, Baidu, Bing, and Yahoo.
Larger View

Figure 1-5: Naver is the most popular search portal in South Korea

Najdi.si (www.najdi.si, shown in Figure 1-6) is a Slovenian search engine and web portal created by Interseek. It's the most-visited website in Slovenia.
Larger View

Figure 1-6: Nadji.si is a Slovenian search engine

These are just a sampling of the search engines across the world. So where do you want to advertise? Simple answer: maybe on all of them. You always want to be where your customers are looking for you. However, if that's too broad and a little daunting, narrow your target market by demographic or search engine. Start out small and then expand as time goes on (depending on your success in the international markets, of course).

TIP It's time for a small, shameless plug: With the SEOToolSet (available in two versions, a free Lite version and a Pro version for just $89 a month from www.seotoolset.com), you can do three things for international search that make your international campaigns easier to manage:
- **Perform on-page SEO content analysis.** The Single Page Analyzer (available in its full-featured form in the free SEOToolSet Lite) supports about 20 languages. Use it to review how keywords are optimized on your page, with a natural language analysis that scores your content, makes suggested improvements, and visually maps your page themes.
- **Monitor keywords in a number of engines, including country-specific engines.** We think the Ranking Monitor (available only in SEOToolSet Pro) is a great tool, and not just because we built

it. You can monitor your pages' rankings for your target keywords on search engines in close to 20 countries.

- **Share data with an international team.** With an unlimited number of users able to access and manage your projects, you can empower your multinational team with the data available through the SEOToolSet. Every report and interface can be displayed in 20 languages with the switch of a drop-down menu.

For more about the capabilities of the SEOToolSet, check out Book III, Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Tailoring Your Marketing Message for Asia

In This Chapter

- **Succeeding in Asia**
- **Discovering Japan**
- **Succeeding in China**
- **Finding out about South Korea**
- **Operating in Russia**

The first stop on our world tour of online marketing in the international venue is the Asia region, which includes Japan, China, South Korea, and much of Russia. In Chapter 1 of this minibook, we briefly touch on the search engines popular in this region, along with a few tips and tricks for operating a website in those countries. In this chapter, we go into more depth on operating online in Asia. You discover tips on how to succeed in the targeted country, the demographics of the region, and any other hints we think would be useful to you along the way.

Succeeding in Asia

Starting a website or expanding your site into the Asian region can be a little daunting. Asian culture can be very different from Western culture, with nuances that can harm you and your company if you miss them, and that's not even considering the language barrier. Not to worry, though. We've put together a step-by-step getting-started guide for building or translating your site to work in the Asian markets.

REMEMBER One chapter in a book isn't enough to make you an expert in SEO for the Asian market. In fact, the most important message you should take away from this chapter is that there is no shortcut or substitute for research and local know-how.

Assessing Your Site's Chances

Your first step is simple: Assess the usability of your translated site — is it going to work for your target country? What works in the U.S. might not work in Asia. If you want to work in any country other than your own, you should be hiring some people who are native speakers from the local markets. This doesn't have to be an expensive proposition. You might find some international students at your local college campus who want to earn a little money by looking over your translated site and pointing out anything you have missed. Look around and see who's available to you and get them to tell you everything they can about your new target market.

TIP Just as you would analyze the market back home, you want to consider the viability of your niche when marketing in Asia. The trick here is that you're dealing with an entirely new culture. You need to find out what's popular before you can start selling it, after all. So maybe there's not a huge market for custom classic cars in Asia, but maybe you have a side operation that sells all sorts of classic-car memorabilia, including fuzzy dice. Through your research, you discover that, in Asia, they can't get enough fuzzy dice. You're in business! (Disclaimer: We made up this

example. We really don't know whether anyone in any Asian country can't get enough fuzzy dice. But who doesn't love fuzzy dice?)

Sizing up the Competition and Sounding Out the Market

After you have your market, it's time to analyze your competition. Having figured out that there is a large market for fuzzy dice in Asia, you need to sit down and study how your competition is doing in the foreign market. Check out other sites that sell fuzzy dice, especially if they're local companies. This is where someone who speaks the language or knows the culture would come in very handy. All the tips and tricks from Book III come in especially handy here. Follow the same step-by-step procedure to gather and analyze information.

You'll have an easier time gathering information using the proper tools. Many SEO tools are available. We obviously recommend the SEOToolSet (www.seotoolset.com) from Bruce Clay, Inc. In SEOToolSet Pro, you can use the Single and Multi Page Analyzer tools to compare the optimization of top-ranked pages for your keywords, both general and localized. The SEOToolSet can be used in nearly 20 different languages, including Japanese and Russian. Find the top-ranking pages in your market for your target keywords and then include those URLs in your multipage comparison to see what patterns emerge from your competition. Another feature of the Pro version of SEOToolSet that's especially useful for a search marketing project outside the U.S. is the Ranking Monitor, which can be configured to track your pages' rankings for target keywords in the popular search engines of 17 countries, including Google Japan, Yahoo Japan, and Bing Japan.

After you sort out your competition, you need to broaden your research to the entire Asian market in order to plan your strategy and tactics. How does marketing work there? Who's online, and how are they searching? A quick search turns up these stats:

- China has 649 million Internet users, with the vast majority — 85.8 percent! — connecting via a mobile device. Users are overwhelmingly in the 15–34-year-old age group.
- In Japan, 86 percent of the population is online, which represents nearly 116 million people. The country has the fastest-aging population, and a demographic segment called the Baby Boomer Juniors, aged 28–37 years old, is responsible for much of the consumer spending.
- The Internet in South Korea is considered the fastest in the world. Most of the population is online, connecting to the lightning-fast Internet through mobile devices. North Korea's stats are largely unknown.

