Chapter 2: Leveraging Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for Social Media

In This Chapter

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*N*o matter how popular social media may be, search engine optimization (SEO) must still be a part of your toolkit for a successful, broad spectrum Web presence. The goal of SEO is to get your Web pages to appear near the top of search results — preferably in the top ten — on general search engines or in search results for specific social media services. You accomplish this by selecting appropriate search terms or keywords and then optimizing content, navigation, and structure to create a Web page or profile that's "search-friendly" for your selected terms.

You can optimize social media, from blogs to Facebook, very much the same way that you optimize a Web site. Some people call this Social Media Optimization (SMO), referring to the application of SEO techniques to social media.

If you do a good job optimizing multiple components of your Web presence — your Web site, blog, Facebook page, Twitter profile, and more — they will all appear near the top of Search Engine Result Pages (SERP) on selected terms, increasing your company's share of that premium screen real estate. As mentioned in Book I, Chapter 1, improving search engine ranking is one strategic justification for implementing a social media campaign in the first place.

Making the Statistical Case for SEO

News of the growth of social media usage sometimes overshadows the actual numbers. For instance, The Nielsen Company shows that by April 2010, Facebook — with its exponential growth in the second half of 2009 — rose to third place in unique U.S. monthly visitors (122.3 million), but Google (150.1 million) and Yahoo! (128.5 million) still topped the charts.

And just because more than 400 million people worldwide (70 percent outside the U.S.) are called active Facebook users doesn't mean they're all using it to search for information that might lead them to your company.

In fact, Nielsen research showed that though a committed segment of Internet users dubbed the *socializers* — about 18 percent across multiple social sites — prefer peer-reviewed social media to find new information, the vast majority of users still opt for portals, search engines, or other information-heavy sites, as shown in Figure 2-1. To reach that majority, SEO remains the technique of choice.

Figure 2-1: In October 2009, The Nielsen Company surveyed Internet users to see how they look for new information online.
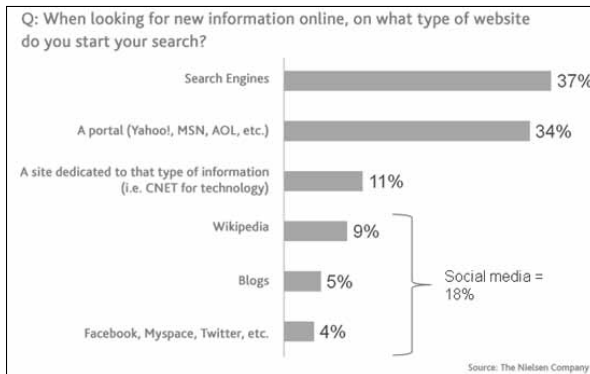
Courtesy The Nielsen Company

Though U.S. Internet users spent more than five times as many hours per month on Facebook as they did on Google in April 2010, this disparity reflects the difference in the nature of the task and purpose of each site. The data is interesting for many other reasons, but isn't relevant when you decide whether to include SEO in your online marketing efforts.

At the moment, no social media alternative covers as wide a base of Web pages or as commanding an algorithm for assessing relevance as search engines. What will happen in the future? Get out your crystal ball, or watch Nielsen and other sites for more data. One thing about the Web is for sure — like the world, it always turns.

Given these statistics, do you still need to bother with search engine optimization techniques for your Web hub? Absolutely. Here's why:

✦ Not all members of your target audience are active users of social media, especially if you have a business-to-business (B2B) company.

✦ The techniques and tools used to find good search terms and to optimize pages transfer quickly to social media, especially to blogs and tweets.

✦ You can optimize social media pages all you want, but they are always of secondary importance except in real-time search. You must first optimize your hub Web site or blog, registered under your own domain name, to get good results.

✦ Social media services still aren't well equipped to handle e-commerce, database applications, forms, or many of the other myriad features that a full-fledged Web site can deliver. For your Web site or blog to be found other than by links from social media, it must perform well on search engines.

✦ SEO remains an essential, though not sufficient, method of ensuring site visibility based on a method other than the number of friends, fans, or followers you have. You're chasing profits, not popularity.

REMEMBER
SEO isn't an end in itself. The goal is to draw qualified visitors to your Web site so that you can turn them into customers and clients. A strong SEO foundation helps direct traffic to your full-featured hub from your social media presence.

For more information about search engine optimization, see *Search Engine Optimization All-in-One For Dummies,* by Bruce Clay.

Thinking Tactically and Practically

The best results for SEO sprout from the best content — and so does the largest stream of qualified prospects. Though we talk about many SEO techniques in this chapter, none of them will work unless you offer appealing content that draws and holds the attention of your audience.

Two schools of thought drive SEO tactics for social media:

✦ Optimize your Web site and all your social media for the same search terms, occupying many slots on page one of results with one or more of your Web sites.

✦ Use your social media pages to grab a good position for some relatively rare search terms that your Web site doesn't use.

Search engine jargon

Help yourself by mastering the terminology you see on search engine resource sites or in articles:

✔ **Spiders, crawlers, or robots (bots)** are automated programs used by search engines to visit Web sites and index their content.

✔ **Search engine optimization (SEO)** is the process of adjusting Web sites and pages to gain higher placement in search engine results.

✔ **Natural or organic search** refers to the type of search results produced by a search engine's algorithm (set of rules) when indexing unpaid submissions.

✔ **Paid search** results are those for which a submission fee or bid has been paid to appear in sponsorship banners at the top of a page, in pay per click (PPC) ads in the right margin, or in some cases at the top of the list of search results.

✔ **Search engine marketing (SEM)** combines both natural and paid search activities.

Get greedy. Go for the best of both worlds. Use your standard search terms on social media profiles and the more rarely used terms on individual posts, photo captions, or updates.

Use the free trial at WebPosition.com or the low-cost trial at ZoomRank.com to see how your site ranks on different search terms. Your tactical decisions about keyword selection may depend on those results, as well as on the goals and objectives of your social media campaign.

In the later section, "Selecting the Right Keywords," you discover how to select terms that people are likely to use and ones on which you have a chance of breaking through to the first page of search results.

Focusing on the Right Search Engines

Ignore all those e-mails about submitting your site to 3,000 search engines. You need to submit to the top three: Google, Yahoo!, and Bing. (Table 2-1 tells where to find where to submit your sites to those search engines.)

Table 2-1	Submission URLs for Three Key Search Engines		
Name	*URL*	*Search Percentage in January 2010*	*Feeds*
Google	`www.google.com/addurl`	65.4	AOL, Ask, iWon, Netscape
Yahoo!	`http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/submit`	17	AltaVista, AlltheWeb, Lycos
Bing	`www.bing.com/docs/submit.aspx`	11.3	Stand-alone

According to Comscore, these three accounted for 93.7 percent of all searches in January 2010, with Google executing almost four times as many searches as Yahoo!, its closest competitor. All remaining search engines together accounted for the remaining 6.3 percent of searches. Together, these primary search engines feed results to all the significant secondary search engines (refer to Table 2-1). You can also check out `www.bruce clay.com/searchenginerelationshipchart.htm`.

These primary search engines now spider the Web incessantly. You don't need to resubmit your site routinely. But you should resubmit to trigger a visit from the arachnids if you add new content or products, expand to a new location, or update your search terms.

Fortunately, you can ping search engines to notify them of changes automatically, as discussed in Book II, Chapter 1. After receiving a ping, search engines crawl your site again.

Different search engines use different *algorithms* (sets of rules) to display search results, which may vary rapidly over time. To complicate matters further, they tend to attract different audiences. Optimize your site for the search engine that best attracts your audience:

✦ Google has about a 77 percent market share for B2B purchasing.

✦ According to Quantcast,com, Google's 2010 audience tends to be users who are younger (13 to 34), but more affluent than the overall Internet population, and more have a graduate school education. Alexa data show more users who browse at work use Google than use Yahoo! or Bing, which is congruent with its B2B role.

✦ Yahoo! users skew older than Google's, and are more likely to be female and more ethnically diverse than the Internet population overall.

✦ Bing, while having a much smaller share of users, attracts those who are older than 45 and more likely to be male. It has a reputation for searchers who are more apt to convert to buyers, especially for shopping and travel searches. Like Yahoo!, its users are more affluent than the Internet population overall.

Selecting the Right Keywords

First, let's dispense with one major source of confusion. *Tags* are the social media equivalent of *keywords* or *search terms* (several keywords together, such as *New Mexico artists*). Users enter keywords, phrases, or tags into the query box on a search engine, Web site, or social media service to locate the information they seek.

REMEMBER

For good visibility on a search term, your site or social media profile needs to appear within the top ten positions on page one of search results for that term. Only academic researchers and obsessive-compulsives are likely to search beyond the first page.

Fortunately or unfortunately, everyone's brain is wired a little differently, leading to different choices of words and different ways of organizing information. Some differences are simple matters of dialect: Someone in the southern United States may look for *bucket* while someone in the north looks for a *pail.* Someone in the U.K. may enter *cheap petrol* while someone in the United States types *cheap gas.*

Other differences have to do with industry-specific jargon. *Rag* has one meaning to someone looking for a job in the garment industry and another meaning to someone wanting to buy a chamois to polish their car.

Other variations have to do with spelling simplicity. Users invariably look for words spelled phonetically; they rarely type a phrase that's longer than four words.

TIP

The average length of a search query has been increasing. As of March 2009, it was about 3.1 words per search, but this number varies by search engine. Longer search queries are more likely to lead to conversions.

Try to come up with a list of at least 30 search terms that can be distributed among different pages of your Web site. You must juggle the terms people are likely to use to find your product or service with the likelihood that you can show up on the first page of search results.

Here are some tips to help you build a list of potential keywords to thread that needle:

✦ Brainstorm all possible terms that you think your target audience might use. Ask your customers, friends, and employees for ideas.

✦ Be sure your list includes the names of all your products and service packages and your company name. Someone who has heard of you must absolutely be able to find you online.

✦ Incorporate all the industry-specific search terms and jargon you can think of.

✦ If you sell to a local or regional territory, incorporate location into your terms: for example, *Lancaster bakery* or *Columbus OH chiropractor*. It's very difficult to appear on the first page of results for a single word like *bakery*, *chiropractor*, or *hotel*.

✦ Use one or more of the free search tools listed in Table 2-2 to get ideas for other keywords, how often they're used, and how many competing sites use the same term. Figure 2-2 displays results and synonyms from the Google Keyword Search tool for the phrase *portrait photographer*. (Intended to help buyers of Google AdWords, this tool is also useful when brainstorming search terms.)

