

5 Fairy Tales and Myths About SEO Which Must Stop Now

Everyone that knows me knows that I love SEO. As the Associate Client Services Director at SGM I have many hats on. Hell, I sometimes even run a “power cycle” on our network when the internet goes down to restore faith in humanity in the office. (I basically switch the router off and back on again).

But what I like the most is working on SEO strategies and approaches for our clients. It's safe to say, I “*LOVE*” SEO.

My appreciation for this kind of search marketing also means I come across many misinformed ideas about what entails effective Search Engine Optimisation. Too many providers still offer £99 SEO packages where these “best practices” are still banded around.

I have listed five fairy tale ideas and myths about SEO below:

1. Link building is dead

Link building is **NOT** dead. What **IS** dead, is the old spammy way of building links using blog comments, forum posts, keyword stuffed signatures and automated link building tools.

Since the introduction of [Penguin](#) these methods of ranking websites have been all but destroyed by Google, and rightly so.

The words “link building” sound a bit forced don't they? Slightly manipulative almost. Some have started referring to this as “link earning”, which to me sounds much more credible.

The idea of *earning* a link from a relevant and authoritative website because you are offering something useful, is not only rewarding, but is how “link earning” should be approached.

Simply put, to earn links you need to:

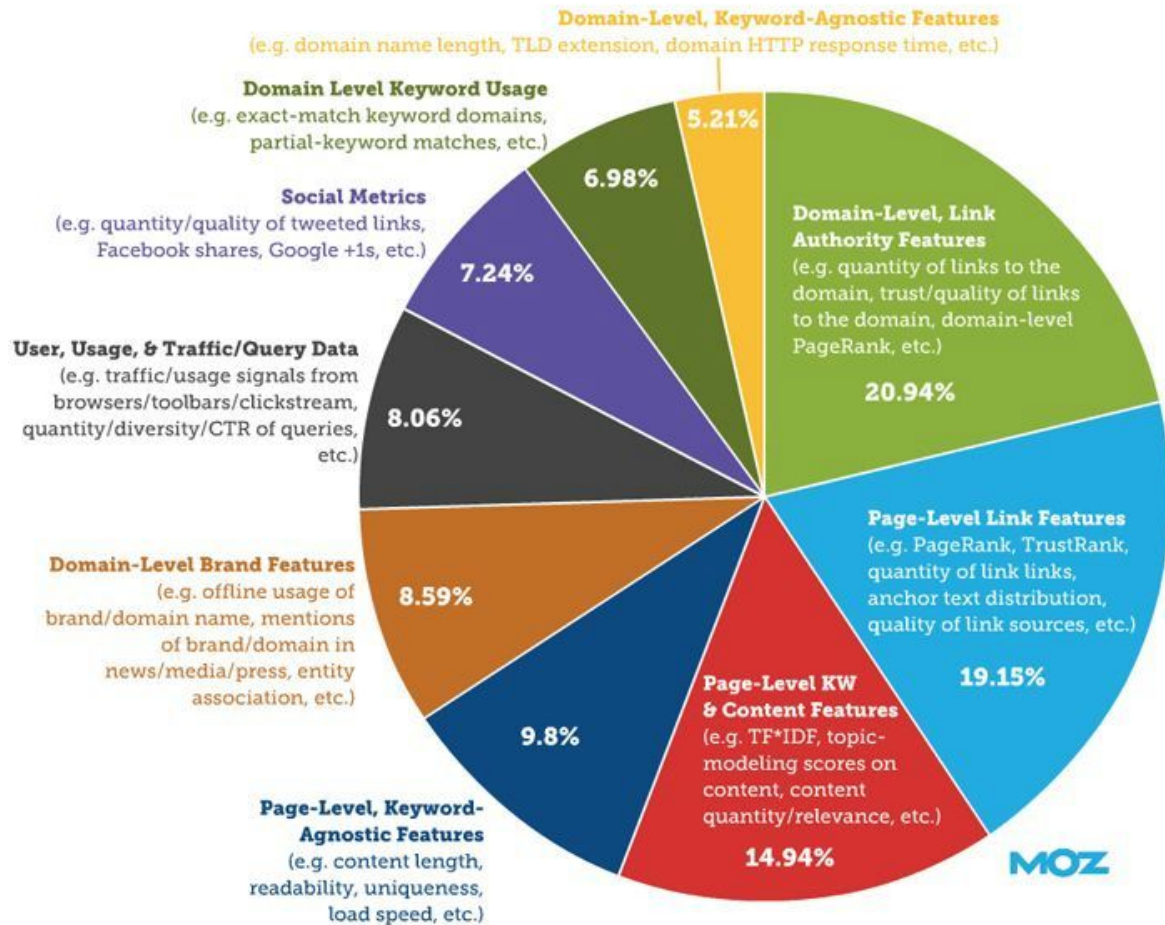
- Create unique/useful content that is out of this world, and ahead of your competition
- Find the audience and influencers that relate to your service/product/cause
- Find PR contacts that *want* to hear about your brand/product
- Don't just talk at, engage with your audience (and watch the links flow in)
- Plan for, and execute all of the above (and many more things along the way)

Sounds simple right? It's not. Here at SGM we have spent many years fine tuning what is successful and what *isn't*, and we like to think we are pretty good at what we do. Bad link building is easy. Good “link earning” is not. It takes time, planning, research, knowledge, and hard work, but if done correctly it can yield fantastic results.