Determining Your Plan of Attack

After you determine your suitability, competition, and strategy, you can move on to the actual implementation. Your next step is the planning phase: Here's where you create your Asian marketing plan.

If you have an *e-commerce site* (any website that sells a particular product or service, such as fuzzy dice), you need to start with Japan, and then expand into South Korea and China. However, if you're *branding* (establishing your name and associating it with your business, such as Nike or Xerox), you need to start with China, then move into South Korea, and then Japan.

Sound strange? It's really not. China is notorious for knock-off brands, so you should be starting there immediately if you want to expand your brand. In Japan, they tend to copy technology faster and to be conscious about brand, so you need to establish yourself as the authority product and then work on your branding so that you're recognized as the only brand to have.

Next, you need to know the search engines you'll be using. Google is used almost everywhere in the world, but certain search engines are actually more popular in a particular country or region. You need to know which search engines are the most prevalent in your target market, and look at getting *indexed* (getting your site into the search engine's database) as soon as you can. The search engine statistics look something like this:

- In Japan, Yahoo has 53 percent of the online market share, with Google the runner up at 40 percent.
- In China, Baidu (www.baidu.com) reigns as the major Chinese search engine and the fourth-most-used search engine in the world.
- In South Korea, Naver (www.naver.com, a Q&A formatted Korean search engine) claims nearly 80 percent of the Internet search market. Google has only 4 percent market share.

TIP Use localized *keywords* (search terms), advertising copy, and *landing pages* (the page a user arrives on when he first visits your site). Do not use an unnatural mix of English and the local languages. Think of how amusing but untrustworthy misspelled signs or menus are. You might think a store offering "Creem donuts" is hilarious, but you probably wouldn't make a purchase from that store. The same is true when English speakers attempt to do business in other languages.

Building trust and face-to-face interaction are *huge* parts of selling yourself in the Asian market. Putting a face on your brand is very important, and you need to be selling yourself as much as your product. Be prepared to log some frequent flyer miles. Meeting with clients, vendors, and others you do business with face-to-face helps to establish trust.

You should also be monitoring your local competition. You're the foreigner, so you are starting at a disadvantage. Be looking for an edge: something that separates you from the local competition, but at the same isn't too foreign or untrustworthy.

REMEMBER In this chapter, we cover things that you should generally be aware of when you move into the Asian market. But each country has its own quirks and legal issues, so you need to do your research.

Discovering Japan

Japan has the third-largest economy in the world, following the United States and China. Japan has open markets that actively encourage foreign investment, which means that you can expand into the Japanese market slightly more easily than you can operate in some other Asian countries.

TIP The most demanding shoppers in the world live in Japan. There is a huge market for brand-name services and goods, and the Japanese are very big on brand names as status symbols. Louis Vuitton, Vivienne Westwood, and others do a healthy share of business based on their brand names alone. During the global economic recession of 2008, it's said that the demographic group made of young working women 28–37 years old singlehandedly shored up Japan's economy with luxury brand purchases.

For much of the last 70 years, Japan led other countries in terms of personal savings. But an aging population is responsible for a decade of drawing down savings accounts. In 2014, for the first time since records were kept in 1955, the country's household savings rate (savings divided by disposable income plus pension payments) was –1.3 percent. Spending is strong, especially among the 13 percent of households with annual incomes above 10 million yen (approximately $80,000). For businesses vetting the viability of the Japanese market, note that another marked characteristic of the Japanese economy is an openness to foreign multinational companies that have evolved products and services for developed markets such as tech and advanced fields.

The Japanese are aware that the language of business on the Internet is English, but to do a good business with the Japanese, you have to be able to communicate in Japanese. The design aesthetic in Japan is also different from the Western one, and when you do business in another country, you should consider the local preferences of graphic design. Check out the site design of Yahoo Japan (www.yahoo.co.jp/) in Figure 2-1.
Larger View

Figure 2-1: The home page of Yahoo Japan has a lot more images and movement than Yahoo in North America

Figure 2-1 illustrates the preference in Japan for busy, interactive, and media-rich websites. Internet users in Japan are much more likely to trust a website that looks like this than one that looks much simpler.

To establish a web presence, get a `.jp` *domain* (the space your site occupies on the web, like a `.com`, or a `.net`, or in this case, `.co.jp, .or.jp`, or `.ne.jp`). Hosting your site on a server actually physically located in Japan is a good idea as well; however, the advent of *cloud computing* (storing, processing, managing, and hosting all files in a remote server) has made local hosting nice to have rather than a critical consideration. Be sure to include your contact info on your website, such as a number someone can call to receive information. Be sure that the person in charge of this phone line speaks Japanese and is able to answer any questions.

As with starting a business in any foreign market, we recommend getting a person on the ground. Hire someone familiar with Japanese language and customs, and if at all possible, someone who actually lives in Japan. A local resident can help you navigate the differences between the Western world and Japan and help you achieve greater success in the long run.

Succeeding in China

China is a new frontier when it comes to the business world. It's also a tricky one to navigate. Not only do you have the language barrier and the cultural issues to work through, but you also have more extensive and stringent government regulations to deal with. However, China's economy is booming, and if you are willing to take the steps, now is a good time to get in the front door.

Internet searchers in China are very different from users in the United States or elsewhere. Two of the top ten Chinese website domains include numbers. Why? Because the Chinese language has 13,500 standardized characters. So, if you're designing a keyboard to have one key per character, the keyboard needs more than 13,000 keys! This is why businesses may find adopting the number platform beneficial.