<div style="float:right">Book II
Chapter 2

Leveraging Search Engine Optimization (SEO)</div>

Table 2-2   **Keyword Selection Resources**

Name	*URL*	*Description*
Digital Point	`www.digitalpoint.com/tools/keywords`	Free keyword tracker and keyword ranking tool
EzineArticles.com	`http://ezinearticles.com/?Keyword-Selection-For-Your-Website-Marketing---Top-Tips-to-Think-About-For-Your-Website&id=3487516`	Keyword selection tips
Google Insights	`www.google.com/insights/search`	Research trends in search terms
Google Keyword Tool	`https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal`	Free keyword generator and statistics
Google Wonder Wheel	`www.googlewonderwheel.com/google-wonder-wheel-step-by-step`	Free visual display of related keywords for brainstorming
KGen	`https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/4788`	Shareware add-on for Firefox toolbar showing which keywords are strong on visited Web pages

(continued)

Table 2-2 *(continued)*

Name	*URL*	*Description*
SEMrush.com	`http://semrush.com`	Competitor keyword research for Google organic search and AdWords
Wordpot	`www.wordpot.com`	Keyword suggestion tool; free basic version
WordStream	`www.wordstream.com/ keyword-generator`	Free basic keyword tools
Wordtracker	`www.wordtracker.com`	Keyword suggestion tool; free trial

Figure 2-2:
The Google Keyword Tool displays the frequency of requests for related search terms and the volume of competing advertisers for that term.
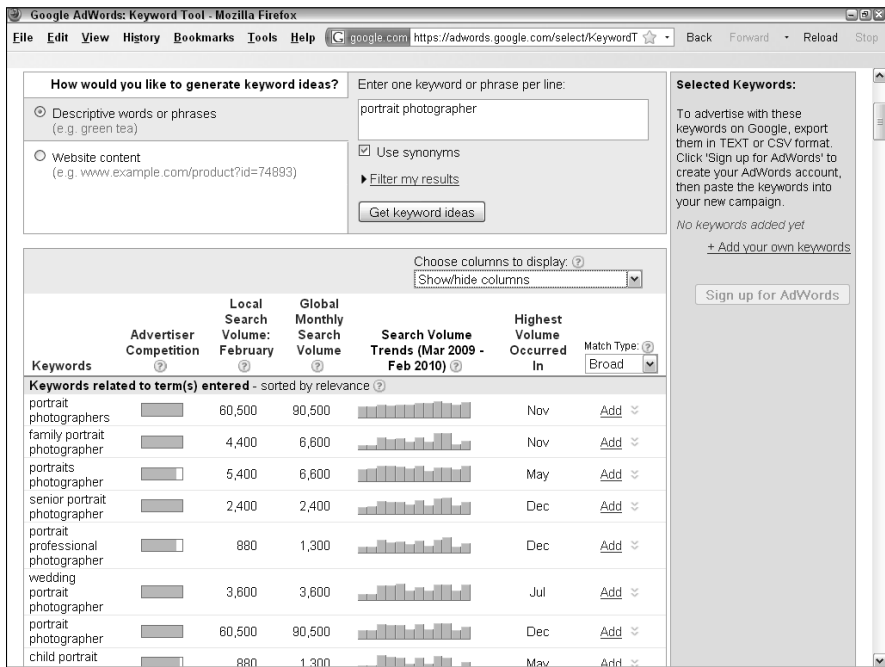
✦ Check your competitors' search terms for ideas. Visit your competitors' sites and, in Internet Explorer, choose View⇨Source. (Look for a similar command in other Internet browsers.) The keywords are usually listed near the top of the source code for a page. If you don't see them, try using the Find command CTRL-F to search for *keyword*.

✦ Not sure who your competitors are? Enter one of your search terms to identify similar companies appearing on the first page of search results. Then you can go look at their other keywords, too.

✦ Look at the *tag clouds* for topics on social news services or blog search engines such as Technorati (`www.technorati.com`) to assess the relative popularity of different search terms. Tag clouds visualize how often keywords appear in specific content or how often they're used by searchers, with the most popular terms usually appearing in larger type.

✦ Avoid using single words except in technical fields or where the word is a "term of art," such as *seismometer* or *angiogram*, with only hundreds of thousands, instead of millions, of competing pages. Not only will you have too much competition on generalized single words but results for single words also produce too wide a range of options. People simply give up.

Understanding tags and tag clouds

Tags, another term for keywords, are commonly used on blogs, social media, and content-heavy sites other than search engines to categorize content and help users find material. *Tag clouds* are simply a way to visualize either how often keywords appear in specific content or how often they are used by searchers.

Keywords in a tag cloud are usually arranged alphabetically or with common terms grouped and displayed as a paragraph. The more frequently used terms (minus common elements such as articles and prepositions) appear in the largest font, as shown in Figure 2-3.

Figure 2-3:
The large tag cloud shows the most popular tags given to photos uploaded to Flickr.
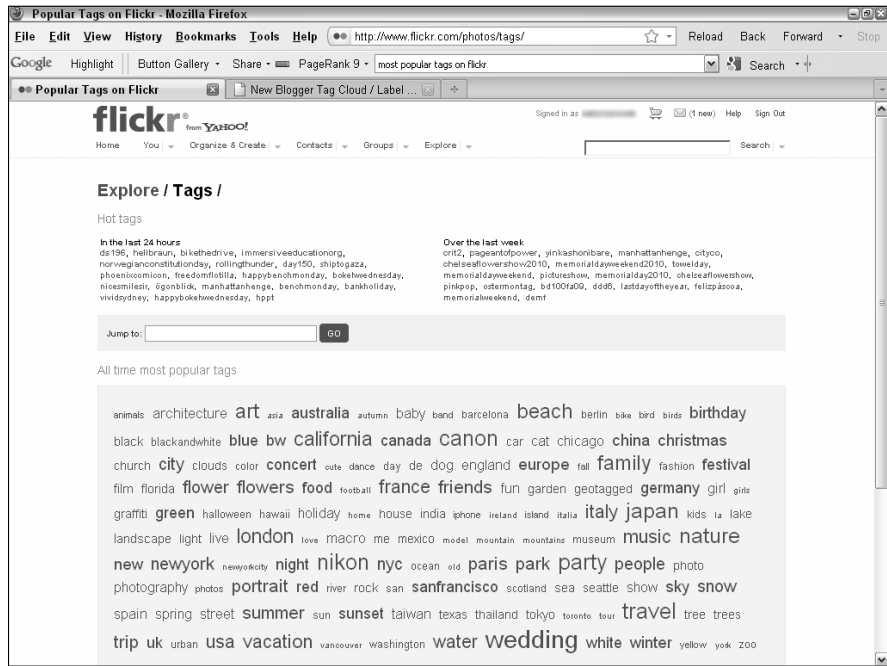
Tag clouds can help you quickly grasp the popularity of particular topics, the terms that people most often use to find a topic, or the relative size or frequency of something, such as city population or usage of different browser versions.

When you submit to social bookmarking or social news services, you're often asked to enter a list of helpful tags so that other people can search for your story. The first rule is to use tags that match your primary search terms and ensure that those terms appear within your text.

Often, people simply "guess" which terms to use, leading to a process of collaborative tagging known as a *folksonomy,* a kind of common-sense group classification of material. The tags that people actually use may diverge from your ideal set, particularly on social media.

You can quickly generate a tag cloud for content by using a tool like the Tag Cloud Builder at `http://tagcloud.oclc.org/tagcloud/TagCloudDemo`. Simply paste in text or enter a URL and select the number of terms to display. You can then enter the most frequently appearing words as the tags when you submit content to a social service.

Use the tag clouds on social media to help determine the popularity of various topics as you decide which content to post. You can also modify the tags you use to categorize your postings. Include or default to commonly used tags when you make your submission, to increase the likelihood that your posting shows up in search results.

Crafting a page, blog posting, or social media profile for more than four or five search terms is difficult. Break up your list of terms into sets that you think you can work into a single paragraph of text while still making sense.

TIP

Optimizing for search terms that real people rarely use doesn't make sense. Sure, you can be number one because you have no competition, but why bother? The exceptions are your company and product names and terms highly specific to your business.

REMEMBER

Always test your selected search terms to be sure that sites like yours show up in the results for that term. For instance, entering *artificial trees* as a search term yields inexpensive artificial Christmas trees, especially at the holiday season, and perhaps some silk palm trees. However, that term doesn't produce appropriate results if your company offers $30,000 model trees used in zoos or museums.

Maximizing Metatag Muscle

Search engines, especially Yahoo! and Bing, use *metatags* to help rank the relevance of a Web site, blog, or social media page to a search query. Historically, engines needed many types of *metadata* (data that describes a Web page overall) to categorize a Web site, but now only the Page Title and Page Description tags are required; the Keyword tag remains helpful to human beings as well as engines. Search engines can automatically detect the rest of the information they need, and too many metatags just slow them down.

REMEMBER

Don't confuse the term *metatags*, which appear in page source code, with the term *tags*, the label used to refer to keywords in social media.

To view metatags for any Web site, choose View➪Source in Internet Explorer; look for a similar command in other browsers. (On a PC, you can also right-click a Web page and choose View Source.) You see a display like the one shown in Figure 2-4, which shows the primary metatags for the main weddings page on MSLresort.com, a resort that offers vacation cabins and destination weddings in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania.

Meta tags in the page source...

Figure 2-4:
The page source (top) for the main weddings page on MSLresort.com (bottom) shows the keyword, description, and title metatags.
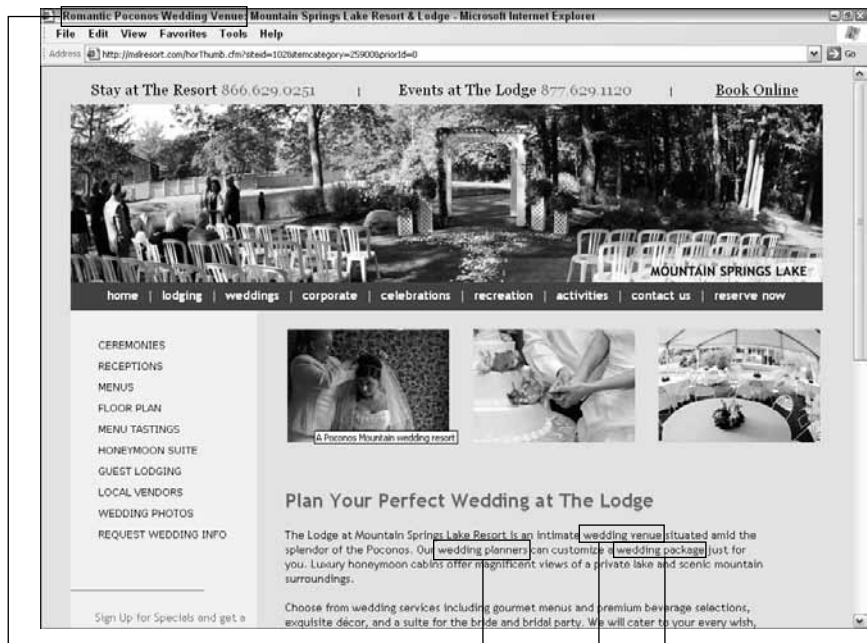
...become keywords on the Web site.

Courtesy Mountain Springs Lake Resort, MSLresort.com

The first paragraph of the weddings page shown in Figure 2-4 is optimized for some the same search terms that appear in the keyword list. Note the `<title>` tag above the browser toolbar, which also includes two of the keywords. We talk more about this tag in a later section of this chapter.

