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[145 0](#)

### 2013 Search Engine Ranking Factors

July 9th, 2013 - Posted by [Matt Peters](#) to [Analytics](#)

Yesterday at MozCon, I presented the results from Moz's Ranking Factors 2013 study. In this post I will highlight the key takeaways, and we will follow it up with a full report and data set sometime later this summer.

## Overview

Every two years, Moz runs a Ranking Factors study to determine which attributes of pages and sites have the *strongest association with ranking highly in Google*. The study consists of two parts: a survey of professional SEOs and a large correlation study.

We'll dive into the data in a minute, but some of the key findings include:

1. Page Authority correlates higher than any other metric we measured.
2. Social signals, especially Google +1s and Facebook shares are highly correlated.
3. Despite Penguin, anchor text correlations remain as strong as ever.
4. New correlations were measured for schema.org and structured data usage.
5. More data was collected on external links, keywords, and exact match domains.

## Survey

Cyrus Shepard and Matt Brown organized this year's survey of 120 SEOs. In a few weeks, we'll release the full survey data. For now, thank you to everyone who participated! This wouldn't have been possible without your help, and we appreciate the time and effort you put in to answering the questions.



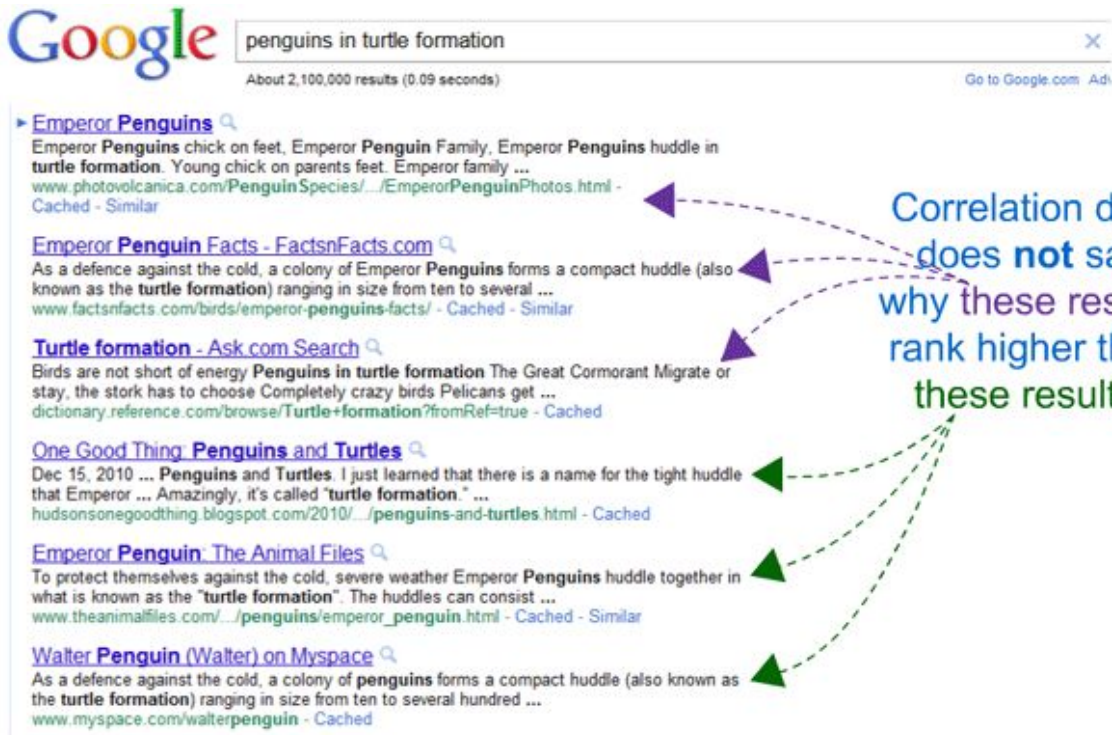
The survey asked respondents to rate many different factors on a scale of 1-10 according to how important they thought they were in Google's ranking algorithm. We present the average score across all responses. The highest-rated factors in our survey had average scores of 7-8 with less-important factors generally ranging from 4-6.

## Correlations

To compute the correlations, we followed the same process as in 2011. We started with a large set of keywords from Google AdWords (14,000+ this year) that spanned a wide range of search volumes across all topic categories. Then, we collected the top 50 organic search results from Google-US in a depersonalized way. All SERPs were collected in early June, after the Penguin 2.0 update.

For each search result, we extracted all the factors we wanted to analyze and finally computed the mean Spearman correlation across the entire data set. Except for some of the details that I will discuss below, this is the same general process that both [Searchmetrics](#) and [Netmark](#) recently used in their excellent studies. Jerry Feng and Mike O'Leary on the Data Science team at Moz worked hard to extract many of these features (thank you!):

When interpreting the correlation results, it is important to remember that correlation does not prove causation.



Correlation tells us what features, on average, the higher (purple) results have that the lower (green) results do not.

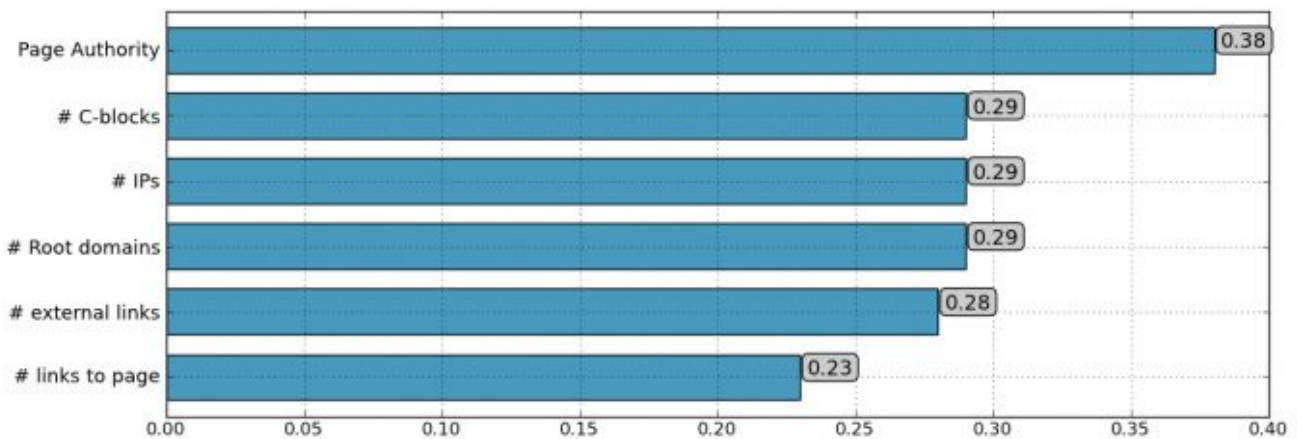
Just because higher ranking pages have a given feature and lower ranking pages lack it does not mean that feature is necessarily used in Google's ranking algorithm.

Rand has a [nice blog post](#) explaining the importance of this type of analysis and how to interpret these studies. As we review the results below, I will call out the places with a high correlation that may not indicate causation.

## Enough of the boring methodology, I want the data!

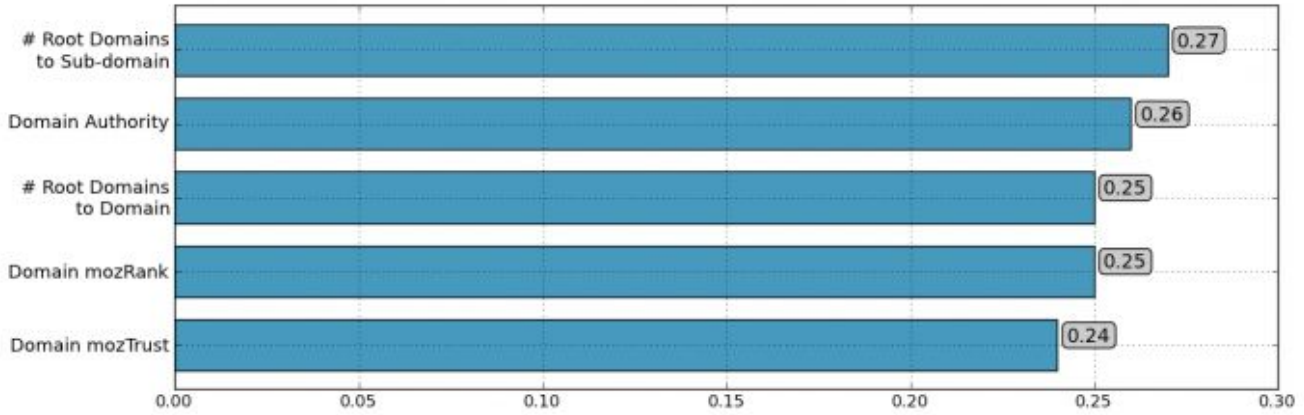
Here's the first set, Mozscape link correlations:

Correlations: Page level



Correlations: Domain level

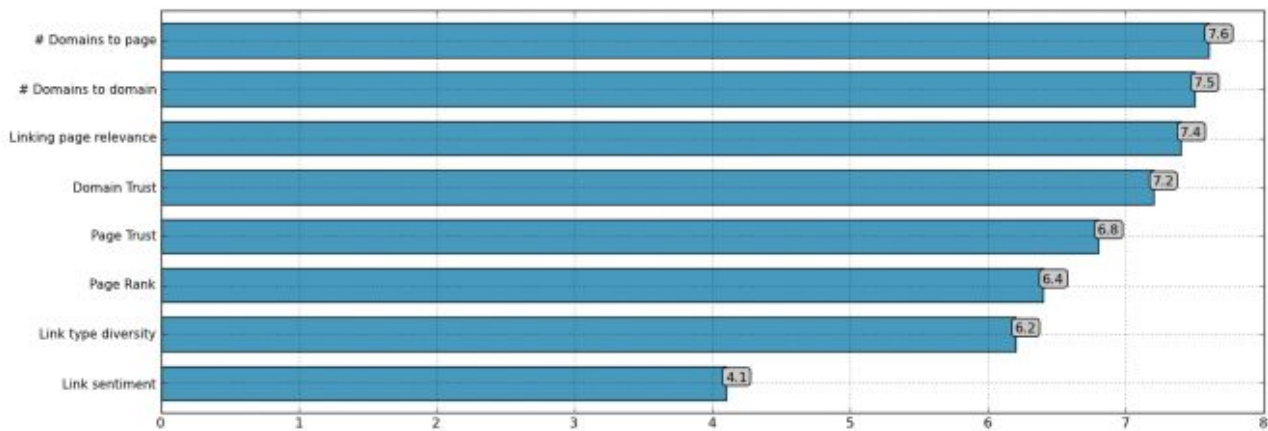




[Page Authority](#) is a machine learning model inside our Mozscape index that predicts ranking ability from links and it is the highest correlated factor in our study. As in 2011, metrics that capture the diversity of link sources (C-blocks, IPs, domains) also have high correlations. At the domain/sub-domain level, sub-domain correlations are larger than domain correlations.