REMEMBER You also definitely need to get a website domain within China's ccTLD (country code Top Level Domain) of `.cn` (or `.com.cn`, if you can). You also need to host your site in China to avoid gateway issues.

If you're getting started in search marketing (PPC or SEO) in China, start with Google, through its interface. Although it's not the dominant search engine in China, it's a good place to start your

optimization campaign because Google China's rules are similar to its U.S. ones, and you can get your campaign up and running without having to jump too many hurdles.

The home page for Google China features a search box that drops down to offer a *guided search* (a search suggestion). Because the language has so many characters, the guided search helps users find information quickly.

Products that will help you understand your searchers and trends in the Chinese market are

- **Baidu Index:** The Baidu Index tool (index.baidu.com/) breaks down keyword-popular queries across all Baidu's products, including web, image, and video search and calculates how much user and media attention these terms are getting. This is a good way to do keyword research for up-and-coming trends and opportunities.
- **Drop-down keyword suggestions:** Because people in China often use *guided search* (in which the search engine makes suggestions based on your queries, much the same as Google Instant or Yahoo Suggests), search engine optimization is a little easier because search marketers know off the bat what queries searchers are using. Also, you can use Google China's Popular Searches function.

A site that might be worth checking out is Tom.com (www.tom.com), which is one of the top ten most popular websites in China (see Figure 2-2). This site features tons of links on the page without a search box above the fold. Users come here as a destination site, not to search. Larger View

Figure 2-2: Tom.com is among the top ten most popular sites in China

Baidu (www.baidu.com), China's top search engine and its answer to Google and Bing, has made accommodations for Western businesses in recent years, with packages for paid search, display advertising, and an engine-specific SEO program, among others. Baidu Advertising offers two tiers of PPC management plans ($500 each month for the Lite package and $900 a month for the Comprehensive program). Funds can be paid via PayPal or wire transfer, and English-speaking support for account setup and management is now available. Find out all about these offerings at the English-language site https://www.baiduadvertising.com/.

Analytics-wise, Baidu and Yahoo provide no impression results. But Google Analytics is available in China. On Baidu, the paid listings are mixed in with the *organic* listings (search engine results that are not sponsored and which rank in a normal search of the index). *Long-tail search queries* (keywords, or search queries, made up of several words or a phrase) don't really exist in China because users don't do as many searches as Americans do. They rely more on guided search.

Here are some key observations on Baidu:

- It's the most popular search engine for lifestyle searches in China, but not for business. Google as well as China's second and third most popular search engines, Haosou (formerly known as 360; www.haosou.com/) and newcomer Sogou (www.sogou.com/), dominate searches in some verticals.
- Paid advertising campaigns overwhelmingly influence Baidu's results.
- Baidu has its greatest reach with young, lifestyle-centric searchers.
- Display advertising that charges by the page view, called CPM advertising (CPM stands for *cost per mille*, meaning cost per each thousand impressions), is most popular with Baidu.
- Baidu offers a unique (and expensive) product among the search engines — Baidu Brand Zone. A brand that purchases Baidu Brand Zone can have its logo and tailored content display whenever a brand's specified keywords are searched. It's expensive but draws a click-through rate of 50 percent. That's a big opportunity for brands with the budget to buy exposure in China.

Being a foreigner in China can be both a disadvantage and an advantage. Although people have the natural tendency to push back against the unfamiliar, in China, you have something of an advantage if you're an expert. When you come in to speak, if you have any kind of credentials, you're treated like a rock star. Additionally, by being a foreigner, you can get away with not knowing the customs at first. Be warned, however, that your grace period ends quickly, so be ready to adapt to Chinese culture.

The Chinese market has a few challenges that, although not unique to the country, are certainly worth knowing ahead of time:

- **Budgets for local companies are small.** If you're a search marketer, you have to deal with less capital than you might have expected.
- **Clients are very particular about their contacts in your business.** Have a point person who's extremely knowledgeable in the culture and can handle your business dealings in the local markets.

 TIP Business is very relationship-based in China. Good relationships are absolutely critical to success. You have to be introduced to the right people at the right places. Many Westerners underestimate exactly how important having good contacts is. This is true everywhere, but especially in China: It's about whom you know, how well you know them, and whom you work with.

Your employees make or break a deal in the long run. Most of the advertising in the Chinese market is branding, not trying to convert. If you do decide to tap into the Chinese market, make sure that you're willing to be flexible and do things its way.

When looking at hiring people abroad (and this includes all countries), be sure to check the following things:

- Check the credentials for the people you're meeting.
- Confirm that they're doing the work themselves, rather than outsourcing it.
- Establish goals and document them in contracts.
- Do periodic checks of the quality of the ads and the effectiveness of campaigns.

You should pick your teams based on their effectiveness. Offer incentives for employees to maintain loyalty. As with any business, a happy employee is an efficient and loyal employee. Pick your partners well and do a lot of research on their capabilities.

In China, Internet access via mobile devices is ubiquitous, with more than 85 percent of users connecting that way. The growth in search from smartphones is due to increased interest in the

Internet and the government's heavy investment in network construction to make high-speed connectivity available. Remember the differences between desktop and mobile searches in regard to searcher intent and behavior, as we discuss in Book I, Chapter 3.

What does all this mean to the outside world? You have a lot of opportunities to market to the Chinese if you do it on its terms and within its comfort level. The keys to succeeding in China are relationships, patience, diligence, and an open mind. People in China have become comfortable with e-commerce in a very short time, with most users connecting through their mobile devices on the go. Keep this in mind as you expand into the Chinese market.

Finding Out about South Korea

When we talk about Korea, we focus on South Korea. North Korea is an unknown and politically hostile environment for pretty much all marketers, so we ignore them entirely. You should, too.

