

## GOOGLE PAGERANK IS CHANGING

### Google Page Rank. What it is, what it does and why it is nothing to do with your page rank.

Page Rank is changing. One of the earliest Google algorithms is evolving as Google tries to keep one step ahead of the optimiser in its never ending search for site 'relevance'. So how should you respond if you want to keep up in the Search Engine Results Page rankings (SERPS)?

First some basics. What is Page Rank? Google Page Rank is a value placed on your web page by Google in its constant search for which web site to present to as being most relevant to a search query. You can see your Page Rank if you download the Google toolbar.



The scale is logarithmic and so your percentage score is shown as a number out of 10 with 10 being the best possible. In fact this score is an approximation only as the real score is concealed by Google in the vain hope that SEO specialists do not focus too much on achieving a high Page Rank.

So why is Page Rank nothing to do with page rank? Page Rank is named after Larry Page one of the two founders of Google. It actually reflects the number of links to that page rather than the quality of the page itself. Google's reasoning has been that high quality pages will attract more links from other pages and thus this is a reflection of their importance and the page should therefore be ranked higher in SERPS. So the formula goes something like this:

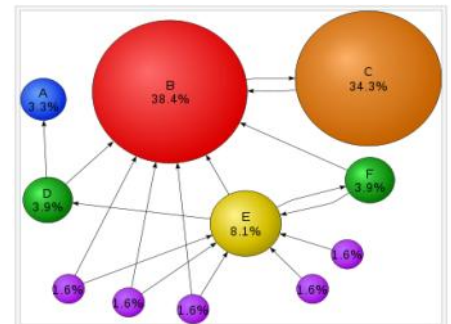
$$\text{No of links} \times \text{quality of linked site} = \text{high position in SERPS}$$

In fact, as with much in Googleland, nothing is quite that simple. There are supposedly over 200 elements in the Google Page Rank algorithm but Google is not letting on what the other 198 are.

So if links are so important in getting a high SERPS position what can you do about getting them? In the good old days it was easy. Set up mirror sites, buy listings from link farms, and persuade every Tom, Dick and Harry to cross link to your site. But that type of strategy is contrary to Google's ambition to present the most relevant sites as a result of a search query. So it has been hard at work at changing the ground rules with rumour having it that new

ones came into effect in January 2011. So if you saw your Page Rank drop last month then that's probably the reason.

Wikipedia has a good diagram explaining the relationship. Page C has a higher Page Rank than Page E despite the latter having more links as Page C is deemed to be of higher quality than Page E.



Google is still searching for relevance however and seems to have found a better way of scoring for quality rather than quantity (on May 11, 2010 a patent was granted to Google for "Ranking documents based on user behavior and/or feature data"). There is one key difference in the new patent. Previously, each link on a page passed the same amount of authority to the target page. Now, every link is weighted according to how likely a "reasonable surfer" would be to click on that link.

The learning point here is that it is better to link to a Page C in the diagram above than a Page E. Out also goes the crafty list of links at the bottom of the Home Page; links now have to be prominent on the page to be given merit. Out also should go link farms as they have no place in the new architecture.

What seems to work best is to link to related blogs, articles and themed sites. So in a sense there is no change from before if you were of the school which believes that if you build a high quality site with focussed content your site will rank highly. This all makes sense and creates an environment in which the serious optimiser will be comfortable. It's now about quality not quantity.

One aspect will continue to cause concern. How do you know if you have improved your Page Rank? Google supposedly only recalibrates the Page Rank every six months with the last one rumoured to be in January so it may be July before you know if changes you made have had a positive affect. It's a long time to wait to see if you are a winner or a loser in this game.

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