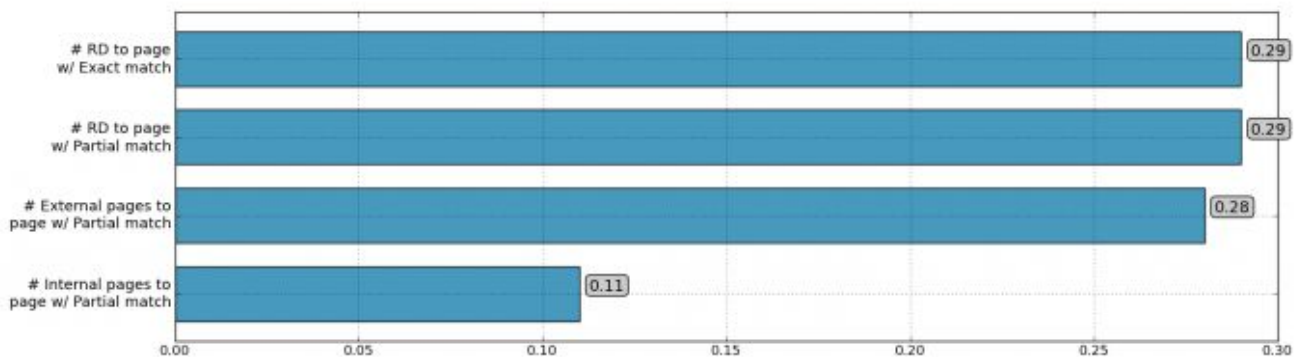
In the survey, SEOs also thought links were very important:

### Survey: Links

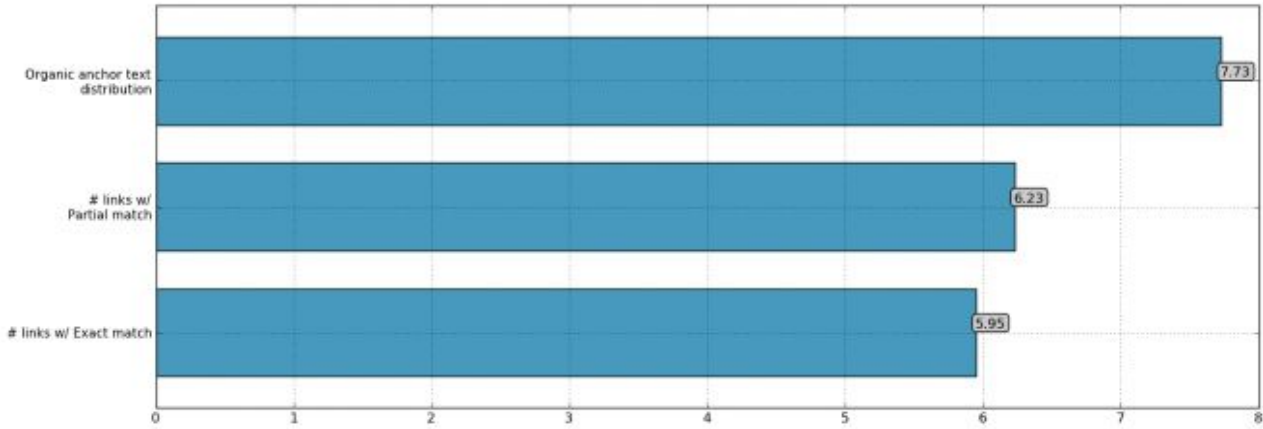


### Anchor text

Over the past two years, we've seen Google crack down on over-optimized anchor text. Despite this, anchor text correlations for both *partial* and *exact match* were also quite large in our data set:



Interestingly, the surveyed SEOs thought that an organic anchor text distribution (a good mix of branded and non-branded) is more important than the number of links:



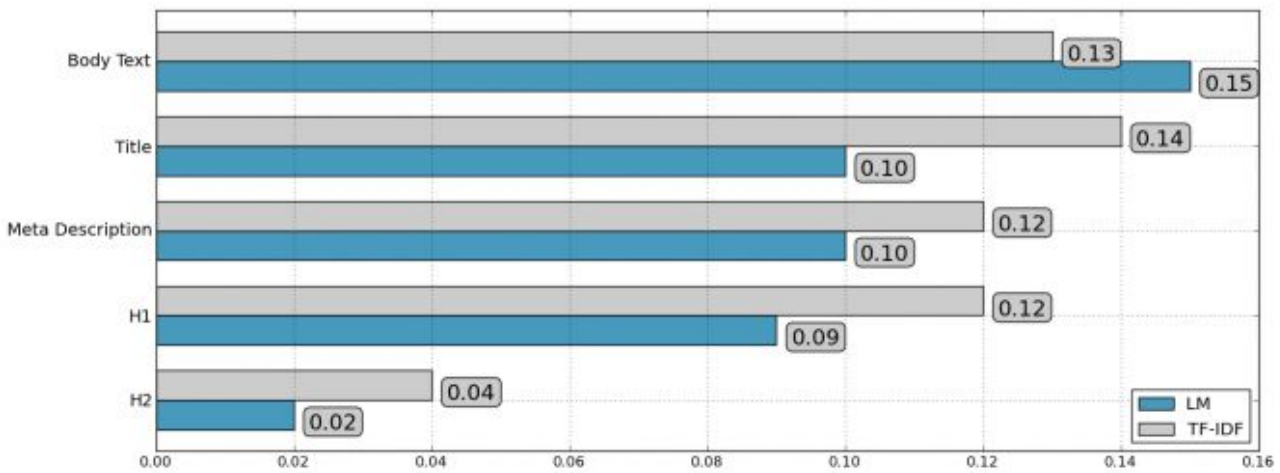
The anchor text correlations are one of the most significant differences between our results and the Searchmetrics study. We aren't sure exactly why this is the case, but suspect it is because we included navigational queries while Searchmetrics removed them from its data. Many navigational queries are branded, and will organically have a lot of anchor text matching branded search terms, so this may account for the difference.

### On-page

Are keywords still important on-page?

We measured the relationship between the keyword and the document both with the TF-IDF score and the language model score and found that the title tag, the body of the HTML, the meta description and the H1 tags all had relatively high correlation:

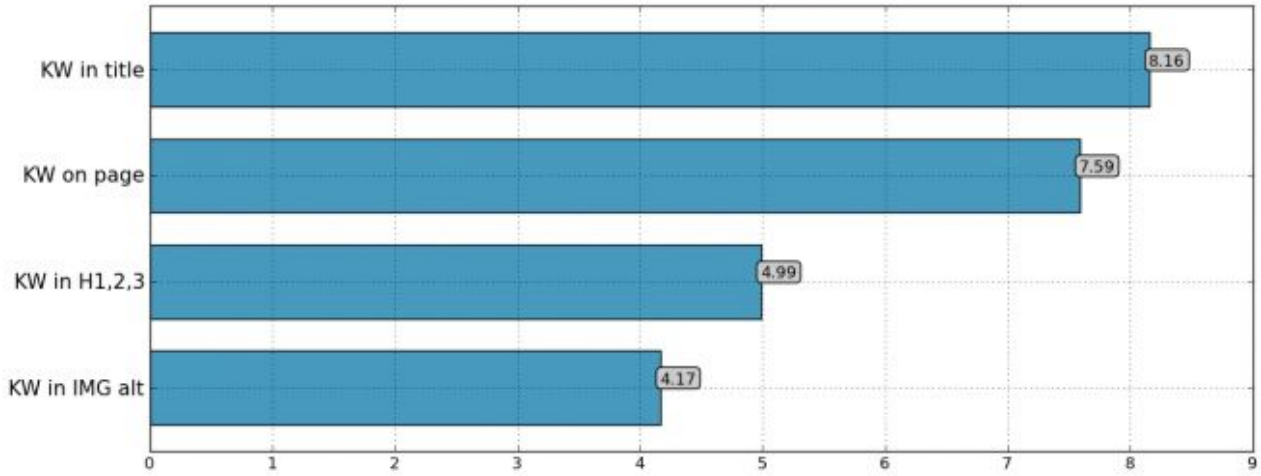
#### Correlations: On-page



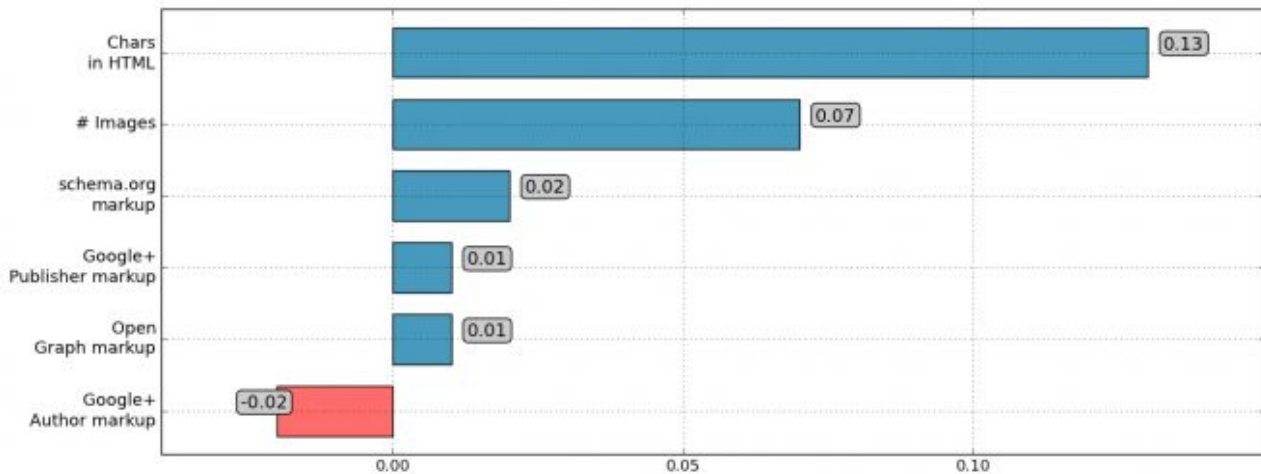
See my blog post on [relevance vs. ranking](#) for a deep dive into these numbers (but note that this earlier post uses a older version of the data, so the correlation numbers are slightly different).