If you see no metatags in the page source for your own site, you may be in trouble. Certainly, that could account for poor results in search engines.

TECHNICAL STUFF

You can usually insert metatags and `<alt>` tags for photos quite easily if you use a content management system (CMS) to maintain your Web site or if you use blog software. If you don't, you may need to ask your programmer or Web developer for assistance.

Keeping up with keyword metatags

Though the `<keyword>` metatag, which lists your chosen search terms for a page, isn't absolutely essential for search engines, it helps you track keywords manually. This tag isn't visible to others while viewing pages; however, it's visible in the source code. Because different search engines truncate the `<keyword>` tag at different lengths, try to vary the position of search terms within the tag on different pages.

You have as many different ways to list search terms as there are search engine optimizers. Try these helpful guidelines:

✦ Make an alphabetical list of all your search terms in lowercase.

✦ Search engines ignore prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and punctuation; you can include them, but engines see the terms without them.

✦ Because simple plurals include singulars (*comets/comet*), use only the plurals. However, if the spelling of a plural changes its root, include both versions in your list (for example, *scarf/scarves* or *salary/salaries*).

✦ If your list is too long, stick with root words; for example, *photograph* covers *photographs, photography, photographer, photographers, photographed,* and *photographing.*

✦ Separate phrases with commas; commas don't matter to search engines, but they make reading easier for you.

✦ If words within a term must be kept together, put them between quotes — for example, "north dakota." Otherwise, search engines index words in any order. The term *red sneakers* is indexed in results even if someone enters the search term *sneakers red.*

✦ Put your unique words, such as your company or product name, at the end of the list. It doesn't matter as much if they're trimmed off because search engines will find your unique term anyway. Those terms are likely to appear so often on your site that you don't have to optimize for them.

✦ Pull out the four or five terms that will comprise the primary "set" of keywords for a particular page and put them at the beginning of the list.

Refer to Figure 2-4 to see how MSLresort.com handles the `<keyword>` tag on one page of its Web site.

REMEMBER

You can reuse the terms from the set assigned to your home page on multiple social media pages, so keep that set handy!

Tipping the scales with title tags

Perhaps the most important tag, `<title>` appears above the browser toolbar when users are on a Web site. A good `<title>` tag includes one or more keywords followed by your company name. Select one of more search terms from the "set" you've assigned to that particular page.

Because browsers may truncate the title tag display, place the search term first. Limit the title tag to seven to ten words and fewer than 70 characters. Once upon a long, long time ago, way back in the dinosaur age of the Internet, page names were used to index a Web site. That method is now unnecessary; it's an absolute waste of time to write a title tag with a phrase such as *home page* rather than a search term. It's almost as big a waste of time as having no title tag. The title tag that appears earlier, in Figure 2-4 (*Romantic Poconos Wedding Venue: Mountain Spring Lake Resort & Lodge*), is a good example.

REMEMBER

Google and other search engines dislike multiple pages with identical metatags. Changing the title tag on each page is one of the easiest ways to handle this preference. Simply pull another relevant search term from your list of keywords and insert it in front of the company name in the title tag.

Pumping up page description tags

The page description tag appears as several sentences below the link to each site in natural search results, as shown in Figure 2-5. Search engines display the first line of text when a page description tag isn't available.

Depending on the search engine, search engines may truncate description tags after 150 to 250 characters. Just in case, front-load the description with all the search terms from the set you've assigned to that page.

TIP

Why pass up a marketing opportunity? Just because your site appears near the top of search results, you have no guarantee that someone will click through to your site. Write your page description tag as though it were ad copy, including a benefits statement and a call to action. Figure 2-5 displays natural search results on Yahoo! with the page description for several other internal wedding pages from MSLresort.com. Note the inclusion of search terms from the keyword tag in Figure 2-4 (*wedding planners, wedding packages, pocono weddings, wedding locations*), the benefits statement (*Our wedding planners will customize a wedding package just for you*), and the call to action (*Enjoy*).

Figure 2-5:
The page description tag for several wedding pages on the Mountain Springs Lake resort site appears in the natural search results for *pocono wedding packages*.
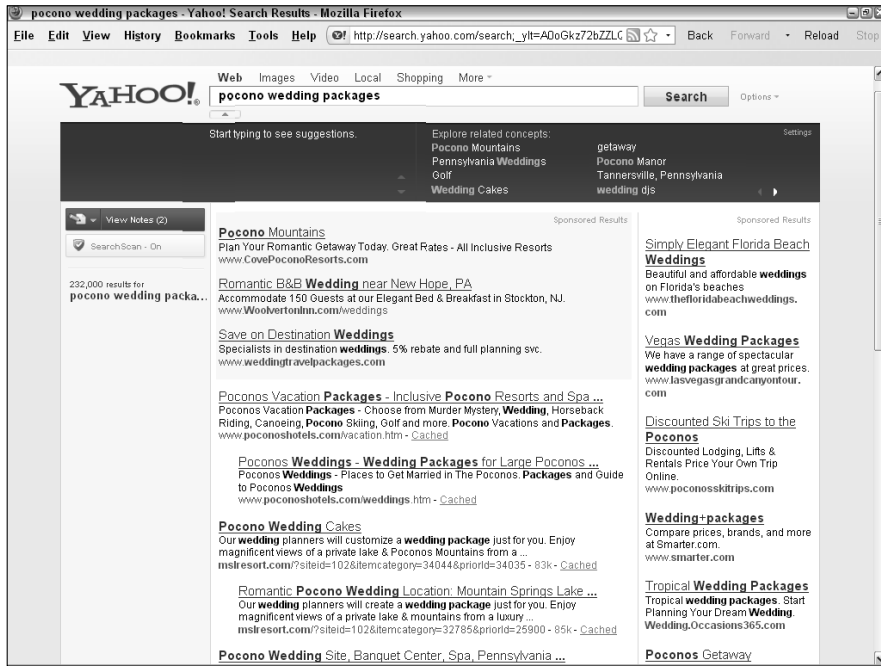
Working out with <alt> tags

An `<alt>` tag, which appears when a user hovers the mouse over an image, is not considered a metatag, because every image theoretically should have its own `<alt>` tag. Note the `<alt>` tag by the image of the couple shown earlier, in Figure 2-4.

Originally, the `<alt>` tag was designed to act as a picture caption read by speech synthesizers for visually impaired people. In addition, `<alt>` tags are another place to incorporate search terms. Although they aren't technically metatags, they offer similar benefits in terms of helping to improve your ranking in search results.

You can place an `<alt>` tag for every image. Because `<alt>` tags appear when someone hovers the mouse over an image (but only on PCs, not on Macintoshes), keep these tags fairly short so that they don't interfere with other content. Include one or two search terms per image from your set for each page (refer to Figure 2-3). The code for the `<alt>` tag (*A Poconos Mountain wedding resort*) that appears over the image of the bride looks like this:

```
<img width="200" src="http://beta.asoundstrategy.com/
   sitemaster/userUploads/site102/msl_wed_h1.jpg" alt="A
   Poconos Mountain wedding resort" border="0">
```

Optimizing Your Site and Content for Search Engines

Optimization is the process of adjusting your site, blog, or social media profiles to "play well" with search algorithms. It's done primarily by having plenty of relevant content, updating it often, and making sure that your Web presence is easy for general and on-site search engines to spider. I cover a few of the most important tricks of the trade in the following sections. For additional information on search engines and site optimization, check out some of the resources listed in Table 2-3.

Table 2-3   Search Engine and Optimization Resources

Name	*URL*	*Description*
Google Webmaster	`https://www.google.com/support/web masters/bin/answer.py?answer=35769`	Guidelines and suggestions for site optimization
LinkVendor	`www.linkvendor.com`	Suite of SEO tools
MarketingSherpa	`www.marketingsherpa.com/Search2010Excerpt.pdf`	Search Marketing Benchmark Report 2009-2010 (free excerpt)
Pandia Search Central	`www.pandia.com`	Search engine news
Search Engine Guide	`www.searchengineguide.com/marketing.html`	Search engine articles, blog, marketing
Search Engine Journal	`www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-best-practices-for-url-structure/7215`	Best practices for URLs
SearchEngineWatch.com (ClickZ)	`www.searchenginewatch.com`	Articles, tutorials, forums, blogs, SEO articles, and tips

Name	URL	Description
SEOmoz	www.seomoz.org	SEO resources, toolbar, blog, spam detector, membership
UrlTrends	www.urltrends.com	Suite of SEO tools and reports

Writing an optimized first paragraph

First and foremost, use the four or five search terms from each assigned set in the first paragraph of text on a page or the first paragraph of a blog posting (refer to Figure 2-3). Basically, most search engines don't check entire Web sites or blogs, so the engines continue until they reach a hard return or 200 words. That's too many words for a paragraph on the Web, so get those search terms in early.

TIP

There's nothing like on-site social media, such as a blog or forum, to generate keyword-rich content for search engines to munch on. Best of all, other folks are helping you feed the beast!

Figure 2-6 shows a well-optimized posting and its source code from the Changing Aging blog. Ecumen, a nonprofit organization specializing in senior housing and services, owns the blog. This entry at www.changingaging blog.org/posts/view/1272-boston-college-analysis-projects-seniors%27-long-term-care-costs includes the phrase *long term care* in its URL, post title, tags, categories, and text. The source code uses the same term in the title and keyword tags, and indicates that the Ecumen Changing Aging blog has both an XML site map and an RSS feed.

Don't try to force more than that set of terms into the paragraph. If another phrase or two from the keyword tag fit naturally, that's fine. Trying to cram more words into your text may render it unintelligible or jargon-loaded to human readers.