South Korea has an incredible infrastructure — claiming the title of the fastest Internet in the world, with projects in place to make it even faster in the next five years! Much of South Korea's population (82.5 percent) is online and searching. In terms of design aesthetic, a very busy-looking page gives you an advantage in South Korea because the population tends to prefer that style (a lot of color and text) for professional sites, so a Korean page can look a little something like Figure 2-3. Because of this push for color and content, Google's clean designs do very poorly in South Korea.
Larger View

Figure 2-3: The typical Korean website uses a lot of images to engage users

Operating in South Korea is like operating in Japan and China in that South Koreans prefer face-to-face interaction, and your success is a matter of establishing trust and accessibility. Get a `.co.kr` domain for your Korean site, and get started optimizing.

You absolutely must work to attract local links. Work on making connections, gaining trust and links, and getting the local search engines to recognize those things. International links are fine, but local links carry more weight in the long run. Remember, relevancy is always key and local is more relevant than non-local.

Naver (www.naver.com) is South Korea's biggest search engine. It currently commands a 73 percent share of desktop searches in the country, and holds a slightly bigger piece of the mobile search pie at 76 percent. The other contenders are Google with 9 percent of mobile search and Daum (www.daum.net) with 14.3 percent of South Korean mobile web searches.

When Naver was first launched, its founders discovered a real dearth of pages in the Korean language on the Internet. So Naver decided to create content and databases, so that when you would search in Korean, you would be able to find quality content. Naver set up Knowledge Search in 2002, enabling Koreans to help each other in a type of real-time question-and-answer platform. On average, 44,000 questions are posted each day, with about 110,000 returned answers. The tool allows users to ask just about any question, such as requests for recipes or how to subscribe to international magazines via the Internet, and get answers from other users. This tool was used by Yahoo as the inspiration for Yahoo Answers.

Operating in Russia

We include Russia in the marketing for Asian strategy for reasons of geography as well as strategy. Expanding to the Russian market is a lot like expanding into the Chinese market. In order to have a fully successful venture, you're going to need a person on the ground in Russia.

This means that you need someone who not only knows the language and culture but also actually lives and works there, to provide you with a bricks-and-mortar foothold in the country. Having someone who is based in Russia can also help in dealing with any legal or local bureaucratic issues that could spring up.

About 59 percent of Russia's population is online, which is about 84.4 million people. The largest search engine in Russia is Yandex (www.yandex.com, shown in Figure 2-4).
Larger View

Figure 2-4: Yandex is Russia's primary search engine

Yandex was launched in 1997. The net income of the company in 2014 constituted $440 million USD. As for search engine market share, Yandex receives about 60 percent of searches in Russia, followed by Google at about 30 percent. One of Yandex's largest advantages is that it recognizes Russian inflection in search queries.

As with all the other countries we mention in this chapter, try to obtain a domain within the country's ccTLD and hire someone who lives and works in Russia to give you valuable credibility. You must do cultural research to pin down the right tone for your Russian audience.

Chapter 3: Staking a Claim in Europe

In This Chapter

- **Succeeding in the European Union**

- **Knowing the legal issues in the EU**
- **Working in the United Kingdom**
- **Discovering France**
- **Operating in Germany**
- **Understanding the Netherlands**

Across the pond from the United States lies the European Union (EU). The countries that belong to the EU are subject to certain laws and regulations, and all those countries are actually located within Europe itself.

Succeeding in the EU isn't as simple as copying and pasting your website into German or French and then hoping the traffic comes to you. You have to consider legal and cultural differences, along with the technical issues that come from running a website in another country. In this chapter, we talk about how to succeed in the European Union, some legal issues you should be aware of, and some specific facts about doing business in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the Netherlands that should give you a little more insight into the search markets in the European Union.

Succeeding in the European Union

You might think that getting started with the European Union would be pretty easy. It's actually not. For one thing, you have to remember that Europe comprises different countries with their own languages and customs, and their own markets for search engines. You can't create one website for the whole EU and then call it a day.

First, you need to figure out what countries you want to target. This is important in terms of tailoring your marketing campaign. Each country has its own language, culture, and social mores that you need to use when doing your keyword research. For example, in the United States, personal telephones are called *cell phones*, so when a user does a search, she most likely enters keywords such as [cellphone], [cell phone], [cellular phone], and the like. But in the United Kingdom, personal telephones are referred to as *mobiles*. So a U.K. user would, for the exact same product, use keywords like [mobile], [mobile telephone], and so on.

You also have to contend with the technical difficulties associated with obtaining and using a proper country code *top-level domain* (TLD; the letters that follow the final dot of any domain name, for example, `.com` or `.net`). A country-code top-level domain, or ccTLD, is a TLD that's specific to a certain country. The United States has `.us`, and the United Kingdom has `.uk`. Users within a specific country are much more likely to trust a website that's within their own country's ccTLD than one with a foreign ccTLD.

European users are also much more likely to trust a foreign website if it includes links to sites within their country, especially local links.

TIP You can also use the free SEMToolBar from Bruce Clay, Inc., to help with your international SEO. It includes tools that enable you to do a local search in the area you're targeting so that you can see search results as someone would see them in Germany, even if you're sitting pretty in Denver. The toolbar supports 20 different languages, including French and German, so it's useful for your entire team, no matter where its members are based. The search is rerouted, using a proxy through a local IP address, so the search engine thinks you are located in the country you are searching for.

Knowing the Legal Issues in the EU

As a marketer to the EU, you benefit somewhat from the fact that all the member countries have agreed on standardized trade policies. However, one thing we have to stress is that the European Union is made up of many different countries, each with its own languages and laws.