SEOs also agreed that the keyword in the title and on the page were important factors:

#### Survey: On-page

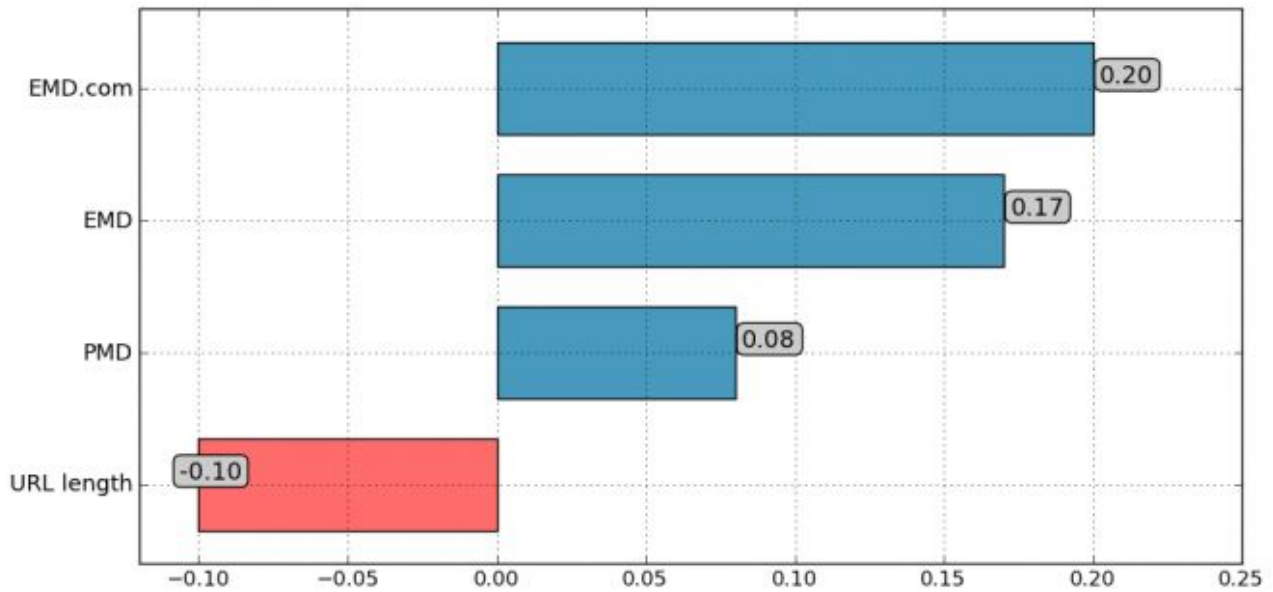


We also computed some additional on-page correlations to check whether structured markup (schema.org or Google+ author/publisher) had any relationship to rankings. All of these correlations are *close to zero*, so we conclude that they are not used as ranking signals (yet!).

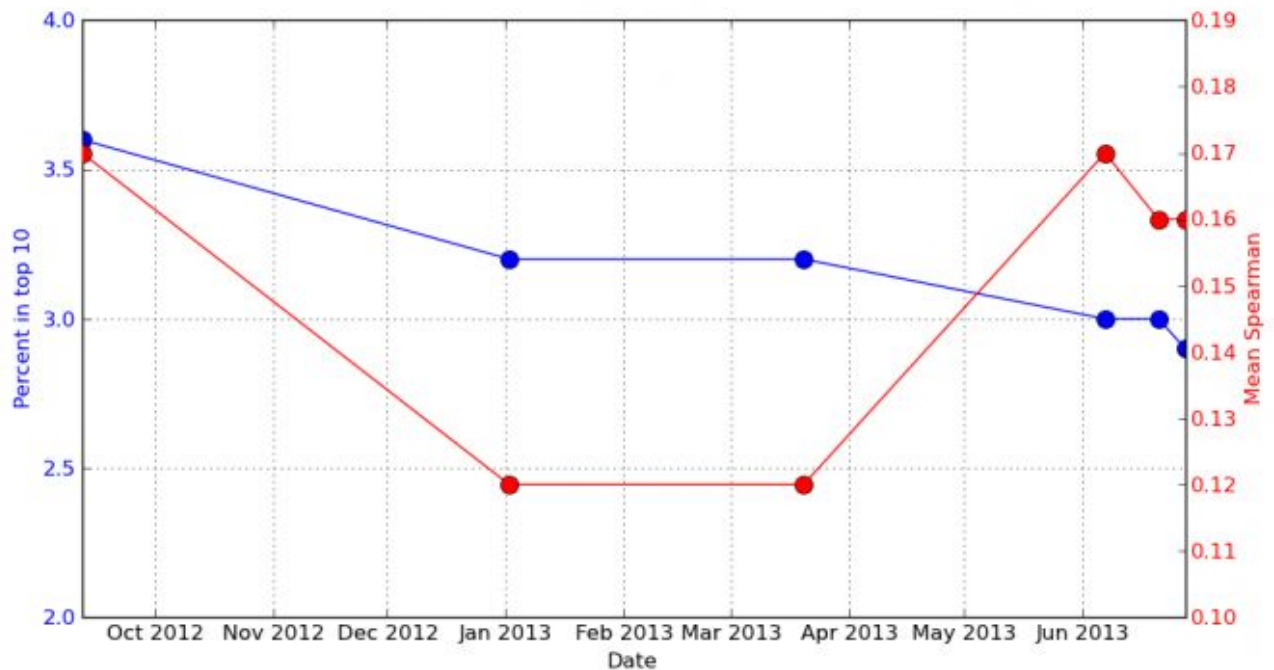


## Exact/partial match domain

The ranking ability of exact and partial match domains (EMD/PMD) has been heavily debated by SEOs recently, and it appears Google is still adjusting their ranking ability (e.g. [this recent post by Dr. Pete](#)). In our data collected in early June (before the June 25 update), we found EMD correlations to be *relatively high* at 0.17 (0.20 if the EMD is also a dot-com), just about on par with the value from our 2011 study:



This was surprising, given the MozCast data that shows EMD percentage is decreasing, so we decided to dig in. Indeed, we do see that the EMD percent has decreased over the last year or so (blue line):

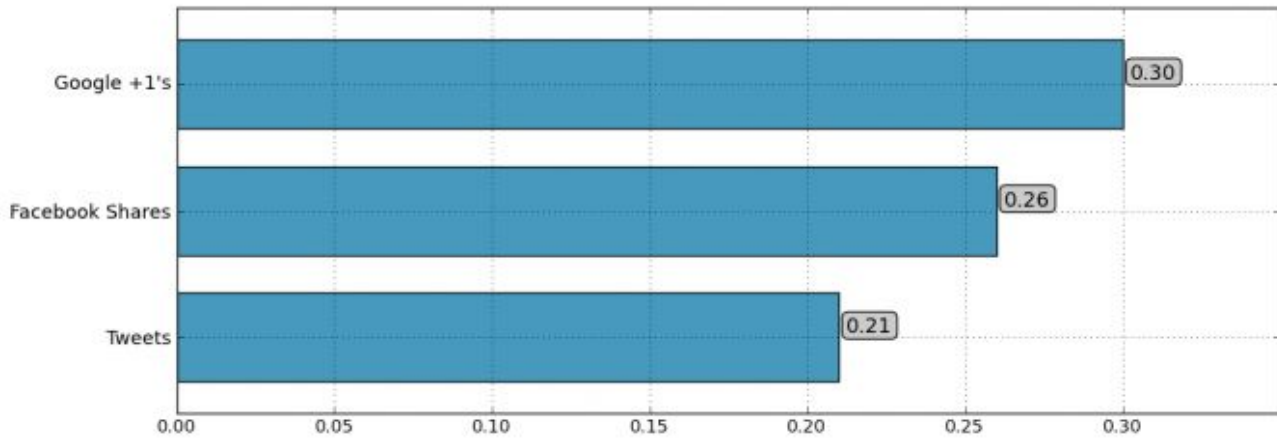


However, we see a see-saw pattern in the EMD correlations (red line) where they decreased last fall, then rose back again in the last few months. We attribute the decrease last fall to Google's EMD update ([as announced by Matt Cutts](#)). The increase in correlations between March and June says that the EMDs that are still present are ranking higher overall in the SERPs, even though they are less prevalent. Could this be Google removing lower quality EMDs?