TECHNICAL STUFF

No matter where the first paragraph of text appears on the page, place the text near the top of the source code. The text should appear above any tags for images, video, or Flash.
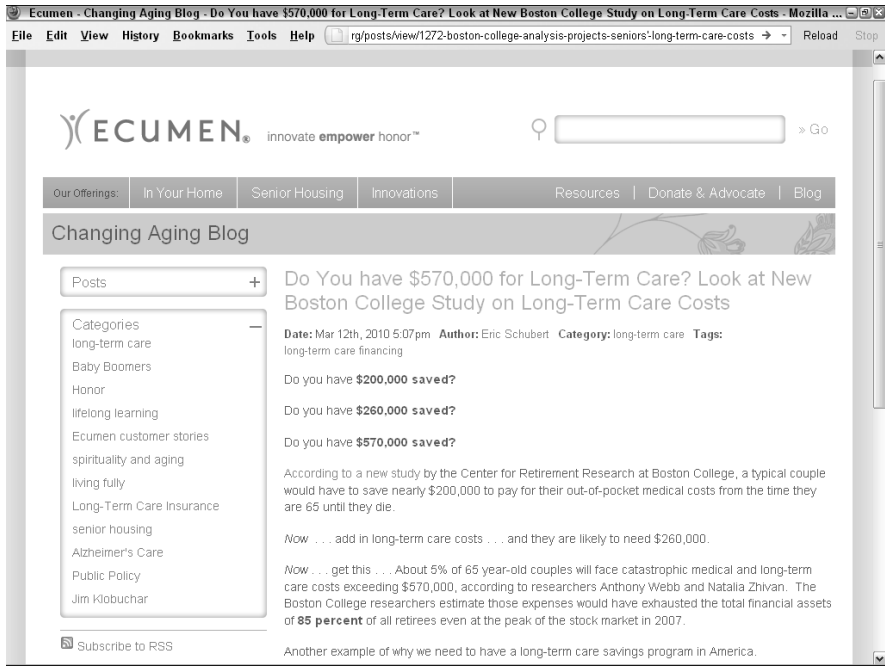
Figure 2-6: This blog post uses several keywords in its title, tags, categories, and text and includes an XML site map and RSS feed.
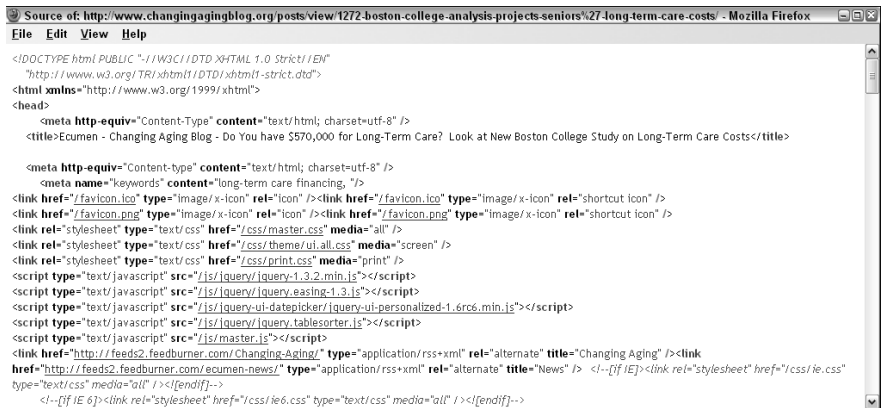
Updating often

Search engines, especially Google, love to see updated content. A sign that a Web site is loved and cared for, easily updated content is one of many reasons for having a blog or content management system on your site. If changing content is simple and free, you're more likely to do it.

At least once a month, change a paragraph of content on your site. Include this task on your Social Media Activity Calendar (see Book I, Chapter 3). If you can't commit to this task, at least ask your programmer to incorporate some kind of automatically updated material, whether it's a date-and-time stamp, a quote, or an RSS feed, for example.

TIP

If you follow no other search optimization tips in this chapter, make sure that you follow at least these two: Update often and optimize the first paragraph of text on every page.

Using search terms elsewhere on pages

Guess what? You score extra jelly beans in the relevance jar if your search terms appear in particular places on your Web site. Follow these tips to help optimize your Web page or blog for your selected set of search terms. If they don't work naturally, don't force them.

✦ **Links:** Use the words from your priority set of search terms as *text links* or *anchor text* (words that form an active link to another internal page or external site). Don't waste valuable real estate on meaningless phrases such as *Learn more* or *Click here.* They don't do a darn thing for your search ranking.

TIP

If a clickable image opens another page, such as a product detail page, add a clickable caption that includes a search term or the product name. Score some points!

✦ **Headings:** Headlines and subheads help organize text and assist readers who are skimming your copy for the information they want. Headings that include your search terms can also improve your search engine ranking.

Onscreen, these words usually appear in bold and in a larger font size or different color (or both) from the body copy.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Headings must carry the `<h1>` to `<h6>` tags that define HTML headings, rather than appear as graphics. Search engines can't "read" words embedded in a picture.

✦ **Navigation:** Search terms that appear as navigational items, whether for main or secondary pages, also earn extra relevance "jelly beans." As with headings, navigation must be in text form, not in graphic form.

Sometimes you have to weigh the design considerations or limitations of your CMS or blog against search engine optimization needs. Some designers prefer the greater control and flexibility of font styles available in a graphic. Ultimately, only you can decide what matters more to you.

WARNING! Under no circumstances should you implement *black hat* techniques, such as stuffing a page with keywords, hiding search terms in the same color as the background, installing "magic pixels," or using any other scam technique promoted as the search engine equivalent of a get-rich-quick scheme. These techniques might get you blacklisted from search engines.

Making your site search engine friendly

In addition to trying the techniques in the previous section, which apply at the page level, you can take specific actions to make your site, as a whole, friendly to search engines.

Avoiding elements that search engines hate

If you expect a search engine to rank your site or blog favorably, you have to give it something to work with. Computers may be getting smarter all the time, but they cannot yet "read" pictures, videos, or soundtracks, let alone minds. They need to be fed a rich diet of words. The list of search engine "detestables" is short, but they can all be avoided without harming your message.

✦ **Pictures:** As much as artists and photographers love pages without words, search engines hate them. Simple solutions can make your pictures search-engine friendly: provide an `<alt>` tag and/or caption; have text appear below the fold (as long as the text appears near the top of the code); or include a descriptive paragraph near the image. For an extra boost, include keywords in the filenames for photos.

✦ **Flash animations:** Whether developers provide Flash animation because it's lucrative or because their clients demand it, search engines detest it. A search engine has nothing to "grab on to" at an all-Flash site. Though you can now find some sneaky ways around this problem, your best bet is to incorporate Flash much as you would incorporate a video — as an element on a page, not as an entire page.

✦ **Frames:** This old-fashioned way (anything ten years old on the Internet is practically an antique) of controlling the appearance of pages lets you modify content within a box. Unfortunately, search engines cannot see anything inside a frame. Many alternatives now exist, from tables to cascading style sheets. If your developer insists on using frames, find a new developer.

✦ **Duplicate content:** Be sure to delete old versions of pages that have been replaced. Even if they sit in archives, search engines may try to index them and "ding" you for duplicate information.

✦ **Splash pages:** This misguided attempt to design a Web site as though it were a book with a cover does real harm to site traffic. Generally, a site loses half its audience every time a click is required. Why cut your prospect list in half before you even have a chance to explain your

benefits? Splash pages often consist of beautiful images or animations that make a statement about a company but carry no content or navigation.

Often found on sites of companies specializing in entertainment, Web development, architecture, arts and crafts, or graphic design, splash pages usually offer viewers an option to skip the introduction and an arrow cuing them to click to enter the "real" site.

The simple solution is to not include a splash page on your site. If you must, have an entry page with a nice graphical element that includes one paragraph of text (preferably filled with benefits) and primary navigation.

TECHNICAL STUFF

If you insist on having a splash or entry page, at least don't annoy your visitors. Direct the navigational link for *Home* to the main page of real content, not to the splash page. With a bit of clever naming, you may be able to get search engines to spider the first page of content and ignore the splash page.

Configuring URLs

The best URLs are readable and might include one of your search terms or a descriptive title: `www.yourdomain.com/social-media-small-businesses`. Using a search term from your set of keywords for your Web or blog page earns you another relevance "jelly bean." At least try to keep the URLs as readable text, as in `www.yourdomain.com/pages/socialmedia/article1234.htm`.

Problems with page URLs tend to occur when they're automatically assigned by a content management system or when the pages are created dynamically. Those URLs tend to look like gobbledygook: `www.yourdomain.com/shop/AS-djfa-16734-QETR`. Though search engines can review these URLs, they do nothing for your search engine ranking and aren't helpful to users.

Even worse are database-generated URLs or pages created on the fly that include multiple nonalphanumeric characters: `www.yourdomain.com/cgi-bin/shop.pl?shop=view_category=ASDFJ%20&subcategory=XYZ%6734`. Search engines are becoming less fussy than they used to be, but many still have problems indexing URLs that have more than four nonalphanumeric characters. (Hyphens and underscores are okay.) Some still have problems with only three such characters.

REMEMBER

Be careful when redesigning a blog or Web site, especially if you're changing developers or platforms. If the existing site is already doing well in search engines, try to preserve its URLs. Not all transitions to a new platform accommodate this strategy. Ask your programmer before you begin.

A badly configured URL is simply not indexed. This problem can become significant with product databases on e-commerce sites, especially when you want every individual product detail page to appear in search engines.

TECHNICAL STUFF

If your site is hosted on an Apache server, a technical fix exists. You (or your programmer) can implement the Apache Mod Rewrite Module, which converts URLs on the fly to a format that's search engine friendly. See `http://httpd.apache.org/docs/1.3/mod/mod_rewrite.html` for more information.

Indexing a site

You can easily create a virtual path to ensure that search engines crawl your entire site. This element is especially important in two cases:

✦ When the top and left navigational elements are graphics, making it impossible for search engines to know which pages are really on the site

✦ When you have a large, deep, database-driven site, without links to all pages easily available in the navigation

For a small site with graphical navigation, you have a simple fix: Create a parallel series of linkable main pages in the footer of your site, as shown in Figure 2-7. The linkable footer on each page of AirOnePhoto.com highlights key site pages and acts as a partial site index for search engines. Alternatively, create a navigational *breadcrumb trail* at the top of the page to help both search engines and human beings know where they are within your site structure.

A breadcrumb trail (think Hansel and Gretel) helps users track where they are on a complex Web site. It typically consists of a series of page links that extend horizontally across each page, just above the content. Breadcrumb trails, which may either display the site structure or the actual navigation path a user has followed, usually look something like this:

```
Home page > Main section page > Internal page > Detail page
```

TECHNICAL STUFF

Put these links in a server-side include (SSI) within the footer to ensure that links are displayed consistently on all pages. You then make future changes in only one place (other than in the site itself, of course).

For a site with a significant number of pages, especially on several tiers, the best solution is to include a linkable site map or site index, shown in Figure 2-8. It may look a lot like a junior high school outline, which is a perfectly fine solution for both search engine friendliness and site usability.

Figure 2-7:
The footer on this Web site highlights pages and acts as a partial site index.

Figure 2-8:
A linkable site index page provides easy access to all pages on the site.

Another solution exists for very large database-driven sites and large stores. Sitemap (XML) feeds directly to Google, Yahoo!, and Bing provide current content to all your pages. Direct your programmer to `www.xml-sitemaps.com`, `www.antezeta.com/yahoo/site-map-feed.html`, or `www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/topic.py?topic=8476` for more information. If nothing changes often, these feeds can be updated manually every month. If you have continually changing inventory and other content, have your programmer upload these feeds automatically, at least once a day, using RSS.

If you want to index your site to see what pages you have, try one of these free tools:

✦ **Yahoo! Site Explorer,** `https://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com`: Enter your domain name and then click Status and then the Explore button.

✦ **Xenu's Link Sleuth,** `http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html`: Download and run this link verification program. In the results, click the Site Map of Valid HTML Pages with a Title link.

Minimizing download time

Google now includes download time in its methods for ranking Web sites in search results. Companies continue to post pages that take too long to download, testing viewers' patience and occasionally overloading their Internet service provider's (ISP's) facilities. Perhaps it's a case of content expanding to fit the bandwidth available.