It is definitely worth noting, that links are just **one** of many search engine ranking factors. See below:

Weighting of Thematic Clusters of Ranking Factors in Google

(based on survey responses by 128 SEO professionals in June 2013)



Courtesy of [Moz](#).

2. You can do a bit of SEO and then it will look after itself

Over the years, I have seen numerous examples of people using this approach, and slowly but surely, losing their search traffic. This type of mentality is just plain wrong, and can lead to loss of search performance.

As the world of search engine marketing is so dynamically volatile, you can be easily left behind if not following best practices for 6 months. Then BOOM! Your search traffic drops off a cliff.

Why would not keeping up, cause your traffic to decline?

- Your competition maintained their SEO game, and are outranking you
- Your content and structure is stale and out of date
- Search engine algorithms update
- Your "new site" was not migrated properly
- Your developers moved pages without consulting you
- There is no one in house to take care of outreach, content creation/updates

- Degradation in links coming to your site, or so called “link rot”

3. Ranking for the core keywords should be number one priority

Sadly, too much focus is still put on core keyword performance, with longer tail queries often relegated to being an afterthought, despite the fact that they could be much more relevant to the business offering.

When conducting keyword research it is easy to fixate on queries that yield high search volumes and traffic and forget about the longer tail, more relevant queries.

Average monthly search volumes for longer tail keywords will undoubtedly be lower but could collectively bring in more traffic and conversions.

Longtail keywords are those 3, 4 or even 5 word queries that are very specific in terms of user intent. Normally, you see these types of sessions have better engagement rates, (time on site etc) and better conversion rates, if you present the user with the specific information or products they are looking for when they make those searches.

In almost all cases, such queries are far more likely to convert than more generic searches, that normally occur in the research phase, when users are looking for information, and before they move onto the buying phase..

The average search behaviour tends to follow the following path, if ignoring device or seasonal behaviour:

1. User learns or becomes aware of a product
2. User looks for information about that product when preparing to buy
3. User looks for alternatives or more information (features, reviews, pricing etc..)
4. User makes their decision and buys
5. User evaluates the product and whether they are happy with it

The ideal scenario is to have a plan that caters for all of these steps. But if you had to choose one step to focus on, on it would more than likely start at number 3. This is where having a long tail strategy can really come into it's own.

Let's look at some keyword examples. I'm a football fan, so let's use some football related keywords. Manchester United for the Premier League this year! (I had to get that in somewhere!)

Fandom aside, let's say we sell football boots. A broadly related keyword could be “football boots”.

Keyword	Exact Match Searches	Keyword Difficulty
football boots	54000	39%
cheap football boots	14800	23%
kids football boots	8100	31%
football boots uk	6600	36%
football boots sale	5400	39%
messi football boots	3600	23%
mens football boots	3600	34%
best football boots	2900	42%
boys football boots	2400	31%
ronaldo football boots	2400	38%
black football boots	2400	27%
classic football boots	1900	24%
girls football boots	1900	27%
all black football boots	1900	40%
superfly football boots	1600	27%
junior football boots	1600	24%
astro turf football boots	1600	27%
football boots for kids	1600	32%
pink football boots	1300	39%
mizuno football boots	1300	17%
childrens football boots	1300	31%
old football boots	1000	24%
design your own football boots	1000	29%
umbro football boots	1000	24%

Collectively more volume and generally less competitive!

The core keyword has a lot of volume, but look at the volume collectively on all the other keywords. They couldn't all fit in this table, but I hope you get the idea. The longer tail keywords are less competitive, and collectively get more volume than the core keyword. They are also more specific so if you can provide good information, UX, and pricing for these searches you are more likely to see a conversion.

Trying to improve performance on a longer tail set of keywords will also ensure that traffic is not as affected by minor keyword fluctuations, as there is a larger set of conversion driving terms to rely on.

Think of it this way. What would you rather have, 1 high volume keyword that drives a shed load of traffic, or 100 keywords that individually drive lower incremental visits when compared to the one keyword, but cumulatively drive more traffic, and where a higher proportion of users convert?

I know what I would choose.

4. If you do PPC, your SEO rankings will improve

To answer this as clearly as possible; **PPC. Will. NOT. Improve. SEO. Directly...in any way.**

What could be impacted is 'branded' organic traffic, that can see an influx, where your generic PPC activity is generating brand awareness. This could in turn result in more exposure, and citations from other websites and sources, as your brand exposure grows.

To be clear though, PPC will not directly influence your Organic keyword rankings.