For example, France is constantly suing Google over *pay per click (PPC) ads* (paid advertising that appears in the search results, for which advertisers pay a fee every time a user clicks each ad). In the United States, you can bid on a trademarked keyword and win it if you put up enough money (and the keyword is relevant to your company). In France, this is not the case, and several lawsuits have arisen over this issue. All the high courts in France (the Court of Nanterre, the Court of Paris, and the Court of Appeals of Versailles) have found that bidding on a copyrighted trademark is a copyright infringement.

However, according to the Cour d'Appel de Paris, the French courts have no jurisdiction if the ads in question lead only to websites owned by companies established outside France and appear only on google.co.uk, google.de, and google.ca, but not google.fr (decision of June 6, 2007, *Google Inc. and Google France versus Axa et al*, CRI 2007, 155 ff). This means that if you have an ad for a trademarked keyword, you can use it as long as you are not a French company and it doesn't appear on the French version of Google.

Another fun legal issue comes to us from Belgium. Several Belgian newspapers sued Google News for displaying and storing their content. A company called Copiepresse claimed that Google violated Belgian law by keeping archived versions of stories in its search cache and using headlines and excerpts within the Google News service. Google claimed that its activities fell under "fair use" laws, but a Brussels court didn't agree.

TIP Because the legal system varies from country to country, you might want to hire a lawyer within the country you wish to be working in. You need someone who can help you with the ins and outs of that country's legal system.

Working within the United Kingdom

It's tempting to think that optimizing for the U.K. is going to be easy because you're at least working in the same language. "Aha!" you think, "The United Kingdom is a lot like America because English is the primary language of both." True — except that they're really not using the same language at all. English in the U.K. has a lot of spelling conventions that an American spell checker reads as misspelled (the "u" in words like *colour* and *favourable*, and an "s" rather than "z" in words like *customisation*, and so on). British English isn't exactly like American English, and you need to be well aware of that. There is no faster way to shoot down your credibility than forgetting cultural mores and language differences when working in another country.

It's not just spelling that's different. U.K. English often uses different words for everyday objects (a *cell phone* in the U.S. is called a *mobile* in the U.K., for instance) and different slang terms, and the same word can mean totally different things. These differences can be subtle, but they stick out like a sore thumb to a native. Blogs like Separated by a Common Language (http://separatedbyacommonlanguage.blogspot.com) are good resources for pinpointing the differences between British and American usage.

In the U.K., Google is the predominant search engine, even more so than in the United States, but here are some key differences:

- Google paid some outside agencies in the U.K. to bring people to AdWords (Google's PPC program), which created two types of PPC agencies in the U.K. — the *optimizers* (the ones that add value) and the *discounters* (agencies that rely on how much you can spend). Google has since stopped this practice.
- The U.K. has the Financial Services Authority (FSA), which is a body that regulates financial matters and financial companies like banks. Be aware that all it takes to cause you grief is an email to the FSA.
- In the U.K., people use different currencies because they are members of the EU, so you'll see euros and British pounds. Multi-currency transactions are difficult to manage and track.

When you use Google, you get two sets of search results. *Organic results* are the links that naturally match a user's search, and PPC results are the ads paid for by the advertising companies. When surveyed, more than 80 percent of U.K. respondents said that the organic

results offered the best results. Only 6 percent in 2007 and 4.66 percent in 2008 answered that the paid search results gave the best results.

So, how much do U.K. firms spend on search engine optimization? Nine percent of U.K. firms are spending more than £1 million annually on paid search ads. One in six U.K. companies spends more than £50,000 on search engine optimization.

Compared to Internet users globally, U.K. users are quite confident online. They're not scared to give their credit card information to a brand they recognize. They're also a little more search engine savvy than a typical American user.

Certain Internet issues are of concern to the U.K. public:
- The U.K. has concerns about child safety issues, especially when it comes to online predators. Many people want to adopt a U.S.-like Amber Alert system, where automatic calls are sent out looking for missing children.
- Social networking sites can create problems at work, undermining employee relationships through gossip and also as a recruitment issue. People in the U.K. use social networking sites as much as Americans do. Unfortunately, this can be a bit of a problem for companies doing research on potential employees and finding, say, evidence of a potential employee doing questionable things on a social networking profile.

You need to be aware of two laws when you expand into the U.K. market. The first is the *John Doe law*. The term comes from an 18th-century law. This particular law lets court proceedings go ahead even when the identity of the person is unknown. When it comes to online marketing, after someone has obtained a court order, a plaintiff can go to the *ISPs* (Internet service providers) or even the search engines to prevent the defendant from entering sensitive information on a blog or website.

The second law is known as the *Spartacus Order*. The person responsible for anonymous activities must come forward and make himself known to the court, or he could be found in contempt of court — a whole extra set of charges that the offending party may want to avoid. This means that if someone files suit against you, even if she doesn't know who you are (using the John Doe law), and you fail to come forward, you're actually in danger of contempt of court. For online activities, in which the person behind a website may be unknown and untrackable, this is another level of trouble.

Discovering France

In France, more than 44 million people are connected via the Internet. But the digital economy makes up only 6 percent of the GNP (gross national product) in France, as opposed to 14 percent in the United States. More than 37 percent of the population uses search engines several times a week, whereas almost 50 percent uses them several times a month. Most users between 45 and 54 say they don't look past the first page of results, and women are less likely to go to the second page than men.