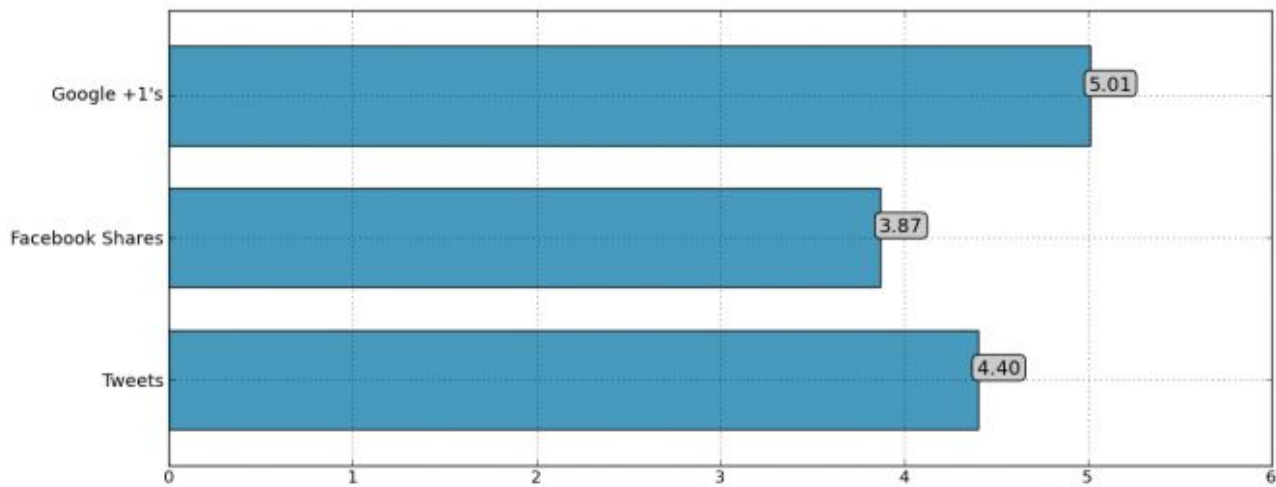
Netmark recently calculated a correlation of 0.43 for EMD, and it was the highest overall correlation in their data set. This is a major difference from our value of 0.17. However, they used the [rank-biserial correlation](#) instead of the [Spearman correlation](#) for EMD, arguing that it is more appropriate to use for binary values (if they use the Spearman correlation they get 0.15 for the EMD correlation). They are right, the rank-biserial correlation is preferred over Spearman in this case. However, since the rank-biserial is just the [Pearson correlation](#) between the variables, we feel it's a bit of an apples-to-oranges comparison to present both Spearman and rank-biserial side by side. Instead, we use Spearman for all factors.

## Social

As in 2011, social signals were some of our *highest correlated factors*, with Google+ edging out Facebook and Twitter:



SEOs, on the other hand, do not think that social signals are very important in the overall algorithm:



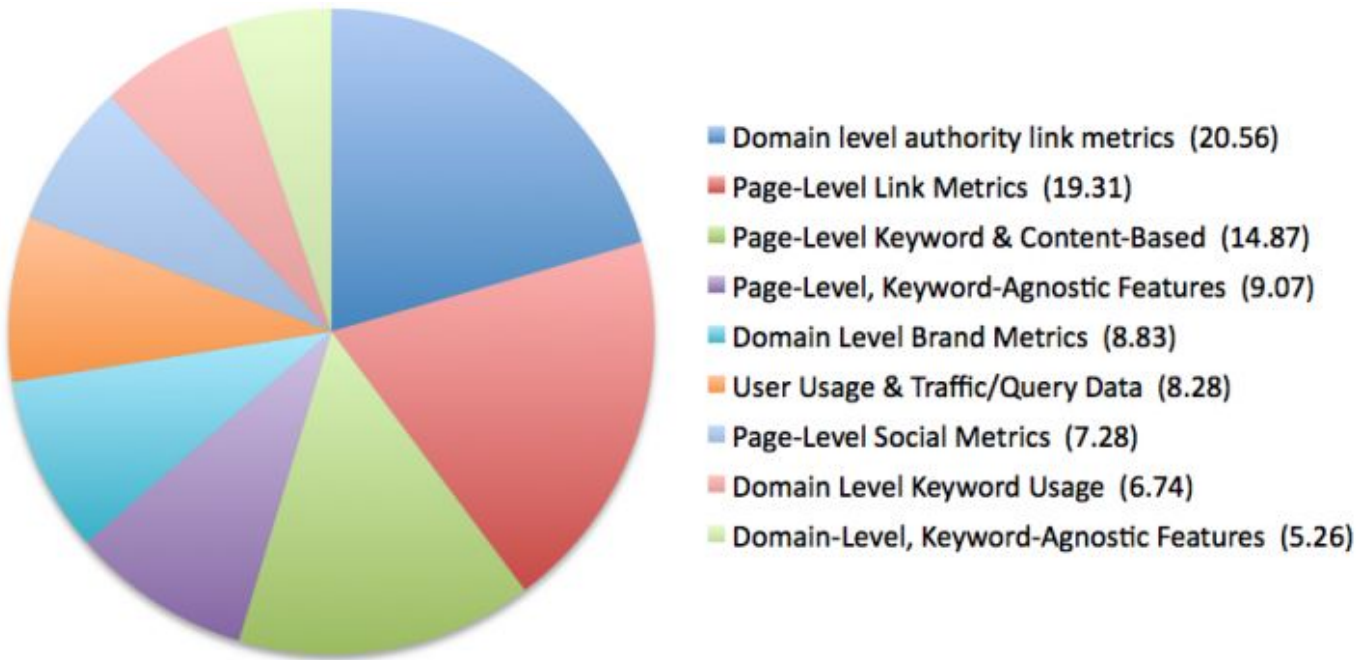
This is one of those places where the correlation may be explainable by other factors such as links, and there may not be direct causation.

Back in 2011, after we released our initial social results, I showed how [Facebook correlations could be explained mostly by links](#). We expect Google to crawl their own Google+ content, and links on Google+ are followed so they pass link juice. Google also crawls and indexes the public pages on Facebook and Twitter.

## Takeaways and the future of search

According to our survey respondents, here is how Google's overall algorithm breaks down:

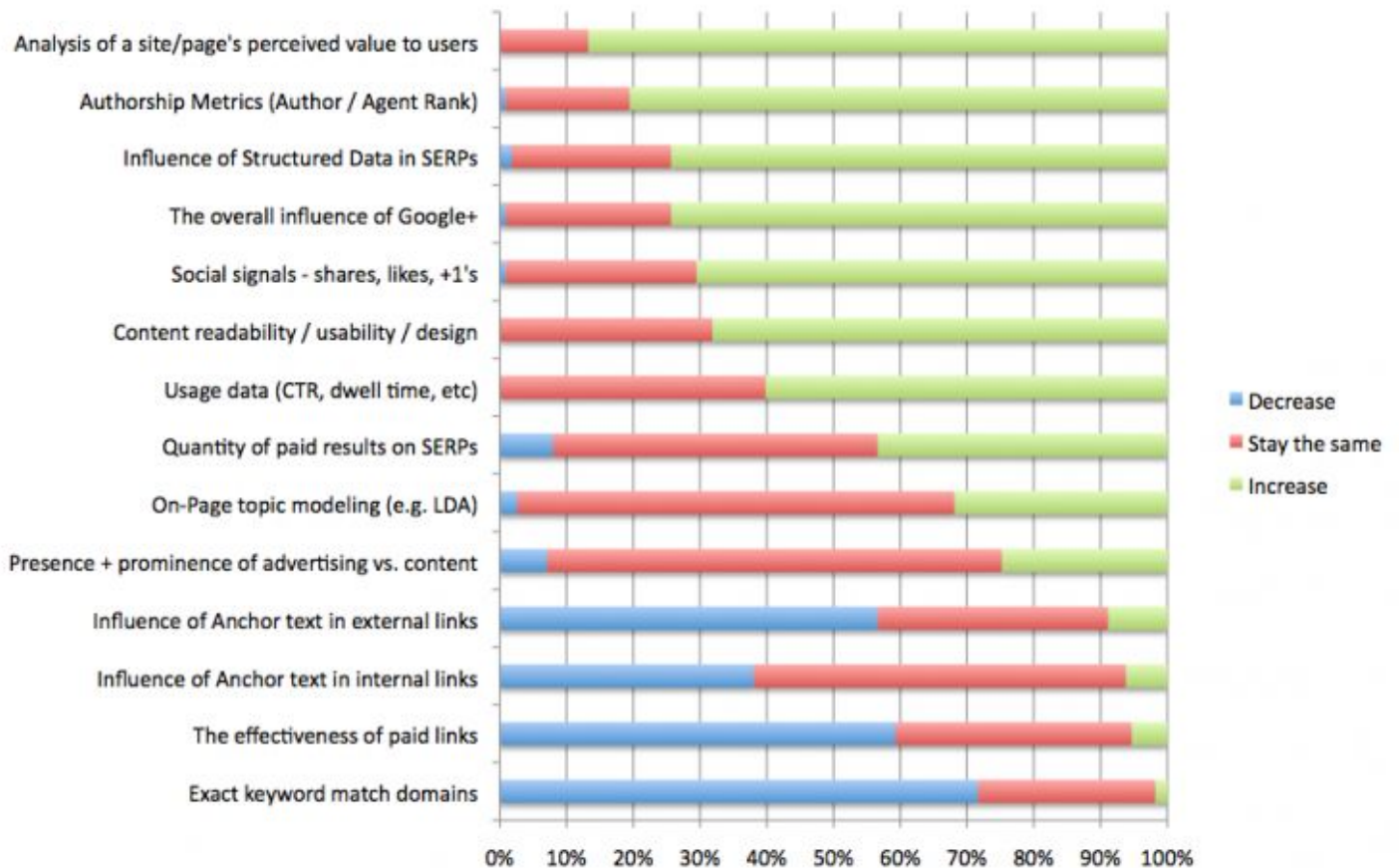




We see:

1. Links are still believed to be the most important part of the algorithm (approximately 40%).
2. Keyword usage on the page is still fundamental, and other than links is thought to be the most important type of factor.
3. SEOs do not think social factors are important in the 2013 algorithm (only 7%), *in contrast to the high correlations.*

Looking into the future, SEOs see a shift away from traditional ranking factors (anchor text, exact match domains, etc.) to deeper analysis of a site's perceived value to users, authorship, structured data, and social signals:



Finally, my MozCon slides contain some more details and data:



## Hot Off the Press: 2013 Ranl

Matthew Peters, Ph.D.  
Data Scientist, Moz

<< >>

#MozCon @mattheman

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### Visits Pageviews Avg. Time on Page Direct Traffic Search Traffic Referral Traffic

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### 106 Comments

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Member  
[10 days ago](#)  
[TomRoberts](#)

A thoroughly interesting read. Could you divulge as to how this study may differ from the Searchmetrics study that you referenced to?