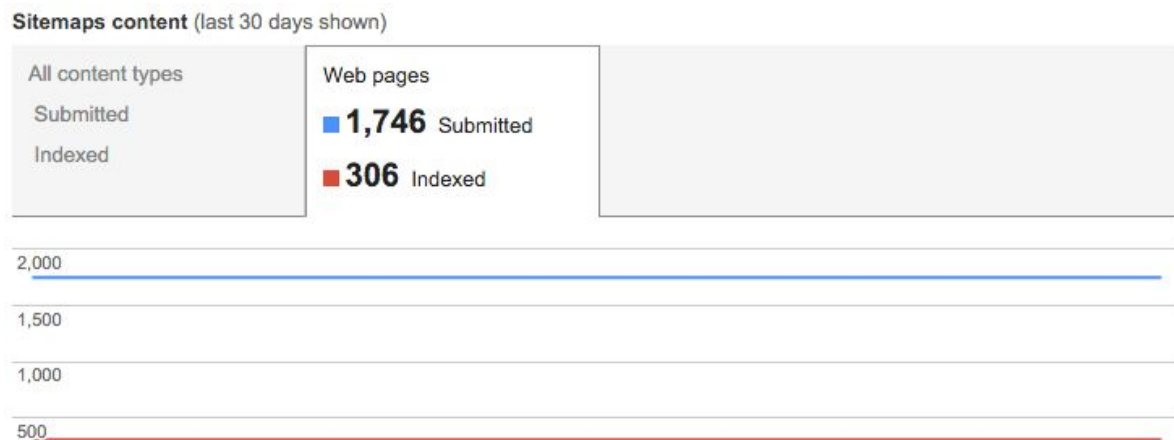
5. Installing an XML sitemap will improve your rankings

Simply put, installing an xml sitemap should not be done to cover up bad site architecture, or to get pages that are not accessible on the website indexed, and will not improve your Organic rankings.

Technically speaking, you should be able to index all of your pages with no sitemap at all, as long as you have a good site structure and your pages follow a logical path.

I have seen people install sitemaps so they can index siloed pages, or pages that exist purely for keyword targeting. These are normally pages that are of low quality, and of little use to users, which makes this even more pointless.

This would be the probable result, if something like that is done:



Of course if you have a lot of URL's, you could use a sitemap to tell search engines where all your most important pages are, and what their importance (or priority), is.

TIP: Don't mark all pages as "Priority 1". Doing this would be the same as not marking a priority at all.

Your sitemap should never cover up bad site structure or crawlability.

When asked, Trevor Foucher of the Google Webmaster Tools Team, said:

"A Sitemap does not affect the actual ranking of your pages. However, if it helps get more of your site crawled (by notifying us of URLs we didn't previously know about, and/or by helping us prioritize the URLs on your site), that can lead to increased presence and visibility of your site in our index."

Here is a link to the full Q&A - <http://bit.ly/1lxgdfv>

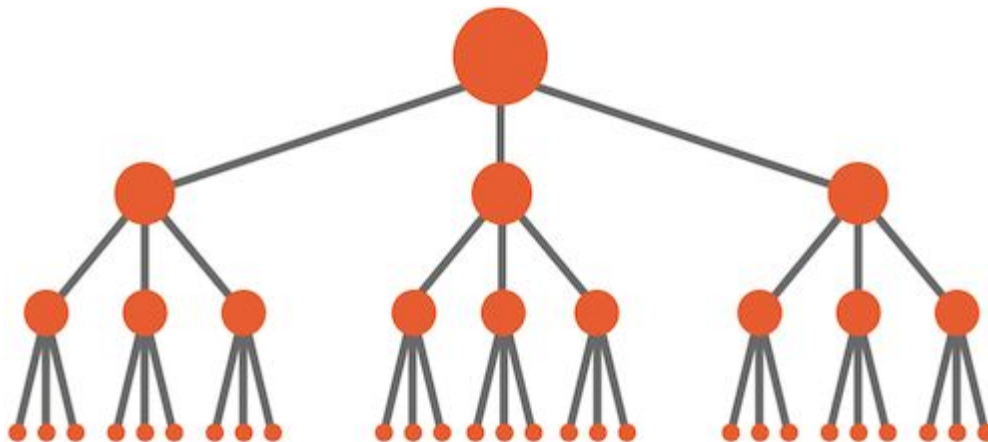
Submitting a sitemap also doesn't mean all of your pages will be indexed as Trevor explains below.

Q: I submitted a Sitemap, but my URLs haven't been [crawled/indexed] yet. Isn't that what a Sitemap is for?

"Submitting a Sitemap helps you make sure Google knows about the URLs on your site. It can be especially helpful if your content is not easily discoverable by our crawler (such as pages accessible only through a form). It is not, however, a guarantee that those URLs will be crawled or indexed. We use information from Sitemaps to augment our usual crawl and discovery processes."

What I have seen before is indexation time for new pages, when using an automatically generated sitemap, improve.

If you make sure your site follows a logical structure, and your content is easily crawled through well structured links, you can't go far wrong.



Credit: <http://bit.ly/1SkG18J>

A sitemap will help Google understand and tweak the way they crawl your website, and prioritise your most important pages. Don't mask bad site architecture with a sitemap, it won't work.

That's it folks. I hope some of this info helps you make the right decisions if you are ever faced with these "fairy-tale" misconceptions.