Try to keep sites to less than 70KB to 80KB per page, even though many users now have high-speed connections such as DSL and cable. High-resolution photos are usually the main culprits when a page is too large. It isn't the number of photos, but rather the total size of files on a page that counts. A couple of tips can help reduce the size of your page:

✦ When saving photos to use online, choose the Save for Web menu option. Stick to JPEG or GIF files, which work well online, and avoid TIFF and BMP files that are intended for print.

✦ Post a thumbnail with a click-to-view action for the larger version in a pop-up window. Be sure to save the larger image for the Web (refer to the first bullet).

Check the download size and time for your home page for free at sites such as `www.websiteoptimization.com/services/analyze` or `www.gomez.com/instant-test-pro`. Call your developer if changes are needed.

Building Effective Inbound Links

An *inbound link* from another site to your Web site, blog, or social media page acts as a recommendation. Its presence implicitly suggests that visitors to the original site might find useful content on yours. Testimonial links are particularly important for social media, where they are measured in rating stars, number of views, retweets, "likes," and "favorites." These recommendations enhance credibility and build traffic, as they encourage other viewers to visit your original post.

Conversely, an *external link* goes from your page to someone else's, providing the same referral function. All these links form a web of connections in cyberspace. A site may require a *reciprocal link* back to its site before it will post one to yours.

It sounds simple. However, identifying places that will link to yours and getting them to post the link can be quite time-consuming.

Why bother? Although all search engines track the number of sites that link to yours, Google (and only Google) uses the number and quality of these inbound links to determine your position on search engine results pages. In essence, Google runs the world's largest popularity contest, putting to shame every high school's search for a prom king and queen.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Sometimes companies link to `http://yourdomain.com` and sometimes to `http://www.yourdomain.com`. Search engines consider them separate pages and may not give full credit for your inbound links. Do a permanent 301 redirect from one to the other. (Google likes www domains better.) Alternatively, you can accomplish this task from Google Webmaster Central, but it applies to only Google.

Google PageRank

The popularity contest is truly an apt metaphor for Page Rank because not all inbound links are equal in the eyes of Google. Links from `.edu` and `.org` domains carry extra credit, as do links you receive from other sites that Google ranks as having good content and good traffic. Think of them as votes from the in crowd. Google factors these parameters, and others, into its proprietary PageRank algorithm. For more information, see `www.google.com/corporate/tech.html`.

The algorithm ranks pages on an earthquake-style scale from 0 to 10. (Google is 10; *The New York Times* is 9.) Empirically speaking, a Google PageRank of 5 is usually enough to place your site on the first page of search results — with no guarantees, of course. Figure 2-9 shows the Google PageRank tool in action. You can download the Google toolbar with the PageRank display from `www.google.com/toolbar`.
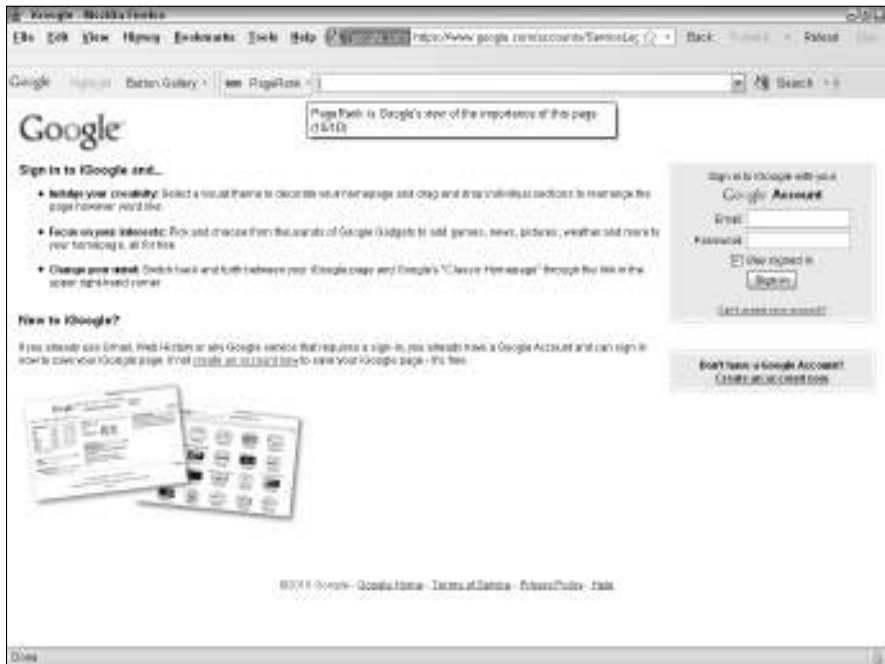
Figure 2-9:
Google has
a PageRank
of 10.

Screenshot © Google Inc. Used with permission.

If you're serious about SEO, install the Google PageRank tool on your browser so that you can quickly check the PageRank of your own site or blog and that of your competitors. Follow these steps:

1. **Download the Google toolbar at `www.google.com/toolbar` and install it.**

   The PageRank tool doesn't automatically appear on the toolbar, so you must enable it.

2. **Choose View⇨Toolbars⇨Google Toolbar. If that option is not already checked, do so.**

   The Google toolbar should now be visible.

3. **Click the Wrench icon to open the Toolbar Options dialog box.**

   If you don't see the Wrench icon in the Google Toolbar, right-click any option on the toolbar.

4. **From the Tools tab, select the PageRank check box and click Save.**

   You now see the PageRank tool on the Google toolbar (refer to Figure 2-9). Its specific location and size depend on how you have personalized your toolbar.

To see the page rank for a Web site, enter its domain name into the address box on your browser and wait for the page to load. Hover your mouse over the page rank tool until the box with page rank results appears below the toolbar.

TIP

To check page rank for multiple competitors' sites at once, try the free tool at www.cascandra.com/web-tools/multiple-pagerank-checker.

Knowing what makes a good inbound link

In a nutshell, good inbound links (sometimes called backlinks) come from sites that have these characteristics:

✦ **Relevance:** The quickest way to determine relevance is to see whether the other site shares a search term or tag with your site.

✦ **A decent amount of traffic:** Check www.alexa.com or www.quantcast.com to estimate traffic on other sites.

✦ **Your target market:** Whether or not a link helps with PageRank, links from other appropriate sites help with branding and deliver qualified traffic to your site.

✦ **A good Google PageRank:** Look for a score of 5 or higher in the PageRank tool. Higher-ranking sites, which often themselves have high traffic volume and good content value, are considered more credible references; they pass along *link juice* from their site to yours.

Links are search engine specific, so lists of inbound links differ on different search engines. Because Google "counts" only sites with a high PageRank, the list on Google is always the shortest.

TIP

To see your own or others' inbound links on a particular engine, enter link:http://yourdomainname.com (where yourdomainname.com is replaced by your own domain name) in the search term box for Yahoo! or Google.

Hunting for elusive links

No matter how hard you try, it's hard to find a good link to your Web site or blog. Use link-checking tools such as LinkPopularity.com or Alexa (www.alexa.com), shown in Figure 2-10, and the other tools listed in Table 2-4.

Figure 2-10: For each site it indexes, Alexa displays a list of not only inbound links but also "related links," such as these for the Taos Vacation Guide.
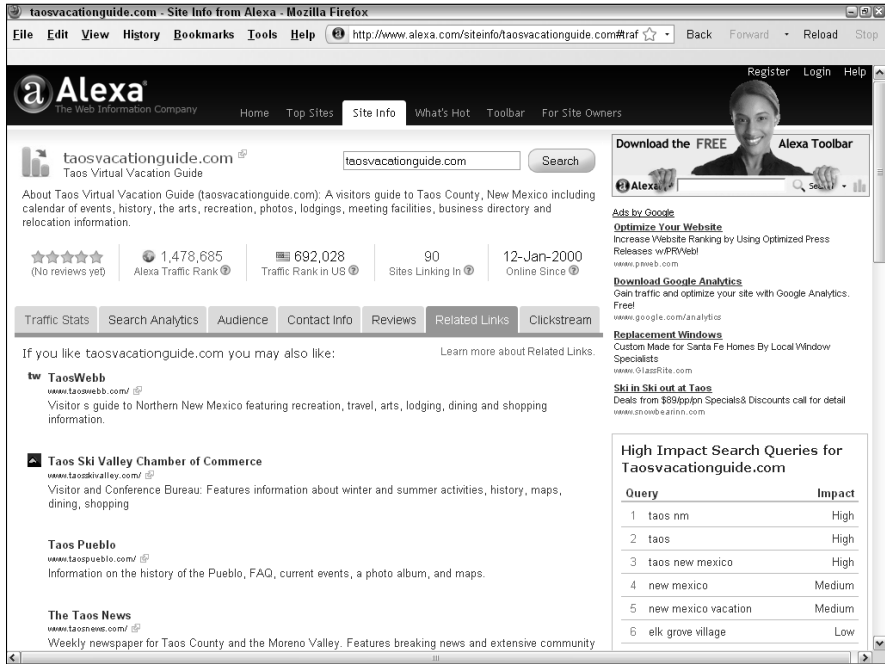
Table 2-4	Free Inbound Link Resources	
Name	*URL*	*Description*
Alexa	www.alexa.com	Link checker, related links, clickstream, and more
Ezine Articles	http://ezinearticles.com/?Top-5-Ways-to-Get-Inbound-Links&id=233380	Tips on link campaigns
Internet Public Library	www.ipl2.org/IPL/Finding?Key=search+engine+directories&button.x=49&button.y=12	Directory of search engines
LinkPopularity.com	http://linkpopularity.com	Link checker for Google, Bing, and Yahoo!
Majestic-SEO	www.majesticseo.com	Check backlinks and history on other sites in bulk

Name	URL	Description
Page Inlink Analyzer	`http://ericmiraglia.com/inlink/`	Check backlinks plus tags and bookmarks on Delicious
Search Engine Colossus	`www.searchenginecolossus.com`	Directory of international search engines
Search Engine Guide	`www.searchengineguide.com/searchengines.html`	Meta-index of topical search engines
Webmaster Toolkit	`http://webmaster-toolkit.com/link-popularity-checker.shtml`	Link checker for multiple engines
WhoLinksToMe	`http://wholinkstome.com`	Backlink analysis and link buidling tools

You can hunt for potential links in a few tried-and-true places:

✦ Inbound links to other sites that rank highly in Google on your search terms

   Be sure that your company truly has something in common with the other. Shared terms may not be enough — there's a big difference between companies that run a fish restaurant and those that sell lead-free weights for catching fish.

✦ Inbound links to your competitors' sites

✦ "Related link" sites at `www.alexa.com` for your competitors or highly ranked sites that share your share terms

✦ The resource lists of outbound links found on competitors' sites or other highly ranked sites

✦ Industry-based business directories

✦ Yellow Pages and map sites

✦ Local business directories

✦ Blog-specific directories

✦ Trade associations and other organizations you belong to or sponsor

✦ Suppliers, including your Web development and hosting company

✦ Sites owned by distributors, clients, customers, or affiliates

✦ *Meta-indices* (sites with master lists of directories), some of which appear in Table 2-4

- ✦ Cross-links with all your social media sites, even though some of these do not help with PageRank.