The reason why I asked is that I read a brilliant post from Michael Martinez shortly after the release of the Searchmetrics study ([which you can read here](#)).

In that post, he explains in great detail how: "*Correlations are really only showing us what marketers do — they do not reveal what the search engines think are important.*"

I couldn't agree more with this status, which is why I am surprised to see this study labelled clearly as "ranking factors" - despite the relatively quick (and accurate) explanation that correlation does not equal causation.

One of the key differences between your study and Searchmetrics of course is that you openly reveal the source and the potential bias in how you aggregated data. Using the [Page Authority](#) factor shows the source, how its worked out and what its strengths and weaknesses are. Similarly, you have separated stuff pulled from your data set and opinions of SEOs, which again is great. That pulls up a great comparison of what we believe is good SEO practice and what appears to be still ranking (namely the anchor text variation here). I think that stuff is really valuable.

But is this accurate enough to be labelled as "ranking factors". Would "ranking correlation study" be more accurate - if a bit less exciting. And also, despite what your data set shows and what the expert opinions gave: can this study really show a correlation between factors like Google +1s and a search engine's preference for higher rankings - or is it strictly limited to showing us what **search engine marketers** have been doing with +1s, and cannot reveal the algorithm's weighting?

Sorry if any of that is negative, hopefully I was constructive. And as I said in the opening, I really enjoyed going through the data - thank you very much!

#### [Reply 15 0](#)

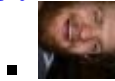


[10 days ago](#)  
[dkoblantz](#)

*"Page Authority is Moz's calculated metric for how well a given webpage is likely to rank in Google.com's search results."*

Should we be surprised at the result that a metric made up to correlate to some extent with a website's ability to rank correlates to some extent with a website's ability to rank?

#### [Reply 8 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)  
[joshuah](#)

Not surprising, perhaps, though it is interesting to note that the 2011 study gave 0.28 for Page Authority, and 2013 has 0.38, which may suggest that Moz has gotten better at their correlating!

But it also sounds like Page Authority is more focused on links as opposed to the other signals. ("*Page Authority a machine learning model inside our Mozscape index that predicts ranking ability **from links***") So might the increase also suggest that Google is returning more to link-based signals after going too far in other directions? Methinks I doth speculate too much...

Edited 10 days ago by joshuah

#### [Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)

### [Matt Peters](#)

Yup, Page Authority only includes link signals, and only keyword agnostic ones at that (it doesn't use any anchor text signals).

Moz has gotten better at correlating Page Authority over time, especially compared to two years ago. We (I) updated the Page Authority algorithm in the fall of 2011 which increased the correlation over the old model (see

<http://moz.com/blog/introducing-seomoz-updated-page-authority-and-domain-authority>).

The Mozscape index is also bigger and fresher then it was two years ago, both factors in increasing the correlation.

I should also say that we have seen these Page Authority correlations change a little over time. Specifically, Page Authority is sensitive to the overall weighting of page vs domain links. Last fall when the page correlations increased and the domain correlations decreased the PA correlation also decreased (see

<http://moz.com/blog/mozscape-correlation-analysis-google-algorithm-changes>). We have recently seen the opposite effect where domain/page correlations increased/decreased over the last few months with a corresponding increase in PA correlations.

### [Reply 1 0](#)



■

[10 days ago](#)

[Matt Peters](#)

No we shouldn't be surprised by this since that the intention behind Page Authority is to correlate well. We included it in the study to benchmark it against other factors.

### [Reply 2 0](#)



○

[10 days ago](#)

[Matt Peters](#)

Hi Tom,

Thanks for your comment and glad you enjoyed the data. We kept the name "Ranking Factors" mainly for historical reasons since Moz has run this study in similar form for several years now and we wanted to facilitate comparison to previous years. I agree 100% that the correlations don't reveal the algorithm's weighting or the inner workings, and that isn't the intent of the work. Instead, our intention with the correlations is to examine the extent to which these factors are associated with ranking highly, and to place them all on the same scale so we can compare them to each other.

Specifically regarding comparisons to the SearchMetrics study: our results should be generally comparable to theirs since we used similar methods, but there are some important differences. As I highlighted above, the keywords we used will introduce some important differences. In addition, since Google's algorithm is constantly changing, the specific dates the data was collected will impact the results. The number of results will also introduce some minor differences (in general, more results tends to increase the correlations).

### [Reply 5 0](#)



■

[a day ago](#)

[tomconner](#)

I take it you've run a panel data regression model to ascertain the statistical significance of each



variable, thus accounting for the omitted variable bias in your bivariate correlations?

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[9 days ago](#)  
[trainSEM](#)

I was concerned with the word "thought" - I don't know most of these SEOs, or more accurately, the industries they drew upon for their "thoughts". I have worked in hundreds of niches over ten years, but my recent experience is in 4-5 niches at best, but in depth. Different industries have experienced different behaviours in the algorithm.

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[7 days ago](#)  
[SolidGoldSEO](#)

Great breakdown guys and thanks for the insight!

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[21 hours ago](#)  
[Josh-Lee](#)

I think it is a valid question, though since we do not have precise algorithm information--and likely never have it--I think the correlative data is 'close enough'. "Close enough only counts in horse shoes and hand grenades," ... and Google algorithm analysis.

[Reply 1 0](#)



•

[10 days ago](#)  
[PaulMartin](#)

As I said in my comments on the survey; The responses were asked to be made on standard, non-personalised results.

However, the personalisation and the localisation of results influences the vast number of SERPs nowadays and so these survey results, while being an accurate reflection of standard SERPs, they *may* not actually be reflective of the SERPs that the majority of users interact with.

For example; I personally believe Google +1's currently have zero impact upon search results in regular SERPs. However for everyone that is signed in to a Google account, they have a massive implication.

The same goes for localisation. While links, content, keyword usage, etc are all vitally important in regular SERPs, if the user was on a mobile device, chances are that their SERP will be heavily influenced by locational factors.

Maybe next year's survey should be split into Regular SERPs, Mobile SERPs, Personalised SERPs etc. It would be tricky to quantify, mind...

[Reply 6 0](#)



o

[10 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

Excellent point Paul, and a great reminder that personalization and Google+ can have a huge impact on the search results. Good suggestion regarding different SERP types -- if we had a good way to collect a large amount of personalized SERPs we could run some correlations. Unfortunately I can't think of a way off hand...

[Reply 1 0](#)



Member

[10 days ago](#)  
[bobjones](#)

Can't wait for the full data release. Hope it'll have some poppin' infographics :)

[Reply 3 0](#)



Member

[10 days ago](#)  
[Nick Stamoulis](#)

I can only imagine that social shares, which would include Google+ and feed into author authority, is only going to become more and more important with time. I don't know if social signals will ever truly replace links but I do feel like they can help separate the "legitimate" online figures from the generic and the spam out there.

[Reply 2 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)  
[Ted Ives](#)

Great study as always, love it!

I still have a bit of an issue with including "Page Authority" in it.

Every other metric is a single factor you can measure. A machine-learning model proprietary to SEOMoz that essentially tries to mimic Google by taking into account page-specific factors...misses the point. The point of the study is to understand individual factors.

Page Authority is certainly helpful as a metric when evaluating pages, as in prioritizing outreach campaigns and so on, but it's not a ranking factor per se.

Technically, it is itself, a ranking...not a factor.

Kudos though regardless!

Edited 10 days ago by Ted Ives  
[Reply 2 0](#)



o

[10 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

Hi Ted,

Glad you enjoyed the study! I agree somewhat that including Page Authority is a bit of an apples-to-oranges comparison since it isn't a single metric. However, we wanted to benchmark it against all of the other factors so we included it in the study.

[Reply 1 0](#)



•

Member  
[10 days ago](#)  
[Chenzo](#)

Hell of a job Matt - very thorough

[Reply 2 0](#)



•

[7 days ago](#)  
[williamg](#)

Re: "Could this be Google removing lower quality EMDs?" Yes, but exact match domains will always rank higher if all other ranking factors are equal with regards to competing URLs. And the SEOs are wrong about the influence of social signals. They're not seeing the future. Excellent piece.

[Reply 2 0](#)



•

Member  
[10 days ago](#)  
[searchpl](#)

I thought this was the most enlightening revelation "SEOs do not think social factors are important in the 2013 algorithm (only 7%), *in contrast to the high correlations.*"

[Reply 2 0](#)



•

Member  
[10 days ago](#)  
[EGOL](#)

Seems to me that usage data is really off of the SEO radar.

[Reply 2 0](#)



• [10 days ago](#)  
[MyCouponsMark](#)

Good stuff.

It's very frustrating to see the anchor text correlation is still a major factor despite what Google has said. We have cleaned up thousands of old links from paid blog posts that used exact match anchor text. Unfortunately the majority of those keywords now rank lower than they did before we had the links removed or disavowed.

[Reply 2 0](#)



• [10 days ago](#)  
[sergio\\_redondo](#)

We finally have the new ranking factors! It's really curious the weakness of Twitter signals, although Rand has spoken about the great engagement of G+ a lot of times.

Furthermore, we can see how link related signals decrease vs. the rise of content related ones.