The search engine market in France looks something like this: Google is the biggest with 87 percent, and then Bing with 3 percent, Yahoo with 3 percent, Voila (www.voila.fr, a French search engine, shown in Figure 3-1) at 2 percent, with the rest of the pack making up the remaining 5 percent.
Larger View

Figure 3-1: Voila is a French search engine

You have a couple of ways to use Google in France. You can use the French version of Google (www.google.fr) or you can use the English version (www.google.com) and ask for your results in French. Most people in France, not surprisingly, use the French version of Google. Many of the most visited sites within France are French-specific websites, such as Orange (www.orange.fr), Free (www.free.fr), PagesJaunes (www.pagesjaunes.fr), and Copains d'Avant (http://copainsdavant.linternaute.com). In 2008, French businesses planned to invest 29 percent of their resources in search marketing (22 percent was invested in 2007).

The most-searched subject categories in France aren't much different than in the U.S.: entertainment, computers, and business. French searchers look for entertainment more than the U.S. markets do, however. The top search terms include [YouTube], [*jeux*] (games), and [*meteo*] (weather). This can be useful to you in terms of figuring out which keywords you want to target while working in France; however, remember that France is very strict about copyrighted keywords. You cannot use a copyrighted keyword that you do not own in any way. Although U.S. legislators have split on the issue, in France, nearly every case has gone the copyright holder's way. Copyrighted keywords cannot be used in metadata or to trigger paid search ads.

Seasons differ between countries. In the Unites States, the Christmas season officially begins the Friday after Thanksgiving. In other countries, the Christmas season can begin even earlier because there's not another holiday in the way. Travel is also different in France (where people typically have five weeks of paid vacation), so holiday-related search words are in high use. You need to adjust your marketing strategy to take advantage of these differences.

Online social networks are booming in France, and the traffic is proportionately huge compared to the United States. Skyrock (http://fr.skyrock.com), a French social networking site that's a lot like MySpace, is the big social media site (see Figure 3-2), and Copains d'Avant (http://copainsdavant.linternaute.com) is like Classmates.com for France, popular for reconnecting with old schoolmates and friends.
Larger View

Figure 3-2: Skyrock is a popular social networking site for France

The French don't often use cell phones to conduct online searches. Fewer than 3 percent of mobile-phone users in France said they've used a phone to find information via search engines.

Here are some special French search engine issues you should keep in mind:

- You can submit your site's URL to most of the French search engines, but generally only if you have French-language content.
- If you put an accent on a word, it may change the meaning of the word. If you ignore accentuation, the French word for *diaper* is the same as for *making love*.
- Many French search engines analyze the word environment to determine the meaning of a word, even without accents, but results aren't perfect.

Operating in Germany

Germany is a country of 82.3 million people. Of that number, 65 million people (79 percent) are online. The equivalent of $49 billion was spent online by Germans in 2007. As of 2009, Germany's GDP (gross domestic product) per capita was about $40,670. It's a pretty healthy economy.

The search engine landscape in Germany looks a little like this: Google Deutschland (www.google.de) has 95 to 98 percent market share. Germans use Yahoo and Ask.com, too, but they almost never use Bing. If you're going to operate in Germany, it's probably best to concentrate on Google Deutschland.

Local search, which is a search that is specifically targeted to businesses within the searcher's local area, is almost nonexistent in Germany. It's still in the starting stages, but it is growing.

Germany has 11 million `.de` domains. If you're thinking about going into Germany, you need to get a `.de` domain. Don't use a *subdomain* (a dependent domain set up within the primary domain, such as de.classiccarcustomization.com); it will not have as much success as a country-specific top-level domain.

To obtain a `.de` web address, you need to have a branch of your company physically operating in Germany, which means you need a local contact. The server that will be hosting your `.de` website must also physically reside in Germany. Remember when we said that the rules are different for every country? This is a good example.

Credit cards are just becoming popular in Germany. Not a whole lot of purchases are made with credit cards. (Many Germans are leery of giving out personal information over the Internet.) So make sure that they have an alternative way to pay in Germany if you are running an *e-commerce* (online retail) business.

Germans are also known to spend a lot of time researching. This is something to keep in mind if you're running a *research site* (a website geared toward providing information), as opposed to an e-commerce site; you might do well in Germany.

If you're running an e-commerce site in Germany, here are some steps you can take to ensure that the process is as easy as possible for both you and your German users:

- State on your landing page that you can ship worldwide and make it clear that it's easy for you to do so. A *landing page* is the page where a user arrives on your website. (See Book II, Chapter 4, Book III, Chapter 3, and Book IV, Chapter 5 for more information on landing pages.)
- Have a German bank account so that transferring money for purchases is as easy and hassle-free as possible.
- Obtain a German phone number that people can call to request more information if they need to. This is why having a physical location in Germany really helps, and not just in terms of obtaining a `.de` ccTLD.

In the German social networking arena, local companies are very strong, much stronger than the U.S. companies such as Facebook or MySpace. Important German social networking sites include studiVZ (www.studivz.net), a networking site for students that's similar to Facebook. Another important social networking site is Yigg (www.yigg.de), as shown in Figure 3-3. Yigg, which is similar to the U.S.'s Digg (www.digg.com), allows German users to vote on a particular news story. The more popular a news story becomes, the more likely it is to appear on the front page of the site.

Larger View

Figure 3-3: Yigg is Germany's answer to U.S. social news networking sites such as Digg

The German language is much different than English. German has some common phrases, but for the most part, if you don't speak German, you're probably not going to understand it. German also has special characters that people in the U.S. aren't used to. You want to keep all this in mind when doing keyword research.

Understanding the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, about 88.6 percent of the population is online, which is the second-highest number of users online in the world and 11 percent more than the U.S. The Dutch also spend about $6 billion USD online, which makes them the fourth-largest market in Europe. Google commands 93 percent of the market.

