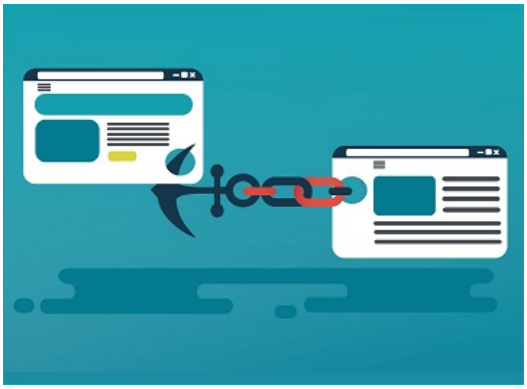
Best practices for anchor text optimization in 2018



Doing SEO for any client is intimately associated with getting the most out of every link.

Anchor text is an important element that "unlocks" every link's potential – to the extent that Google had to roll out its first Penguin update in 2012, cutting tried-and-true anchor text ***over-***optimization methods out of the picture.

Over the past five years, the best practices of anchor text optimization have considerably evolved. It is time to learn how anchor text best practices can allow you to get the most out of links in 2018.

Anchor text and Google Penguin

The release of Penguin 1.0 in April, 2012 shook up the SERPs, affecting around 3% of all search queries in English, German, Chinese, Arabic, and other popular languages. Since then, there have been at least five major Google Penguin updates:

Since Google releases its Penguin updates periodically, some SEO professionals and marketers take advantage of the gaps, pushing up SERPs with gray-hat anchor text practices (e.g. targeted anchor texts, lower-quality link-building), and then get penalized for doing so.

When it comes to the relationship between anchor texts and Google Penguin updates, the rule of thumb is simple: Follow Google's guidelines and avoid trying to hack the system by using overly aggressive anchor text practices. Sooner or later, Google will come up with a new update, which will negatively affect SERPs.

Major anchor text categories

Before providing specific tips on anchor text optimization, let's recap the major categories of anchor text:

- Branded – your brand name with a link placed on it (e.g. Search Engine Watch)
- Naked URL – your site's URL with the link it is pointing to (e.g. https://searchenginewatch.com/)
- Website Name – your site's URL with the anchor text written as "YourWebsite.com" (e.g. searchenginewatch.com)
- Page/Blog Post Title – a page's title anchor text with a link on it (e.g. How to future-proof your SEO for 2018)
- Exact-match Keywords – a targeted keyword with a link on it (e.g. Tips for entrepreneurs)
- Partial-match Keywords – a targeted keyword plus some other text with a link on it (e.g. Beginner tips for entrepreneurs, tips for entrepreneurs guide)
- LSI Keywords – a keyword anchor text that is related to a targeted keyword (e.g. entrepreneurship tips, business tips for entrepreneurs, startup business success stories)
- No Text – an image with a link on it
- Generic (e.g. Click this link, Read more, Check this out)

Best practices for anchor text optimization

Keep it natural… and versatile

According to Google, every part of any website, including links and their associated anchor text, needs to provide real value to users. Links must be put only where users expect to see them, so they can get informed about something valuable to them.

With Google's algorithms getting smarter every year, you should avoid multiple repetitive and keyword-based anchors in your site's anchor text cloud. Failure to do so will definitely result in a penalty.

To quote Neil Patel:

> *"I like building natural links, because that's what Google wants. You can't be smarter than the engineers who spend their workdays making the algorithm work smarter. So, stay off Google's radar, focus on high-quality content and avoid a penalty on Google and other search engines."*

Of course, you need to link to high-quality, relevant pages and disavow all links from low-quality, non-relevant web pages. Getting links from sites with high Domain Authority, Page Authority, and Trust Flow is also a must.

Avoid over-optimization

Google does not appreciate overly-rich anchor text. A spammy, keyword-based anchor text cloud is a big red flag to Google. It indicates blunt manipulation with backlinks, which, obviously, results in penalties.

Instead, try to keep your anchor text natural by spreading it

across your inbound links in the right proportions (more about this below). For instance, instead of placing “Software development company” in every guest post, try using something like “companies that develop software” or “the most reliable software development firms,” etc.

Keep anchors relevant to content

As time goes on, Google will only improve its algorithms responsible for understanding the actual meaning of a web page’s content. Since 2015, it has been testing DeepMind, a natural language processing technology that allows artificial intelligence to learn just as humans would.

Provided Google knows what is put on a concrete web page, it will not have any problems figuring out if a specific anchor text or link is relevant to a web page’s content.

If you place an internal link with irrelevant anchor text on your own website, this is likely to harm your search ranking. The is true for backlinks with irrelevant anchor text.

Google is obsessed with improving user experiences. It tries its best to provide relevant content in the most convenient manner. Clearly, non-relevant anchors with non-relevant links behind them lead users to non-relevant content, which Google does not appreciate.

Engage in relevant guest blogging

The relevance of the anchor text is one of key factors of a successful, cost-efficient guest blogging campaign, or of any healthy anchor text cloud for that matter.

What it comes down to is this: If you are guest posting with the intention of pushing up your “Digital marketing tips” keyword, place links to pages that include information about digital marketing, with exact-match, partial-match, and LSI (Latent Semantic Indexing) keywords featuring the topic of

discussion. Obviously, your “Digital marketing tips” anchor text, with an associated link, should not be put on websites that have nothing to do with digital marketing.