Great survey, great post.

[Reply 2 0](#)



• Member  
[8 days ago](#)  
[Thommas](#)

Amazing insights, probably the best SEO survey I've seen this year. Interesting to see that despite Penguin, anchor text and links are still the main ranking factor.

[Reply 1 0](#)



• Member  
[8 days ago](#)  
[KevinBudzynski](#)

Seems like high value is still on links/keywords and expect this to be the same for some time to come. Perceived value is increasing, so valuable/unique content matching user's intent will continue to be more important.

Can't wait to see the full report later this summer!

[Reply 1 0](#)





• [7 days ago](#)  
[VSIthinking](#)

Great post Matt, some really helpful details in here.

[Reply 1 0](#)



• [8 days ago](#)  
[Dubs](#)

A GREAT READ! Only testing will determine the actual factors and the weight of those metrics.

[Reply 1 0](#)



• Member  
[9 days ago](#)  
[SEO4Attorneys](#)

This is one of my favorite Moz Posts. It was concise and provided some good technical information without flooding me with infographics. It will be interesting how SEO plays out in the future, and how the ranking factors change.

[Reply 1 0](#)



• [9 days ago](#)  
[Arun.Singh](#)

Thanks for this outstanding post. Everything does make sense in a way. When you are a big reliable website, passing the ranking factors does seem OK but when you are a little reliable website, problems come. How a tiny fish can reach the surface of a tank with big sharks?

[Reply 1 0](#)



○ [9 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

By doing all the things the big companies do: build your brand, engage with your customers and audience and produce high quality sharable content.

[Reply 2 0](#)



• [9 days ago](#)

[nazre](#)

Matt@

you have done very valuable research to find out the roots but i just want to know one thing - as i am getting lots of Exact Match Domains on top at the Google Search on some highly competitive keywords, i just want to know about the fact of EMD Updates.

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[9 days ago](#)

[Matt Peters](#)

Keep an eye out for a upcoming post from Dr. Pete that revisits the EMD/PMD changes. I'd guess that these are still a moving target in Google's algorithm since these correlations are still changing frequently.

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[8 days ago](#)

[ProjectMayhem](#)

@Nazre & Matt,

Statistically, EMDs will always be an important factor in the algo because, by definition, EMDs are the input query and *must be accounted for in the output*. The machine (algo) takes the input (query), makes computations, and produces an output. Additionally, domain names are the single distinguishing characteristic for the algo to weigh in its calculations - a singular distinction that has meaning to users. Given that the queries are generally alpha (qualitative) data makes this even more unavoidable. Moreover, user feedback loop information will enhance this over time because humans have a confirmatory bias that compels them to 'click' on whatever they searched (inputted query). Google recognizes this based on the elevation of domain name prominence in the SERP snippet from testing over previous years (Google CPC testing).

[Reply 1 0](#)



•

Member

[9 days ago](#)

[goldenfs](#)

I love the slideshare way of viewing this page with the little comments at the bottom of each slide. It is easier to read and understand on the slideshare and it works really smooth. I am surprised to see markup having no correlation, but we all know it does help with improving Ctr, and I am sure it does effect ranking in an indirect way.

Moz I think it's time for a Google Plus post please since it did beat Twitter and Facebook. Lastly what I got from the anchor text study is that it is a good idea to continue with mixing it up for the future including some exact match, some branded and some relevant non specific anchor text in your content. SEO is certainly alive.

[Reply 1 0](#)



•

[AcademicAds](#)

[9 days ago](#)

[lornefade](#)

Its always interesting to see how the SEO industry weighs in on the most important ranking factors. The only way to combat big G is with big data, and the convergence of SEO firms sharing data is paramount to the future success of SEO efforts and strategy

[Reply 1 0](#)

• [9 days ago](#)  
[ddimitroff](#)

I can debate a lot about the power of social signals and CTR within the SERPs. I actually have a live proof of a website that has ranked in top 3 with just extremely high CTR within the SERPs and lots of brand searches... and zero backlinks :) It was mostly an outbound advert campaign that made the users go to google and search for the website and the products.

Still I'm eager to see the complete results!

[Reply 1 0](#)

• Member  
[9 days ago](#)  
[CDUBP](#)

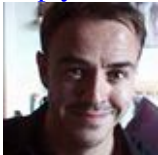
Thanks for the fresh data! As always amazing work!

[Reply 1 0](#)

• [8 days ago](#)  
[DannyDBSIT](#)

Local search is drastically improving, I believe most important factor are local listing strength and social activeness.

True, page authority plays an important role in SERPs.

[Reply 1 0](#)

• Member  
[6 days ago](#)  
[David E. Carey](#)

Really interesting survey this year, I recently checked on GWT and I can see 60 pages of my site are now listed by Google as using structured data. At this moment in time I think that's pretty good to see but am I seeing any real tangible impacts on adopting this for our site? - well not really. In fact I added structured data tags on our home page and tested it for 2 weeks, my home page dropped in the SERPs - arggh what have I done ! I removed the structured data and my home page reverted after a week to it's original position.

Note, I did this before the recent google update run! and other pages seem to be fine and serving my author/publisher details on pages against target keywords.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[3 days ago](#)  
[Vince Lin](#)

I think that most SEO'ers are wrong and therefore these ranking factors reflect the current mindset of the SEO industry rather than Google's actual algorithms.

[Reply 1 0](#)



Member  
[3 days ago](#)  
[Devonlad](#)

You might look to explain causality at some point. Correlations explain relationships between variables, how one variable is related to another but they don't explain causality. If I increase the number of backlinks, my website will improve rankings for x amount, this is a causality relationship so you have to be very clear on this and i believe that your report is very clear. However, causality is important and you might want to think the unthinkable and build a model that examines causality.

This type of modelling is very common in econometrics as economists try to identify what will happen to variable y if variable x changes. The understanding of econometric modelling is incredibly complex though with various factors such as the use of qualitative and quantitative variables, cross sectional and times series data and the influence of the stochastic error or white noise on the model. Algorithmic modelling can also be incorporated into an econometric model through techniques such as Principal Component Analysis to include variables in a causality model that are based on an algorithm. In essence, this is the holy grail of what Moz should be attempting to do, may be you should employ an econometrician or two to model your data, it would make a good PhD study!

[Reply 1 0](#)



Member  
[2 days ago](#)  
[blinkdigital](#)

Thanks for sharing all that data! Very thorough and insightful.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[2 days ago](#)  
[tobtol](#)

great survey + team work! thx!

[Reply 1 0](#)





• [10 hours ago](#)  
[ainhoa.julian](#)

Possibly the most serious and effective study of the ranking Factors affecting the ranking I've ever read. Congratulations to the author, and thank you very much for the research.

[Reply 1 0](#)



• [a day ago](#)  
[hetsshah84](#)

I believe Content should be come first and unique, then linking part and then how you promote naturally.

[Reply 1 0](#)



• [5 days ago](#)  
[DennisCasa](#)

I hate reading articles that are too long. Cause it bores me.

But, this one is very interesting.  
Ton's of helpful data. Thanks for sharing

[Reply 1 0](#)



• Member  
[5 days ago](#)  
[andykuiper](#)

Looking forward to the full data article - what an endeavour! - thanks everyone :-)

[Reply 1 0](#)



• Member  
[7 days ago](#)  
[LuigiM](#)

Very informative and concise post- thank you. I was however surprised about Google Authorship and social media not being perceived as strong ranking factors, but as someone already alluded to, the potential for spammy social activity is high.

I've always thought the line between social and search in terms of ranking is becoming more and more

fudged.

I was also surprised about markup, although agree that it does play a strong part in improving CTR. Just a thought (not saying it's right or wrong) - surely a website that encompasses various features such as schema and authorship shows that it is using the latest tools/attributes, and should therefore count towards something?

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[4 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

Yes I agree that sites that implement schema or authorship are likely also being careful about other things that impact the user experience. The interesting thing in our study is that even those don't have any noticeable correlations with rankings. That's not to say that the structured data doesn't have other benefits, e.g. expanded search snippets for authorship.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[7 days ago](#)  
[ShopletPromos](#)

Such a thorough study, thanks for the great work! Always helpful.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[9 days ago](#)  
[SMaria](#)

Thank. Very interesting and useful.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[6 days ago](#)  
[steefenhak](#)

Thanks Matt..... i love this info

[Reply 1 0](#)



[6 days ago](#)  
[rdvapors](#)

I agree that correlation does not equal causation. In my empirical study of my industry to find why I have lost my SERP but my PR has remained the same. I have found the following.

1. Traffic seems to play the number one role.
2. PR has no effect on SERP

3. Indexed pages play no important role
4. Domain age plays a the number 2 role.
5. Backlinks play no important role.
6. W3C validation plays no important role
7. Google Analytics plays no important role
8. Keyword in url plays no important role.
9. Social Signals plays no important role, other than sending traffic to the site.

The top 10 keywords for my industry were analyzed and the SERP was correlated with the top 10 sites ranking from #1 to #10. Using the data to support my findings of why I do not rank on first page on any of the top 10 keywords. I found that my site Red Dragon Vapors follows my suspicion of not having enough traffic and the domain age is under a year. However, using the data to correlate the findings of SEO Best Practice for Post Penguin and Panda, I find that I should rank in the top 5 for every keyword in my industry.

Summary: Domain age and Traffic seems to be the most important factor for ranking well in Google.

Edited 6 days ago by KeriMorgret

[Reply 10](#)



Member

[7 days ago](#)

[jarrettbyrom](#)

Hi Matt,

I was at Mozcon and enjoyed your talk on this immensely and always wait for this study and survey to come out but it helped to have you explain it live.

Two things I wonder though on the correlation study side,

The first is these all seem to be listed as one to one correlations which obviously they're not, it would be highly unlikely for someone on only to have an exact match domain and no other SEO tactics employed and show up on SERPS at a high percentage. So even though they are listed one by one, it is likely well into the high 90s of percentile of search results viewed were doing multiple SEO tactics you measured.