When researching your keywords, be aware that Dutch is spoken by 15 million people in the Netherlands, which is the vast majority of the population. About 1 million speak Flemish, which refers to dialects of Dutch. Be aware that the paid search campaign you're running in one language won't work in the other. That being said, English is taught in all Dutch schools, and most of the population of the Netherlands is fluent in English.

Stemming (the difference between the ending of a word that makes it singular or plural) is one of the anomalies in the Dutch market. For example, a single tree in Dutch is *boom*, whereas more than one tree is *bomen*. This means for Dutch keywords, you would have to target both [boom] and [bomen]. As for all keyword research in languages not your own, we recommend that you employ someone who is fluent in your target language and preferably an actual resident of that country.

As for local search, the Netherlands has Marktplaats (www.marktplaats.nl; see Figure 3-4), which is its biggest online marketplace site. It's where a lot of the local search queries go.
Larger View

Figure 3-4: Marktplaats is Holland's online marketplace

Spam (sneaky or deceptive ways of fooling the search engines into giving a web page higher rankings) is unfortunately pretty common in the Netherlands. If some shady operator does a bit of no-frills spam and some aggressive link buying, he can rank pretty highly. People still do link farms too, so be wary when requesting links to your site. You can spot link farms a lot sooner than you could in the United States because only about 2 million Dutch websites exist.

REMEMBER Don't be tempted by those link farms, however. Remember that honesty is the best policy, and it's best to be operating aboveboard from the start. That way, when the Netherlands starts to clear out the spam in its search engines, you're in the clear and way ahead of the game.

Chapter 4: Getting Started in Latin America

In This Chapter

- **Succeeding in Latin America**
- **Using Google Search Console for geotargeting**
- **Making your website work in Mexico**
- **Operating in Brazil**
- **Discovering Argentina**

Latin America is an important stop on our search engine optimization (SEO) world tour. Latin America includes Mexico and both Central and South America. Keep in mind that, as with the Asian region (which we talk about in Chapter 2 of this minibook) and the European Union (discussed in Chapter 3 of this minibook), the Latin American region is made up of many different countries, all with different cultures, economies, and languages. Many countries in Latin America have Spanish as their dominant language, but not all. The biggest country in South America, Brazil, speaks Portuguese.

As always, you need to do research before you launch an online business in a particular country. Hiring someone with knowledge of the local language, customs, and legal ins and outs is also an invaluable asset to your company if you are looking to expand into the Latin American region. In this chapter, you find out a bit about operating in Latin America and discover some stats on a few countries in the area. Latin America is a pretty big place, so realize that we're giving you only a peek into the region.

Succeeding in Latin America

Latin America has a population that's hungry for everything the web has to offer. Latin American countries have more than 310 million Internet users, according to eMarketer. Although 51 percent of the population in Latin America is connected, Brazil alone makes up the bulk of the Internet population, housing one-third of Internet users. Latin America has the highest number of time spent online at 7.75 hours per day. These Internet users are highly mobile and social — 45 percent of users in the region connect to social networks on their mobile device, compared to the global average of 35.5 percent.

In 2013, 80 percent of Latin Americans said they shop online, with about a third of those users reporting that they shop on their phone and a quarter saying that they use a tablet. E-commerce sales in the region hit $70 billion in 2013. Latin American shoppers are comfortable paying with credit cards online, and the average employed Chilean is reported to have more than four credit cards!

REMEMBER In Latin America, language matters. Results differ by including accents or using the English- or Spanish-language versions of Google. When you're researching *keywords*, have someone who's from the country you're actually targeting help you, not just a generic Spanish speaker. The language has subtle variations based on both region and culture, and what might be a perfectly innocent word in one region might be an offensive slang term in another. For example, in Mexico, the term *cajeta* means a caramel dessert topping. In Colombia, it's slang for a bodybuilder, like "meathead" in English. In Costa Rica, it means a form of low-quality marijuana. But in Argentina, it refers to female private parts. Definitely *not* a mistake that you want to make! These are just some examples of regional differences. Obviously, you should take great care.

TIP If you are going to be translating your site into Spanish to target Latin American users, do have a way of getting your products to your customers! Learn from the mistakes of Best Buy Español. In November 2007, this leading North American retailer translated its site into Spanish

in order to target Spanish-speaking customers. Best Buy Español was then immediately *indexed* (included in a search engine's database of websites, which the search engines pull from when a user does a search) and got huge numbers of people visiting its sites. The problem was that it was showing up in the search engines in Spain and Latin America as well as in the United States, but Best Buy didn't have the ability to ship to those places! If you translate your website just for the U.S. Spanish-speaking population, be aware that you will probably draw traffic from these other countries. If you do, have a way to ship to them! Nothing is wrong with people wanting to buy things from you. Just make sure that you can provide what it is you are selling.

REMEMBER Also, do be aware that not all Latin American countries speak Spanish. Several countries, such as Brazil, use Brazilian Portuguese (distinct from that spoken in Portugal) as their primary language. Other countries still have a large native population that speaks their own diverse languages and dialects. Argentina, for instance, has a large German-speaking population and a large English-speaking population as well. This is something to look for when you do your research and to keep in mind when you target your keywords and create a version of your site to run in those countries.

As with expanding into any foreign market, hiring a legal expert who works in the country or region you are targeting is best. That expert helps you work out any legal issues, commerce headaches, or trade and tariff rules that you need to understand to do business in that country.

Geotargeting with Google Search Console

Google's Search Console is designed to help you build your site, but the package also has an option that allows you to associate a website with a particular country in order to enhance that website's presence in the particular country's local search results. (A *local search* is a search geared specifically toward a user's physical address, usually via the location of the server he's using.)