Note: Do your best to use LSI and partial-match anchors in your guest post. In this way, you will achieve a more natural-looking anchor text cloud and satisfy the Google gods.

Share this article

Related articles

Avoid links from and linking to spammy sites

While the first part of this one is self-descriptive (you should never build links from low-quality websites), it is not common knowledge that Google pays close attention to websites you link to as well. Actually, since the release of Google’s Hummingbird update, this type of co-citation can play a key role in calculating your site’s SERP placement.

Check your outbound links to make sure you steer clear of low-quality sites. Even though you can get paid or rewarded with a couple of reciprocal links, linking to a toxic website has the potential to ruin your site’s authority and rank in the long run.

Distribute anchors in the right proportions

While the “right proportions” part is always up for debate, it is pretty much indisputable that you should:

- Avoid stuffing your anchor text cloud with exact-match and partial-match keywords by all means

- Rely on branded and website name anchor texts (as they are allowed by Google and other search engines)
- Sparsely use Page Title/Blog Post Title anchor texts (Adam White of Search Engine Journal claims that this is the single best anchor text for SEO)

So, what are the right proportions?

While the safe answer is, “It depends,” – some recommendations do exist. According to at least a couple of anchor text case studies, the golden formula is:

- 50% – Branded anchor texts
- 15% – WebsiteName.com
- 10-20% – Naked URL
- 10-15% – Page Title/Blog Post Title
- 1-5% – Generic anchor texts
- 1-5% – Exact- and partial match keywords
- Other

But, once again, make sure that you do a thorough analysis of your niche and competitors. Your first priority is to reverse-engineer the anchor text cloud of websites ranked at the top, and only then can you start adjusting your website’s anchor text cloud.

Focus anchors on deep-level pages

One of the most common mistakes that beginner SEO professionals make is focusing the anchors they build on top-level pages, mainly placing links to a homepage, landing pages, or even concrete product pages.

An anchor text cloud that is purely built around these shallow pages does not look natural to Google and other search engines, simply because people do not naturally place links in that way. As a rule, they link to worthy shareable content like blog posts.

What you should do is focus your anchors on relevant, deep-level pages. Not only will you create a natural, versatile anchor text cloud, but you will also allow visitors to navigate to top-level pages.

Place anchors where users pay the most attention

This is more of a psychology-type tip.

Since users often do not read but rather skim pages, a page's first few paragraphs, its headings, subheadings, and imagery become focal points – people pay more attention there. Thus, it makes sense to put your anchor texts next to these "hot" parts of a page in order to increase click-through rates and engagement.

Do not be overly obsessed with this one, though. If users find concrete anchor text to be descriptive and potentially valuable, they will click the link to check out what's inside, one way or another.

Conclusion

Anchor text optimization practices evolve over time. As most of them get adjusted in line with the Penguin updates, pay close attention to keeping your anchor text cloud natural and versatile, which is the first point of interest to Google.

"Organic" anchor text distribution influenced by averages for a targeted niche, and specifically for your competitor's websites, plays a huge role, but keep low-quality links in mind. If your anchor texts are up to snuff, do a complete audit of incoming links to sift out and disavow those coming from untrustworthy, non-relevant websites.

To sum it up, you need to remain on the right side of Google, one way or another. Specifically, do not try to game the

system – it will not work in the long run. Instead, make sure that your anchor text is natural (avoid over-optimization, use relevant anchors, do not link to low-quality websites), and use keyword-rich links once in a while to help you rank.

Want to stay on top of the latest search trends?

Get top insights and news from our search experts.

Related reading



The price associated with an SEO campaign can be de

termined by a significant amount of factors: what work has been conducted previous

ly
?
Wh
at
in
te
rn
al
re
so
ur
ce
s
ar
e
av
ai
la
bl
e
to
su
pp
or
t
th
e
ca
mp
ai
gn
?
Ho
w
co
mp
et

it
iv
e
is
th
e
in
du
st
ry
?
Wh
at
ar
e
th
e
go
al
s
of
th
e
ca
mp
ai
gn
?
As
a
re
su
lt
,
pr
ic
in

g SEO can sometimes feel akin to a ‘how long is a piece of string’ scenario.



With just a couple of weeks left in December, it’s time to start preparing for what

SEO might look like in 2018. A little while ago, we highlighted our seven SEO tr

ends for 2018 that you should be watching out for. But what practical steps should



you be taking with your SEO to prepare for next year?

Google Trends, first lau

ch
ed
in
20
06
,
pr
ov
id
es
ma
rk
et
er
s
wi
th
in
va
lu
ab
le
in
si
gh
ts
in
to
ho
w
pe
op
le
se
ar
ch
on

the world's most popular search engine. Over time, the power of this service ha

s
be
en
ta
pp
ed
in
ne
w
an
d
en
li
gh
te
ni
ng
wa
ys
.
He
re
’s
ho
w
yo
u
ca
n
us
e
it
fo
r
SE
O.



As we come to the end of 2017 and embark on the inevitable dozens of review articles lo

ok
in
g
ba
ck
ov
er
th
e
pa
st
ye
ar
of
se
ar
ch
,
it
’s
as
go
od
a
ti
me
as
an
y
to
re
fl
ec
t
on
SE
O

strategy. What are the great est challenges being faced by the industry as a whol

e?
Wh
at
ha
ve
be
en
th
e
bi
gg
es
t
su
cc
es
se
s?

https://searchenginewatch.com/2017/12/22/best-practices-for-anchor-text-optimization-in-2018/