- ✦ Exchange a link in your *blogroll* with other, well-ranked blogs

- ✦ Related but not directly competing businesses that your target audience might also visit

REMEMBER

Prequalify every potential link. Visit every link site to ensure that it accepts links and is truly relevant and that it has a Google PageRank of 5 or higher and represents the quality and audience you want.

WARNING!

Stay away from *link farms* (sites that exist only to sell links); *Web rings* (a closed loop of companies that agree to link to each other); and *gray-market link sites* (sites that sell links at exorbitant prices and guarantee a certain result). Your site can be exiled from search engines for using them. Besides, they don't raise your PageRank!

Implementing your link campaign

Try for at least 50 links and hope that 30 of them come through. There's no upper limit — the more, the better.

You might want to create a spreadsheet to track link requests. Create columns for these elements:

- ✦ Domain name

- ✦ Appearance URL

- ✦ Submission URL or e-mail address

- ✦ Submission date

- ✦ URL of the landing page you asked others to link to

- ✦ Reciprocal link requirement

- ✦ Date you checked to see whether a link was posted

Don't be afraid to group spreadsheet rows by target market. For instance, if you sell products for toddlers, you might have a group of links for sites used by single parents and another group for sites used by daycare centers.

TIP

Break this task into bite-size pieces so that it doesn't become overwhelming. On your Social Marketing Activity Calendar (found in Book I, Chapter 3), limit the search-and-submission task to only five to ten links per week.

After you qualify prospective links and add them to your spreadsheet, follow the directions on each site to submit your URL or e-mail your request to the site owner.

Getting inbound links from social bookmarks and social news services

Leverage your social marketing activities to increase the number of inbound links to your site. If it's permissible, post your site to some of the social bookmarking, shopping, and news services described in Book II, Chapter 3. (Not all social bookmarks allow you to submit your own site, so you may need to ask a friend to help.) You're generally required to include either your domain name or a specific page URL with your submission.

These links encourage both inbound links and traffic. Some of these sites pass link juice, especially if you have multiple links from social news sites back to different news stories or content on your main site. For more information, see Book II, Chapter 3.

Just as with inbound link campaigns for search engines, don't link everything from social bookmarking, news, or shopping services to your home page. For example, multiple product recommendations on social shopping sites should link to the appropriate product detail pages in your store.

TIP

Cross-link by submitting especially good blog entries to several social news services or by linking from one product recommendation to another on social shopping sites or from one review site to another.

Reaping other links from social media

Another easy way to build inbound links is by distributing (syndicating) content as described in the previous chapter. By re-purposing content on multiple social media sites, you not only increase your audience but also increase the number of inbound links.

Taking advantage of the many places to post links on social media pages will not only drive traffic to multiple elements of your Web presence but also improve your search engine rankings in the process.

REMEMBER

Somewhere on your Web site or blog — at least on the About Us or Contact page — display a list of links to all your profiles on social media services. Search engines can't see graphical links such as the Follow Us *chiclets* (those ubiquitous rectangular Facebook and Twitter icons, for example). They're useful for people, but not for search engines.

You can also repeat text links to your social media pages in your linkable footer.

✦ Every profile on a social network has a place to enter at least your Web address and blog address, if you have one. If possible, link to both. The links in profiles usually provide link juice, although the ones in status updates usually do not.

✦ Include your Web address when you make comments on other people's blogs, post reviews on recommendation sites, or submit someone else's news story. You may have to work it into the content. Use at least your company e-mail address@yourdomain.com for branding reasons!

✦ Include your company name for branding and your Web address for linking when you post to groups on any social networking site, as long as it's appropriate, relevant, and not too self-promotional.

WARNING!

Read the Terms of Service on each site to be sure that you comply with requirements for use of e-mail addresses, submissions, and links.

✦ Post events on LinkedIn, MySpace, Facebook, and elsewhere with a link to your site for more information.

✦ Include a Social Sharing button, described in Book II, Chapter 3, to encourage additional distribution. People who receive content they like often pass it along or link to it from their own pages or blogs.

✦ Be sure to post cross-links on all your social media profiles to all your other Web pages, including to your primary site and your blog.

REMEMBER

Now that social media are included in ordinary search results, using search terms consistently can help you occupy more than one slot in search engine results pages. This strategy works well for The Brooklyn Kitchen, shown in Figure 2-11. The WordPress blog and Yelp review, as well as its Web site and store links, help The Brooklyn Kitchen occupy four of the top five results. Search results are shown at the top, and the Web site is shown at the bottom.

Creating a resource page for outbound links

One item to include when optimizing your site for search engines is a Link Resources page, by that name or any other, for external or outbound links.

You need this page in order to post reciprocal links to other sites but also to help viewers find useful, neutral information on .edu, .gov, and .org domains. Nestling reciprocal links within an annotated list of informational sites makes reciprocal links less noticeable and less self-serving. Good ideas for neutral links are described in this list:
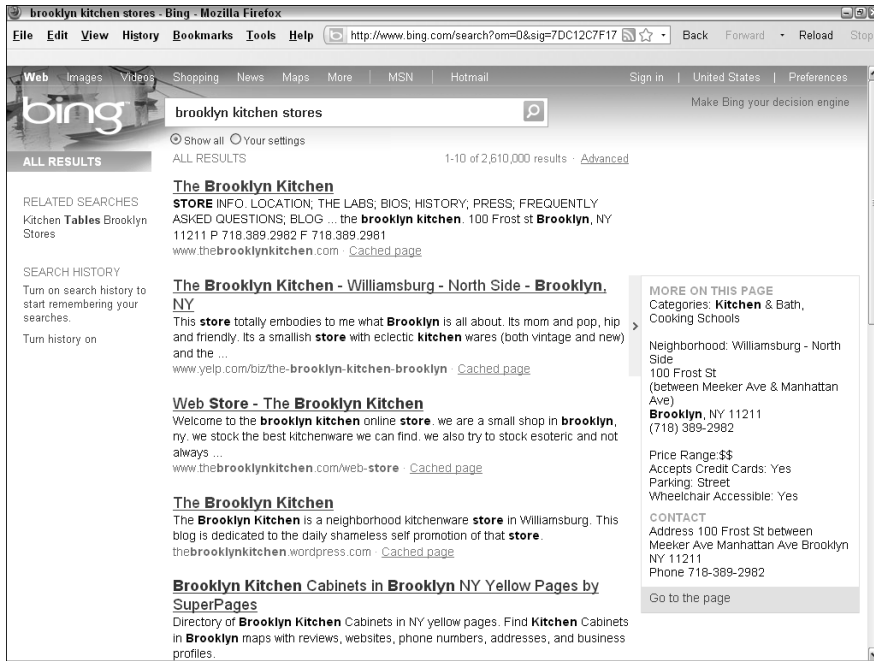
Figure 2-11:
Social media are included in Bing search results for *brooklyn kitchen store.*

Courtesy The Brooklyn Kitchen

✦ Sites with information about materials used in your products or how to care for them

✦ Educational sites discussing the services you provide, such as feng shui for offices, the benefits of massage, or tips on tax deductions

✦ Trade associations and other business organizations to which you belong

✦ Local, state, and federal government sites whose regulations or procedures may affect your business or customers

✦ Nonprofit sites that share your values; for example, sites talking about recycling electronics or supporting entrepreneurs in developing countries

✦ Sites that talk about the history of your business or industry or the local history of your brick-and-mortar storefront

✦ Other sites that may interest visitors to your site; for example, a hotel site that links to a local dining guide or events calendar

New Mexico Community Capital, for example, links to helpful sites at `www.nmccap.org/Learn_and_Engage/Industry_Links` (see Figure 2-12).

Figure 2-12: New Mexico Community Capital offers visitors helpful links to other sites.

Risking the personalized search

All bets are off with personalized search, one of Google's more problematical recent ideas. Google now defaults to a customized list of search results based on an individual's past searches and the results she clicked. In theory, these search results, derived either from a browser cookie or Web history, are continuously refined to become more relevant to users' needs.

In practice, that relevance is debatable; users tend to see results that are "more of the same," distorting the reality of what's out there and reducing the likelihood of receiving new information.

Users must take a distinct action to turn off personalized search by clicking the Web History link in the upper-right corner of any Google search results page and then toggling

the Disable Customizations Based on Search Activity option. Most users don't even know that personalized search exists, let alone how to turn it off or how to delete repeatedly occurring, undesirable sites from results to make room for new ones. (The latter option requires logging into your Google account to personalize settings for your Web History.)

Unfortunately, the algorithm for personalized search tends to produce results reflecting a philosophy of "Them that has, gets." Your Web site may have more difficulty breaking through to new prospects or achieving a presence on the first page of some individuals' search results. Unfortunately, you can do nothing about it. Whether users who see your site are more qualified as prospects and more likely to buy remains to be seen.

TIP

A good starting place for neutral outbound links is to see related links for a high-ranked competitor. Enter its domain name into the search field on Alexa; then click the Get Details button on the results. On the ensuing page, click the Related Links tab. Also look under Resources by Subject at the Internet Public Library (`www.ipl2.org/div/subject`).

Optimizing Social Media for Search Engines

Here's the good news: Everything we've covered in this chapter about using SEO for your Web site or blog applies to other social media too. Whew! You still have to implement the techniques, but you can save time by reusing search terms, metatags, inbound links, and optimized text.

REMEMBER

Every search engine has its own rules. You may need to tweak your terms for not only general search engines but also internal search engines on specific social media services.

Placing your search terms on social media

Start by reviewing your research for keywords and phrases. Decide on a primary set of four to six terms that best describe your company. Because your search terms must still relate to your content, you may want to reuse other sets for individual posts from your SEO research, mix them up, or include additional terms not optimized on your primary site.

You can place these terms in many locations:

✦ **Tags:** Tags are the social media equivalents of keywords. Because many social media services place a limit on the number of tags, pick a few from your primary set of search terms and select others (for example, brands, products, market, or competition) from your secondary list or elsewhere that are specific to your content.

If you're pulling tags out of thin air, remember to confirm which synonyms are most popular with the users of that service. For example, do people search for *Barack* or *Obama* or *president?* Use a keyword selection tool for Web sites listed earlier in this chapter (refer to Table 2-2) or check the tag cloud, discussed earlier in this chapter, on the service you're using for the latest trends in tag usage.

✦ **Profiles:** Just about every form of social media asks you to establish an account. Most profiles ask for a brief description of your company and location as well as the URLs for your Web site and blog. Work your primary set of keywords and brands into your profile and any other place you can comfortably integrate them, including featured products, department names, marketing tagline, and staff bios.

Occasionally, a service requests only your e-mail address. Of course, you use the one with your domain name in it.