So, I wonder if there was an effort to group a few of these things together and see if that affected their correlation data any. For Example, if Pages had both a page title and meta description did their correlations go any higher than if someone just had one or the other. Or if they had all of the on-page elements was their a higher correlation for pages that did all on page elements versus pages that only did say page titles and meta descriptions but no EMD or H1 tags. I know designing a tool that let us do that ourselves would probably be an immense undertaking but would sure be cool.

The second thing I wonder about is when looking at things one by one. If there would be a way to get the percentage of items that showed up in the study. I believe you said you looked at 10k keyword serps to get your data and to make the math easy lets say you only looked at the first page on 10 result pages, I know how unlikely that is, but it makes the math easy at 100k total rankings. I think it would be highly helpful to know of that 100k how many and what percentage were missing meta descriptions, How many had multiple h1 tags, how many were exact or partial match domains, How many had social shares over/under a certain number. My guess is that was probably the raw data to make the correlation study and I think for some, myself included, those raw numbers would be more helpful.

I think you and Moz immensely for putting this all together.

[Reply 1 0](#)

o

[4 days ago](#)[Matt Peters](#)

Thanks for your comment and questions. It's great to hear you enjoyed MozCon this year, always my favorite event of the year. To answer your questions:

(1) We plan on doing something similar to this in the future, specifically about the relationship between links and social shares (and to try to explain the high correlations with social shares by links). Time permitting we'll also look at on page factors too.

(2) We'll do some type of reporting about coverage percents for the final report. We did that back in 2011 and agree it's valuable so plan to repeat it this year.

[Reply 1 0](#)

•

Member

[10 days ago](#)[ALLee](#)

That's really interesting that G+ authorship doesn't have any correlation with rankings. My assumption was always that social signals had correlation with rankings because websites with good social signals usually are more authoritative - not really because social affects SEO (in line with the survey results).

I would have guessed the same thing to happen with authorship, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

[Reply 1 0](#)

•

Member

[10 days ago](#)[Cobalt](#)

Interesting reads (and always good to confirm what you thought was happening.) For as much as Google+ is talked about, are there any suggestions for those of us with business listings stuck in the "old dashboard/new look" - I'd love to see more about the Google fail for business owners as we talk about the importance of Google+.

Edited 10 days ago by Cobalt

[Reply 1 0](#)

•

[10 days ago](#)[sadanandseo](#)

Thanks to the SEO survey team.

[Reply 1 0](#)



- [10 days ago](#)  
[BearCreekWeb](#)

Hi Matt,

I just love these types of studies. Exactly what SEOs who gobble up numbers and trends like to see: data. On the other hand, SEO is so organic and often times niche specific to different verticals. I notice often that there are many levels of trends, correlation, and seemingly, causation.

For example, I may be on top of the "SEO Ranking Correlations for 2013" and I may also be on top of the relevant causal trends for 2013, but it's my experience working with specific client verticals over time that gives me a much better idea of what is working specifically in that industry, with those sites.

The more general trends and Google updates may be apparent in these specific industry rankings, but there are other things of note that I only find by constantly monitoring and analyzing these specific keywords and verticals.

Thanks for all the work that went into this!

[Reply 1 0](#)



- [9 days ago](#)  
[Salik](#)

Hi Matt,

Every Year, I wait for this SEO Bible, thanks for your and Moz efforts in studying, analyzing and preparing the amazingly superb report. I just want to highlight one of the findings of this analysis, as you said, even after Penguin(1 and 2), Anchor text remains a strong correlated factor.. This is something which is a bit confusing for all of us, I believe that anchor text is still Google's first indicator of the relevance, even before crawlers follows a link and this is the reason why Anchor text is still correlated with the ranking. The second side of the coin, Ugly side rather, is that Anchor text can give two signals to Google, one which I already mentioned that is relevancy, second is the over optimization and(or) artificial link profile, and there is a very thin line between these two side of the coin, though, few studies have been conducted on anchor text distribution and 50-50 ratio of brand- money anchor text is a good ratio. What are your thoughts on that? Is there any Golden Ration which you will suggest?

Thanks

Salik

[Reply 1 0](#)



[9 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

I don't have any specific suggestions about anchor text other then keep it as close to natural, organic anchor text as you can.

[Reply 1 0](#)



Member

[10 days ago](#)

[Dragudza](#)

Well there is not so many changes all in all. We all need to stick with fundamental, pay some attention on social signals, and we and our clients will be fine.

But i am worry about personalisation. This is very unpredictable part, and there is no way (at list i don't know) how to find out how many % of people using personal results in the search?

If somebody has something on that part, will be helpfull to everybody.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)

[rfrank](#)

Thanks for the research and insights. Much to think about.

A question. In the last couple days, MOZ has had posts partially regarding the importance of bounce rates. Where do you see that fitting into this data. I'm not seeing it mentioned, at least directly, anywhere.

Fabulous report. Thanks for your work and insights.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)

[Matt Peters](#)

User signals are likely included in Google's algorithm. Unfortunately we don't have access to that data so we can't analyze it.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)

[Rameez-Ramzan](#)

If Authorship factor is not fruitful for us so why peoples are using this? and secondly social signal factor is also important in other search engines why not in Google?

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)

[joshuah](#)

I believe the general idea is that Authorship may not help you rank higher, but it may help you get



more clicks *at that ranking* that you would otherwise.

[Reply 2 0](#)



■

[10 days ago](#)  
[steviephil](#)

Yep, absolutely. It's great for click-through rate - it's possible for a lower result with authorship to get more clicks than a higher result without authorship simply because searchers' eye-lines are drawn to the former, especially if they recognise the person - a great example would be if you searched for something related to SEO and recognised someone from Moz attributed to a result, you might be more inclined to click it.

It's not been used for authorship, but a while back Dr Pete did a great eye-tracking study that showed that Google Places/Google+ Local got [a lot of attention](#)...

Regardless of whether or not it affects rankings at this stage, it should still be considered for the CTR/personal branding benefits.

Edited 10 days ago by steviephil

[Reply 1 0](#)



●

[10 days ago](#)  
[Praveen Sharma](#)

Awesome study Matt. As far as Social is concerned for me, I think it should not be taken so seriously as there are many business verticals with very limited (may be negligible to other sectors) social presence. So, there is hardly any chance social can influence rankings for such businesses.

Your study might show its strong influence, but it must be for limited verticals like technology, lifestyle, etc.

Edited 10 days ago by Praveen\_Sharma

[Reply 1 0](#)



○

[10 days ago](#)  
[Phil Gregory](#)

I have to disagree. Social has been around for some years now and it's still popular. I find more links on social these days than I do with a search engine. Google Facebook and Twitter are absolutely massive nowadays and I doubt very much that so many sites would seek integration with their API's if there wasn't some perceived value.

[Reply 2 0](#)



■

[10 days ago](#)  
[Praveen Sharma](#)

Hi Phil, I agree with you that many websites are going social on daily basis nowadays. But I was talking about certain sectors which hardly possess any social presence. Have you ever read something interesting related to auto parts manufacturers, or companies manufacturing hardware tools, etc? They might have profiles and pages on social networking sites, but this gives them only a kind of social presence, not any kind of influential engagement which can boost their rankings. And it's a fact that people on social networking sites even don't notice these sectors or

related content, forget about sharing, liking and doing +1s, etc.

[Reply 1 2](#)



o

[10 days ago](#)  
[PhilippM](#)

I agree with Phil, if there is a group with 10 competing Sites on a Keyword and only one of them is strong in Social (ceteris paribus), this one would rank better than the others imho. My thought is, that this is why strong social signals correlate with high rankings.

[Reply 1 1](#)



•

[10 days ago](#)  
[webfirefly](#)

Are social signals really so important?Is there already an offer like 1\$ for 10 shares?If not,it will be soon.Or:"Jamie tell your friends to share this link,they don't need to read article,just to share link" .Socials can be manipulated easily.

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[10 days ago](#)  
[PhilippM](#)

Spammy sharing usually gets penalized by the user. You dont see posts like "share and like to win" so often anymore. Would be interesting to know, if google can track traffic from shared posts to the facebook page or the shared link, in order to decide whether the content is interesting and trustworthy or not.

[Reply 1 0](#)



■

[10 days ago](#)  
[webfirefly](#)

Yes,would be nice to know what metrics they use to give weight to shared links.If I as total beginner can see possibilities of cheating with socials,search engines surely have seen that long ago.

If they want socials to become very important ranking factor,they surely work hard to find "perfect social algorithm".

But,you share link because you like that post (video,picture...),so is a matter of personal "taste".Can any algorithm measure that?Hmm,now I remember Google collect data about our searching behavior,interests for years.For commercials.Was commercials only reason?If socials become new search engines battlefield they have huge advantage. Yea,sounds like conspiracy theory.Still...

Anyway people change fields of interest and often add new,so possibilities of cheating remain.Wont be surprised if "share farms" will replace link farms.

-----  
Wrooong,i was wrong about everything.Probably becose i dont like socials.And becose i'm new to Seo.SE's can measure value of every share,and no cheating possible (or it will be veery hard

to cheat).Very similar to links.Look at this scenario:  
 Some guy share video about SEO,Google check hi's searching history and see that guy have started to search about SEO few days ago.He probably dont know much so his share have value 1-5 points.  
 Then i share some video about SEO.Google check searching history from my IP adress,i spend some time searching,not to long,but i may know something so my share is wort 20-30 point.  
 Then Rand share SEO video,oooo,he search a lot,spend lot of time on SEO article and all that for many years.He must be an expert.Hi's share is wort 1000 points.  
 then 10.000 guys who never show interest about SEO share same link.Very suspicious,99% probability of cheat.  
 O yea,there is very accurate way to measure value of shared links trough social sites.  
 Am i wrong again?Possible,it's no based on any data,just thinking "outside the box".  
 Best part of all this,i'm start thinking about SEO,not just reading.My first post have proven usefull for me.Think i'm continue posting on seomoz.