In geotargeting, Google looks at a couple of signals to determine where a site is located or what particular region it belongs to:
- The server location of the website.
- The top-level domain (TLD). A *domain* is the root part of a website address, such as wiley.com. The *TLD* is the part that identifies where the website is registered on the World Wide Web, marked by `.com, .net`, and so on. In the case of international domains, the TLDs (known as country code TLDs or *ccTLDs*, for short) identify the country where the domain was registered, such as `.us, .uk, .co.jp`, and so forth.

By using Google Search Console, you can do geotargeting even if your site is hosted in Colorado. If your website aims specifically for business in Argentina, you can use the tools to have your site appear in local searches for Argentina by setting it to that country in the Tools.

For more information on geotargeting by using Google Webmaster Central, go to the Google Search Console site at www.google.com/webmasters/tools.

Working in Mexico

Mexico has approximately 50 million Internet users, meaning more than 41 percent of the country is online, and the demand for broadband Internet services is increasing. Mexico ranks twelfth in the world in terms of personal computer Internet access via high-speed fixed Internet subscriptions. These fast connections enable residents to do online searches much more effectively. Telmex is de facto the only company that provides DSL connectivity in Mexico. The government used to own Telmex and had a complete monopoly. Although the company is now privately owned, it still has near-total control.

Mexico is a signing member of 12 separate trade treaties, the most important being the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA is a trilateral trade bloc between Canada, the

United States, and Mexico. This means that these three countries have agreed to eliminate tariffs, quotas, and preferences on most goods and services between them. Whatever your political views on NAFTA, it does make commerce between the United States and Mexico slightly easier if you are looking to create an e-commerce site that targets Mexico, as opposed to other Latin American countries.

As for the search engines, Google and Yahoo have versions for Mexican users: www.google.com.mx and https://espanol.yahoo.com. In fact, Google has a version for almost every Latin American country, including www.google.com.ar (Argentina), www.google.com.co (Colombia), www.google.com.pe (Peru), www.google.com.ec (Ecuador), www.google.cl (Chile), and so on.

WARNING! For keyword research, add someone to your staff who both speaks Spanish and is actually from Mexico. This person can help you translate your website, pointing out cultural differences that a simple translator tool might miss and helping you effectively target your market.

You might also want to dip a toe into the YouTube (www.youtube.com) pool. Mexico and Brazil are the biggest consumers of YouTube in the world, and you have plenty of opportunity to connect with your users there. YouTube Mexico (http://mx.youtube.com) serves videos targeted at the Spanish-speaking market (see Figure 4-1).
Larger View
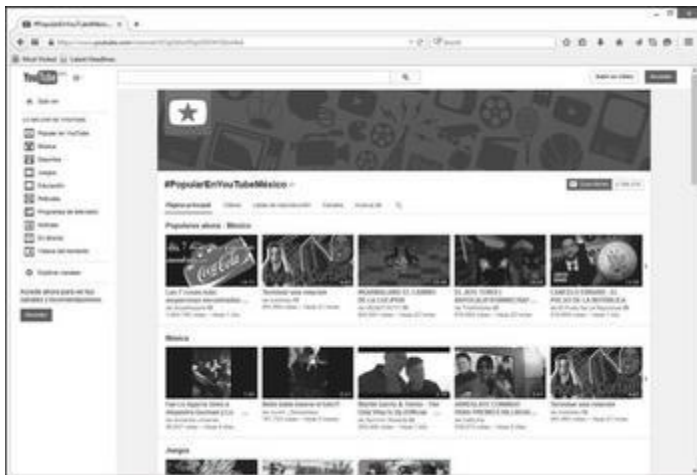
Figure 4-1: Mexico and Brazil are the biggest consumers of YouTube in the world

TIP To take advantage of YouTube's popularity to help promote your website, upload a few Spanish-language videos on YouTube Mexico, providing links back to your own site in the sidebar, and see where this takes you. YouTube can be a very effective tool in marketing your brand and reaching a completely new audience.

Operating in Brazil

Brazil has the largest Internet population of any country in Latin America, with a total of 113 million users at last count. Brazil is a country of about 200 million people, meaning that 56 percent of Brazil's population is online. In recent years, the increase in fixed telephone lines, cell phones, broadband access, and economic stability has afforded more Brazilians the opportunity to get online. In fact, the user growth from 2000 to 2013 was 2,095 percent. That's not a typo; it really does say that the growth exceeded two thousand percent.

A majority of the upper and middle classes in Brazil regularly use the Internet. Of the 56 percent of the population online, a large number of those people have purchasing power.

The Brazilian Internet Steering Committee has an online survey about Internet usage in Brazil. The site is available at http://cetic.br/publicacoes, in both English and Portuguese; however, survey data is provided only in Portuguese. Considering that you'll have a Portuguese speaker on your team to help you with language and marketing, you can make use of useful survey information like this when you're starting to figure out your keywords.

Brazil is one of the nine countries in which Google has launched a local version of YouTube. As we mention in the preceding section, uploading a few videos to this video-sharing site that include links back to your web pages can get you attention and bring you more traffic.

Facebook is the most popular social media site in Brazil, and the country tops the social network's list of highest active number of users. Brazil has 70 million active Facebook users, and as you know, using social media helps you be where your potential customers are, develop relationships, and promote brand awareness for your site. Search engine–wise, Google is the most popular.

Here are some other things to keep in mind while operating in Brazil:
- Don't just translate your ads into Portuguese. Take into account localisms and slang.
- Provide multiple payment systems, using both credit cards and Boleto, a local bank-invoicing system.
- If you're running an e-commerce site, be aware of the high taxes and duties that Brazil requires. Hire someone well-versed in Brazilian-commerce legal issues to help you out.