If you haven't already set up e-mail to forward from `you@yourdomain.com` to whatever e-mail address you have from your ISP, do so now. Most hosting packages include at least five free e-mail addresses. E-mail from `@yourdomain.com` not only makes you look more professional but also adds to brand value.

✦ **Page content, status updates, and comments:** Obviously, you should include search terms in the first paragraph of text for each blog post. They don't need to be part of your primary set of terms, so you have some creative flexibility. Incorporate search terms in updates and comments, too, to increase the likelihood of being found in on-site search results.

✦ **Metatags, titles, and headlines:** Use search terms from your list in the title of your blog or page name; in the title of your post; in `<alt>` tags, captions, or descriptions for images; and within metatags. Each service handles these elements a little differently, as we discuss in the sections on individual services.

TIP

Duplicate content can reduce rankings on search engines. If you use a service such as Ping.fm to update everything at one time, you may pay a bit of a penalty. Because SEO is only one of the online marketing arrows in your quiver, you might not want to worry about duplicate content until your social media campaigns take off. Only you can weigh the pros and cons based on your available time, staffing levels, and campaign objectives.

Optimizing blogs

Because blogs (discussed in Book III, Chapter 2), are basically Web sites in a different format, the same principles of site optimization and configuration apply, including the need for inbound links and cross-promotion on social media services. Hard-learned lessons and best practices truly pay off because search engines crawl frequently updated blogs at least daily. Oh, frabjous day!

REMEMBER

Integrate your domain name with your blog URL or buy a separate, related domain name (`yourblog.yourdomain.com` or `yourcompanyblog.com`), even if a third-party server hosts your blogs. For SEO purposes, you must own your own blog domain name. A blog at `www.MyCompanyBlog.blogspot.com` or `www.TypePad.com/MyCompanyBlog` isn't acceptable.

Blogs are primo link bait. The casual sharing of relevant, text-based links within posts, the use of *blogrolls* (bloggers' linkable recommendations of other blogs), and related thematic material attract inbound links like black jackets attract white cat fur. With all that link juice, plus rapidly updated content, many blogs quickly zoom to page one in search engine results.

REMEMBER

Review all requests for inclusion on your blog roll or reciprocal link offers. Make sure that the requesting site is relevant, has a decent page rank, and is one that you feel good about recommending.

Different blog platforms operate somewhat differently, leading to some confusion on the part of bloggers trying to optimize sites for search engines. Whatever your platform, the same methods you follow for Web sites still apply, with a multitude of additions:

✦ Include keywords from your primary list in your blog name. such as `YourCompany.com/social_media_blog`. The blog name should appear with an HTML `<h1>` tag on only the front page. On other pages of your blog, the heading level can be as low as `<h3>`.

✦ Include keywords in individual titles for each post. Use these keywords in the title metatag in the source code for that entry, as well as in the page URL. Put those titles at the HTML `<h1>` level.

✦ Include primary keywords in the first sentence of content, which becomes the description metatag by default, unless you write one manually. Use your secondary keywords in the body of your post.

✦ Fill out the tag box with your keywords.

✦ Incorporate search terms in anchor text for links on your blog.

✦ Use `<alt>` tags, captions, and descriptions with search terms for any images or media you upload to your blog.

✦ Post rich, appealing content with search terms regularly and often.

✦ Make sure search engines can spider your blog easily by including a side navigation column on all pages, and offering access to archives and previous posts from all pages of your blog.

✦ Include a linkable, keyword-loaded, breadcrumb trail.

✦ Provide internal text links to your own related posts.

✦ Submit your blog to blog directories and RSS submission sites. An excellent list is at `www.masternewmedia.org/rss/top55`.

✦ Use your blogroll as a source to request a backlink or reciprocal appearance on other people's blogrolls; just having a blogroll is not enough.

✦ Get backlinks to your blog with *trackbacks* (automated way of notifying other bloggers that you've referenced their blog) or by posting comments on other blogs. Not all blogging hosts support trackbacks. See Book III, Chapter 2 for more information.

✦ Create an XML site map and submit it to search engines, just as you would for your Web site.

✦ Use *permalinks* (permanent links) to maintain blog URLs permanently.

✦ Use analytics tools to monitor traffic and user behavior.

If you need quick suggestions for good blog keywords, install the free tool at `http://labs.wordtracker.com/seo-blogger`. It sits next to your blog editor on the screen so that you can consider keyword suggestions as you write.

Long blog pages, with lots of responses, may end up with too many links. You can place an HTML `nofollow` attribute in the code just before links from comments.

Optimizing WordPress

Although WordPress automatically optimizes titles for search engines and generates metatags, you may want to tweak the automated SEO results for important posts. Autogeneration is fine for mundane posts or when you're short on time.

For more flexibility and additional optimization features, try the All in One SEO Pack at `http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/all-in-one-seo-pack`.

Make your overall WordPress life easier by reviewing the entire list of plug-ins at `http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins`.

Here are a few things you can do to optimize your WordPress blog posts:

✦ **Swap elements of the blog post title.** Reverse the WordPress default arrangement by putting the post title first, which contains keywords, followed by the name of your blog.

✦ **Use a consistent format for keyword-rich page titles on all pages.** You can set up the format once in your template and apply it everywhere by using the All in One SEO Pack plug-in.

✦ **Insert a longer title description, with more search terms, into the image title field.** WordPress automatically uses the title you give an image as its `<alt>` tag. Insert a longer title description with more search terms into the image title field.

When you write a post and add tags, WordPress automatically adds your tags to its global tag system. The global system determines the WordPress list of hot topics in real time. Users can click any word in the real-time cloud tag to view the most recent posts for that tag.

WordPress, like other blogs, often duplicates content by showing the same posts on archive, author, category, index, and tag pages. To remove duplicate content, which can have a negative effect on SEO, create a `robots.txt` file. See `http://sixrevisions.com/wordpress/optimizing-wordpress-for-search-engines`.

Optimizing Blogger

Contrary to myth, Google doesn't necessarily give preference to blogs hosted on its own service, Blogger. However, Blogger poses some unique advantages and challenges:

✦ Blogger templates place `<h1>` through `<h6>` tags into the source code automatically, thereby helping with SEO. You can easily adjust page titles and blog names for the correct heading level in page templates.

✦ Blogger lacks theme-related categories, which makes it a little more difficult for you and for theme-based SEO. To overcome that problem, create permalinks that include your categories or directory names. We discuss permalinks in the next section.

✦ Because Blogger doesn't provide a related-links feature, create that list of related text links within or at the bottom of each post. These links should open your other postings on the same topic. Or, take advantage of unlimited sidebar space to create a separate section for related links above your blogroll.

✦ Blogger defaults to weekly archiving, but the timeframes for archiving are malleable. Adjust the timeframe based on your volume of posts and comments to maintain good keyword density. If you post only weekly, it might make more sense to archive monthly. For an extremely active blog, you might want to archive daily.

✦ Creating text links is easy, so use your keywords in links whenever possible.

Assigning permalinks

Because most blogs are created on dynamic, database-driven platforms, their posts don't have fixed Web addresses. Links to individual posts disappear after the posting is archived and no longer available on a page. Obviously, that's bad news for inbound links and SEO.

Permalinks (short for *perma*nent *links*) solve that problem by assigning a specific Web address to each post. Then individual posts can be bookmarked or linked to from elsewhere, forever.

Most blog software programs, like WordPress, already offer this option; you just have to use it. If your blog doesn't offer it, you can generate permalinks at `www.generateit.net/mod-rewrite`, though you may need help from your programmer to install them. Try to avoid links that look like this: `www.yourblog.com/?p=123`. Instead, choose an option to use one or more keywords, such as `www.yourblog.com/contests/summer-travel-sweepstakes`.

To generate WordPress permalinks, open the Settings option in the Admin panel. From there, select the Permalinks panel and choose a common option or enter your own. (For example, you might want to insert a category.) For new blogs, that's it; for existing blogs, you may need to use the Redirection Plug-in as well. For more information, see `http://codex.wordpress.org/Using_Permalinks`. Permalinks on Blogger.com are a little more complicated. Go to `www.google.com/support/blogger/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=41436` for directions.

Optimizing images, video, and podcasts

Because search engines can't directly parse the contents of multimedia, you must take advantage of all opportunities to use your relevant search terms in every metatag, descriptive field, or `<alt>` tag. You'll find more about podcasts in Book III, Chapter 3 and about video in Book III, Chapter 4.

Make these fields as keyword- and content-rich as you can. In these elements you can often use existing keyword research, metatags from your Web site or blog, or optimized text that you've already created:

✦ **Title and title metatag:** This catchy name includes a search term.

✦ **Filenames:** Using names such as `image1234.jpg` or `podcast1.mp3` doesn't help with SEO as much as `PlushBrownTeddyBear.jpg` or `tabbycats-sing-jingle-bells.mp3` do. Use terms also in category or directory names.

✦ **Tags:** Use relevant keywords, just as you would with other social media.

✦ **`<alt>` tags:** Use these tags for a short description with a search term; for example, *Used cat tree for sale*.

✦ **Long description metatags:** Follow this example: `longdesc=for sale-gently used, gray, carpeted 6 foot cat tree with 4 platforms`.

✦ **Content:** Surround multimedia elements with keyword-rich, descriptive content.

✦ **Transcriptions:** Transcribe and post a short excerpt from a keyword-loaded portion of your video or podcast.

✦ **Anchor text:** Use keywords in the text link that opens your multimedia file.

✦ **Large images:** Upload large versions as well as the thumbnails that are visible on your blog or Web site.

✦ **RSS and XML:** Expand your reach with media RSS and site maps.

For more information on indexing multimedia, see `www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=114016`.

TIP

Even though search engines can't read watermarks, you may want to mark both videos and large images with your domain name and logo to encourage visits and for branding purposes.

Optimizing Twitter

In addition to adhering to the standard admonishments about providing good content and using well-researched keywords, you can follow a few extra guidelines to improve your ranking in search results on both internal Twitter searches and on external searches:

✦ **Your name on Twitter acts like a title tag.** If you want to benefit from branding and to rank on your own or your company name, you have to use it! If you haven't already done this, log in to your Twitter account and click the Settings link. Then change your name.

✦ **Your username, or Twitter *handle*, should relate to your brand, company name, or campaign and be easy to remember.** It can include a keyword or topic area. Change it in the Settings area.

✦ **Pack your one-line bio with keywords.** Your Twitter bio serves as the description metatag and is limited to 160 characters. Use résumé-style language and include some of your primary search terms. Talk about yourself or your company in the third person. Click Settings on the top right of the page, then click the Profile tab in the navigation bar. Complete the Bio box.

✦ **On the same Profile page, use your business address as your location.** (Or click the Settings link and then the Profile tab to modify.) Doing so helps with local searches. Remember to save your changes.

✦ **Collect Twitter followers.** Essentially internal, inbound links on Twitter. They carry special value if your followers themselves have a large number of followers. As the Twitter variant of link popularity, a good follower count may improve your PageRank.

✦ **Include keywords in your tweets and retweets whenever possible.** With the 140-character limit, Twitter might be a good place to use those single-word terms.