Edited 8 days ago by webfirefly

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)  
[cqburris](#)

This is very interesting stuff. Although Authorship doesn't seem to have much correlation as far as ranking goes (yet), we do know that Authorship does facilitate higher CTRs. One thing I'd be interested in seeing is the correlation of pages with external links pointing to it that don't have EM anchor text, but rather the anchor text is surrounded by the EM keyword - so links by association, if you will...

Another point I'd like to raise is about meta descriptions. We've been saying for awhile that meta descriptions really only help facilitate clicks rather than being a major ranking indicator. Google has been saying that they are focusing on user experience - well, for me, user experience starts in the results page.. if Google starts to notice a trend for a higher CTR on your listing, and the targeted keyword (showing up bold in the results) is notated over and over again, who's to say big G isn't tucking that data into their back pocket?

Then again, I'm just speculating... Thoughts?

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

Interesting thought about the meta description tag, definitely a possibility for good tags to be associated to positive user signals.

[Reply 1 0](#)



Member  
[10 days ago](#)  
[Rick-Noel](#)

Thanks for the write-up and slideshare sneak peek Matt. The Moz Ranking Factors Study is one of the most anticipated reads (for me anyway) every two years and in my view, the best content produced by Moz, which is saying a lot given the content published here each and every day. I very much look forward to the full report/data.

[Reply 1 0](#)

Member

[10 days ago](#)[mprvivo](#)

Fantastic article! Thanks

[Reply 1 0](#)[10 days ago](#)[amitad](#)

Although correlations are not cause-&-effect signals, they're all we have in order to understand what impacts what. By the way - SearchMetrics 2013 analysis also showed that social shares/likes/+1 have big correlation to good rankings.

[Reply 1 0](#)[10 days ago](#)[mrodriguez1440](#)

Hi,

What advice do you have for small business owners who provide a service rather than sell a product? I understand that Google +1 is important, but that seems to favor websites that sell products or blogs. What something like a law firm? Are people going to Google +1 a law firm's website? It just seems like Google's focus favors a particular type of business. What advice do you have, if any, for non-traditional businesses to increase their Google search result rankings?

Thanks!

Edited 9 days ago by KeriMorgret

[Reply 1 0](#)[9 days ago](#)[Matt Peters](#)

Good question! Unfortunately I don't have any specific advice since I'm not a practicing SEO. I'd suggest posting your question over on our Q&A forum for input from the broader community.

[Reply 1 0](#)[9 days ago](#)[David O'Donnell](#)

Regarding the anchor text distribution findings, what do you classify as navigational queries?

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[9 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

Navigational queries are those where a user knows the site they want to visit, but uses a search engine to find it. Queries like "facebook login" or "ibm homepage" are navigational. We didn't exclude any queries, navigational or otherwise, from our study.

[Reply 1 0](#)



■

[9 days ago](#)  
[David O'Donnell](#)

Thanks for clarifying Matt. I take it typing the url directly into the search box is considered navigational also?

[Reply 1 0](#)



■

[4 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

Yea, that would also be a navigational query.

[Reply 1 0](#)



●

Member  
[9 days ago](#)  
[xoffie](#)

Awesome

But interesting how this report is really only emphasising what has been held as common theory for quite some time now, there's nothing really new in here (at least in this entry) that i'd think "aha" too although I am pleased to see Page Rank and not domain rank being the key.

[Reply 1 0](#)



●

[10 days ago](#)  
[Azeem](#)

Thank you @Matt Peters. Actually I found something new in this post as I read previous post as well. Also thanks to @moz who twitted this post.

[Reply 1 0](#)



Member

[10 days ago](#)

[Netmark](#)

Awesome post Matt! I wish I was at Mozcon to participate the ensuing discussion. I loved the "Takeaways and the Future of Search" chart. Moz is truly the master of using science and statistics to formulate great marketing strategies.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)

[TommyTan](#)

Wondering why Google Authorship is not as important. It is a G product and it helps with the authority/trust factor. I would think that in the future, more of the Authorship will play a role in ranking.

[Reply 1 0](#)



Member

[10 days ago](#)

[Francisco Meza](#)

This post **NEEDS** to be re-shared by every Mozzer! This is a very important post. I even posted it on my personal Facebook page (I never share on my personal FB wall) telling my own friends to re-share to anyone who owns a website.

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)

[Ryan Passarelli](#)

This is an awesome study Matt...Thanks!

[Reply 1 0](#)



[10 days ago](#)

[PhilippM](#)

Good survey, looks like you would match the factors, that searchmetrics published. It would be nice, if you could comment on how traffic from backlinks and social platforms affect ranking.

[Reply 1 0](#)





o

[10 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

I agree that would be interesting to look at. Unfortunately we don't have access to the traffic data to analyze.

[Reply 2 0](#)



•

[10 days ago](#)  
[CumbriaRay](#)

Most surprising factor here I believe is that you don't think the authorship factor has really kicked in yet. I was quite surprised by the strength of anchor text in your data and the disparity between that and what the other SEO's thought. I need to read this a couple more times to take it all in, - before you publish the full data which could be pretty overwhelming. Has David M published his Local ranking Factors yet?

[Reply 1 0](#)



•

[10 days ago](#)  
[JNFerree](#)

Since social shares and social signals influence the SE results, would it be safe to presume that is a monster like Guy Kawasaki +1's your G+ card and shared it with his 3.x million fans, would this social signal have more impact on the SE results than if another plusser with only 27,000 fans shared your G+ card?

[Reply 1 1](#)



o

[10 days ago](#)  
[Matt Peters](#)

Perhaps -- from a link perspective if someone's Google+ profile has a lot of incoming links, then links that they share will pass more link juice than a page with less incoming links.

[Reply 1 0](#)



o

[9 days ago](#)  
[Search Office Space](#)

If Guy Kawasaki shared my G+ card with his millions of fans I would be less worried about how much my Serps ranking would increase and be happy with all that direct traffic increase I'd be getting.

[Reply 1 0](#)



•

[10 days ago](#)  
[cone34d](#)

Wow! This is right on. I really appreciate the research that you put into this. Numbers don't lie.

[Reply 1 1](#)



o [9 days ago](#)  
[dkoblantz](#)

I'd say that numbers frequently lie. Or, at the least, they often aren't telling you what you think they might be telling you

[Reply 1 0](#)



o [10 days ago](#)  
[Allf](#)

Very interesting! This really makes me think. Have a nice day!

[Reply 1 1](#)



o [10 days ago](#)  
[GodofSEO.Co](#)

So you're saying that the meta description has the same influence as the title? Sorry, but I don't think that's correct. I've managed to have a solid link profile on a domain I bought from a guy who went bankrupt, I edited the title and added a picture and a bit of coming soon text, was ranking top 3 pages, I change the title to the branded name but keep the keywords in the description and nuke to page 9...

[Reply 1 4](#)



o [10 days ago](#)  
[DigiMatt](#)

No he's saying it's correlation, the caveat throughout all is that this is not causation. What's likely is that the Title Tags that are optimised (by SEO's most likely) are on the websites that also contain meta descriptions vs. sites that aren't optimised.

Basically they're all very similar because they've been managed vs. the websites that haven't.

[Reply 2 0](#)



o [10 days ago](#)  
[GodofSEO.Co](#)

ah I see now, I guess i just didn't understand how he put it. I still don't think descriptions and titles have any form of correlation to be quite honest, they seem to be 2 completely different things whenever I try to rank a site with a meta description that is built to be optimized to the same title, it doesn't seem to have any effect.

[Reply 1 1](#)



o [10 days ago](#)

[SteveOllington](#)

It's why the post by Rand was linked (<http://moz.com/rand/what-do-correlation-metrics-really-tell-us-about-search-rankings/>) and why they make so much effort for every ranking factor release to explain that correlation does not equal causation.

[Reply 2 0](#)

10 days ago  
[GodofSEO.Co](#)

Thanks for the link, I hadn't actually noticed it hence why I was a bit confused probably more concentrating on the point he was making of them being the same value.

[Reply 2 0](#)

10 days ago  
[paints-n-design](#)

Title and description are very similar important, so I think that. Maybe the title is a bit more - because - take out the Keywords of the title the page goes down (when u haven't done much more SEO).

Take out the keywords from the description and it will fall down to - but if (and only if) google isn't able to find a good text from anywhere else to display under the result (Google sometimes catches text from <h tags> instead.).

I think there maybe a small difference - but for the user/searcher its better to see exactly what u want him to see, when he is searchin for u - simpliest way - description. maybe they dont fit that good.

But like DiggMatt sayin - most likely optimised by SEOs - and that isn't allways to rank high, sometimes (for me i cant speak for all) it is for the site visitors...

And u still have a choice after seeing the searchresults. You have the choice where to klick - for that u need both. And thats also a factor for optimisation.

[Reply 1 0](#)

6 days ago  
[linkbuildingtips](#)

I also agree with your saying paints-n-design. Title and Description have similar importance for the website's page rank. I also appreciate your saying that for more users or visitors we must put the easy and simple description, it only attracts more visitors to your sites. ranking is important but if your site have seen in top ranking but user cant understand your description then it is useless. so i suggest try to make your description easy to undersatand for the users.

[Reply 1 0](#)

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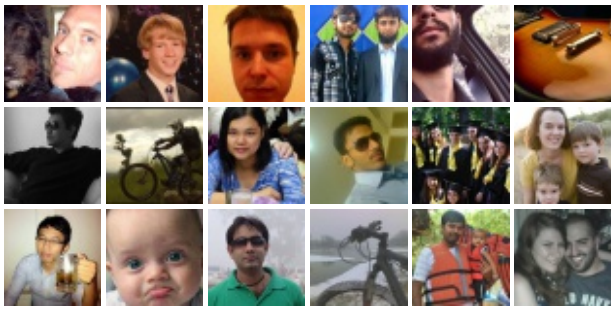


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