

SEO

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Does having keywords in a URL or page name improve your search engine position?



Keywords form the foundation of your search marketing efforts and help you make better decisions about the type of content you produce. Properly selected keywords can also help you decide the best way to categorize that content, and structure your site.

Your goal should be to:

- Make it easy for users and search engines to navigate and understand the types of content in each category of your site
- Have a clear focus for every page of content

Achieving this is one powerful way to increase your search rankings.

The challenge is to find the right balance between including keywords that bring qualified visitors to your business, and not alienating your website visitors by repeating keywords in your pages and URLs in an unnatural way.

Should I use my brand or keywords in the domain name?

So let's start with your actual domain name.

Is it better to have?

Keyword phrase: www.comfortableshoes.com

Brand: www.zappos.com

Combination: www.zapposshoes.com

In general, it is better to use your brand rather than just a keyword term for your domain name. Using just a generic keyword phrase makes it hard to differentiate your company, and will be difficult for customers to remember from the 1000's of other competing results.

Having a combination of Brand + Main Keyword can give you some advantage. Other sites will naturally link to your domain which includes your Main Keyword, passing some added relevance through the link.

Ultimately this becomes a branding decision, and in most cases it is better to stick with your brand.

“Brands are the solution, not the problem. Brands are how you sort out the cesspool.”

-Eric Schmidt
Executive chairman of Google

There was a time that Google would give an unfair boost to domains that had the exact search term they were trying to rank for as their domain name. These were called Exact Match Domains or EMD's for short.

On September 2012 Google did a major update that significantly reduced the advantage of EMD's meaning Brands were now on more of a level playing field in terms of ranking for those same phrases in the search results.

So where can you get a little extra keyword lift?

You can help improve your search position by grouping your pages & products into tightly focused and clearly named categories. This helps search engines and users understand exactly what each section of your website is about.

Categories

- Rather than name a sub directory: /directory1/ , try naming it with a keyword rich phrase that describes the page, such as /hotel-rooms/ or /teddy-bears/
- Use hyphens between words to act as useful separators as opposed to teddybears or teddy_bears that are not as easy to read for users.
- Remove any “stop words” like: in, and, or, on. These are not needed and simply make the URL too long.

Page Names

- Make the names of your pages descriptive by including the relevant keywords in your file names. E.g. /executive-hotel-suite/ or /brown-teddy-bears.html
- Aim to use two or three keywords. Any more will make the URL's too long, and will look like web spam to both search engines and users.

File Names

- It is also beneficial to use descriptive keywords in the names of actual files included in the page. This can be
 - Images E.g. /executive-suite.jpg
 - PDF's E.g. /hotel-breakfast-menu.pdf
 - Any other media used on the page

So, should I change my URL?

At one point, changes to the URL structure of a site could have devastating consequences as they would require 301 redirection of the original URL, which can result in a loss of search visibility. However, Google has announced that 301 redirects pass full link authority, so this possibility is less concerning. However, before you start changing URLs, keep the following in mind:

- Any URLs which change will need to be redirected immediately using a 301 redirect.
- Note that sub-pages of the original page are affected by this too – make sure to redirect all pages affected.

- Don't redirect URLs to a new page that isn't relevant to the original page's content – this comes with a high risk of losing your search visibility.

What do Search Engines Recommend?

Google's Matt Cutts, the head of Google's Web spam team posted mentions that keywords in the URL do indeed help.

Sensibly he goes on to say that web masters and SEO's shouldn't obsess over this, but should approach the subject of keywords in URL's in the context of all the Google SEO factors required to improve your Search Engine results:

- Website Infrastructure
- Technical implementation
- Topic focused, relevant and useful content
- Quality links earned from authoritative websites

What does this mean for your website?

A Search Engine considers a wide range of on-page and off-page web elements to figure out what a page is about. The majority of keyword relevance is taken from the content of a web page but, in highly competitive segments, a Search Engine will also take into consideration the URL and file name of a web page to determine keyword relevance.

If you want to get the best possible rankings for your website, particularly for highly competitive keyword phrases, it can indeed help to include your targeted keywords in the URLs of your website.

But remember, as with everything in the SEO world, it is important not to overdo this so that Search Engines don't get the impression that you are trying to manipulate the search results by web spamming.

So, in summary?

Keywords in the URLs and file names of your web pages can indeed improve the ranking of your web pages in Google's search results.

Careful consideration is needed before making changes, and needs to be implemented properly to minimize any loss of accumulated authority.

And finally, if it is overdone, it can actually have a detrimental effect on your users experience, rankings and ultimately conversions.

This article was updated with the latest industry insights on December 2, 2016.

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