Use keywords in your Twitter #hashtags, too.

✦ **Remember the importance of the initial 42 characters of a tweet.** They serve as the title tag for that post. Your account name will be part of that count. Search engines will index the full tweet, however.

✦ **Format your retweets.** Keep them under 120 characters so there's room for someone to add their retweet information at the front. When you re-tweet, avoid sending duplicate content by changing the message a bit.

✦ **Maximize retweets as a measure of popularity.** Write interesting content or share good articles, especially when the direct link to detailed content goes to your own site.

✦ **Increase your visibility.** Link to your Twitter profile from other sites using your name or company name as the link text, rather than your @ Twitter address or Twitter handle.

Because Twitter adds a `nofollow` attribute to links placed by users, linking to your site doesn't help with PageRank. Truncated URLs (such as the TinyURLs described in Book II, Chapter 1) behave just like their longer-version cousins because they're permanent redirects.

However, links from Twitter still boost branding and drive traffic to your site. More traffic to your site improves your ranking at Alexa (`www.alexa.com`), which in turn improves one of the quality factors Google uses for setting PageRank. It's all one giant loop.

For more information on Twitter, see Book IV.

Optimizing Facebook

Take advantage of myriad opportunities to gain traffic from your Facebook pages by applying optimization techniques. Next to blogs, Facebook pages offer the highest number of opportunities to use SEO on social media to reach people who don't already know you. Fortunately, Facebook search engines can index all shared content on Facebook.

REMEMBER

Every social network has different rules for its account names and profiles. Though consistency is preferable for branding purposes, follow the rules carefully.

Try these techniques when you first create your business page:

✦ On the initial login page at www.facebook.com, click the Create a Page for a Celebrity, Band, or Business link. If you already have a personal account, scroll down any of your pages all the way to the bottom and click the Create a Page for My Business link. Either option takes you to www.facebook.com/pages/create.php. (If you create your business page from your personal page, you're automatically listed as the Administrator for the page.)

✦ Use an easy-to-remember version of your business name alone or combined with a search term as your Facebook business page name. If possible, use the same username on both Twitter and Facebook for branding reasons. Facebook doesn't like generic names.

   Once you have at least 25 people connected to your page, you can claim a username as your own at www.facebook.com/username, instead of seeing a long string of numbers in your Facebook URL. After you select a name, you cannot change it.

✦ Once your business page has been created, click on the Info tab and then on the pencil icon to Edit Information. You will see two gray bars with triangle icons: Basic Information and Detailed Information. Click the triangle on Basic Information to enter the date of founding and Save. Then click the triangle to expand Detailed Information. You'll see four boxes: Website, Company Overview, Mission, and Products. All boxes expand so you can enter all essential information.

✦ Under Websites, list all your relevant domain names, including your blog and other social media pages. Later, you can also place links to your Web site or blog or another type of social media within your page stream. Generally, it's easier to use the actual URL.

✦ Place keyword-loaded content in the first paragraph of each of the remaining boxes, all of which help with on-site product searches. Include your address and contact information in the Company Overview box; address information also helps with local searches. Your page

description metatag may work well in the Mission box since it is already optimized for search terms. Be sure to include all your brand names and all the products or services that you offer in the Products box.

✦ As with Twitter, popularity matters. The more Facebook fans you have, the more internal links you have to your own page. Even better, when fans comment on or recommend your content, Google sees reciprocal links between your page and your fans' pages, which may increase your PageRank.

✦ More search term opportunities abound in the Static FBML Box application offered by Facebook. You can create additional boxes or tabs to display text, images, and more links. Be sure to use a good search term in your box name (which is limited to ten characters) and include text links in your content. It's a bit of a pain, but you can do this on your own.

For more information on creating a Facebook account and business pages, see Book V.

Optimizing LinkedIn

LinkedIn (discussed in Book VI) doesn't offer quite as many options for SEO as other forms of social media do. Start by including search terms within your profile text, with descriptions of any groups you start, and within postings to a group. Just keep it gentle and unobtrusive. Follow these steps to optimize your profile and to pass along some SEO credibility:

✦ Use your name or company name in your LinkedIn URL (for example, `www.linkedin.com/in/watermelonweb` or `www.linkedin.com/in/socialmarketing`). Because search engines look at keywords in URLs, this technique makes your company easier to find.

✦ Use content similar to your page description metatag within the first paragraph of your LinkedIn profile. It should already contain some of your primary search terms.

✦ Unlike Twitter, links from LinkedIn to other sites carry link juice. You can have as many as three links on your profile. Set one to your Web site and another to your blog. Use keyword-based link text on a third link to drive traffic to another page on your site or to another of your social media pages. Nothing says that all links have to lead to different domains.

Gaining Visibility in Real-Time Search

Needless to say, all the emphasis on social media has forced search algorithms to adjust accordingly. Social media services not only are now included in natural search results (refer to Figure 2-9) but are also driving a demand for results displayed in near real time.

TIP

It remains to be seen how this integration will affect your overall standings in search engine results. Watch one of the search engine resource blogs for changing news.

Dedicated real-time search engines are available for different services, such as Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds, and blogs. These engines, some of which are listed in Table 2-5, may also index comments and other elements found only on a particular social media service.

Table 2-5	Real-Time and Specialty Search Engines for Social Media	
Name	*URL*	*Description*
Aardvark	`http://vark.com`	Connects people with questions to people with answers; acquired by Google in February 2010
BackType	`www.backtype.com`	Real-time conversational search of blogs and social networks and other social media by topic
Collecta	`http://myspace.collecta.com`	Real-time search of MySpace by topic; from third-party developer
Facebook	`www.facebook.com/#!/home.php?sk=lf`	Real-time (most recent) search of Facebook for postings and public stories from friends
IceRocket	`www.icerocket.com`	Real-time search of Twitter, MySpace, other social media sites, images, and blogs
LinkedIn	`www.linkedin.com/search`	Real-time search built-in for people, jobs, answers, groups

(continued)

Table 2-5 *(continued)*

Name	URL	Description
OneRiot	www.oneriot.com	Real-time social media, Web, and video search engine ranked by currency, relevance, and popularity
PubSub	www.pubsub.com	Real-time search engine for RSS and Atom feeds
Scoopler	www.scoopler.com	Real-time search engine indexing Twitter, Flickr, Digg, Delicious, and more
Twitter Search	http://search. twitter.com	Real-time Twitter search

Naturally, where others have broken the trail, Google, Yahoo!, and Bing cannot be far behind. In December 2009, Google launched real-time search in partnership with Facebook, FriendFeed (since bought by Facebook), Twitter, MySpace, Jaiku, Identi.ca, and other services. Results from all these sites are incorporated, based on relevance, directly into regular search feeds for both Web sites and mobile phones, along with news items, blog posts, photos, videos, MySpace moods, and other content.

To view real-time results in Google, search for a term and then, on the search results page, follow these steps:

1. **Select Show Options, directly above the Sponsored Link section.**

2. **Click Latest from the navigation bar on the left.**

   This step displays the most recent relevant postings first.

3. **To filter results for social media only, click Updates in the top section of the left navigation column.**

   The results are filtered to show the most recently updated sites, including social media, in reverse chronological order, as shown in Figure 2-13. Results update automatically as new posts appear.

Note the word *relevant* in Step 2. Try to use at least one of your researched keywords in tweets and updates so that you have more to offer than a time stamp.

REMEMBER

You can't benefit from real-time search unless you're active on Facebook, Twitter, and other services. Add your twist on the latest trends in your market sector on Twitter, Facebook, and your blog. For ideas on current topics, use Google Trends (http://google.com/trends), or the "hot topic" searches on most social media services.

Figure 2-13: Real-time social media search results for the term *social entrepreneur* on Twitter and Facebook are easily visible within Google search results.
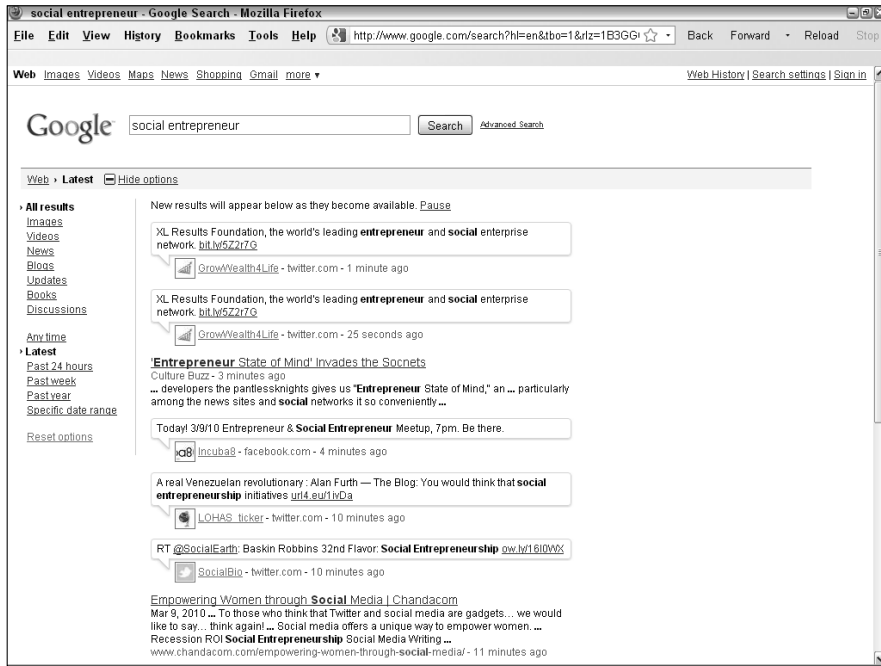
TIP Real-time search creates pressure to update frequently on social media so that you can stay near the top of the results stream. If this placement is critical for your business, schedule times on your Social Media Activity Calendar (found in Book I, Chapter 3) to post to your blog, add to your Facebook page stream, or send tweets at least twice a day.

TIP Get some sleep! There's no point tweeting in the middle of the night when your customers are in bed (unless you're selling to insomniacs or international customers halfway around the world). Your tweets may be long buried by tweets from dozens — if not hundreds — of others by the time the sun rises.

Think about which messages are truly time-critical and save your real-time efforts for them. On your Social Media Activity Calendar, enter the times that you expect your target market might be searching, such as first thing in the morning or right before lunch. Make sure to ping all search engines with your updates.

Monitoring Your Search Engine Ranking

As always, if you're serious about SEO, you'll want to monitor how well you're doing. Table 2-6 lists some search engine ranking software that will show where your site appears on search engines by keyword or page. Most ranking software carries a charge, but some either offer a free trial or rank a limited number of pages, keywords, or engines for free.

Table 2-6	Search Engine Ranking Services	
Name	*URL*	*Starting Price*
Googlerankings.com	`www.googlerankings.com/index.php`	Free, need free API key
RankTracker	`www.link-assistant.com/rank-tracker/buy.html`	Free trial; then $99.75
Search Engine Rankings	`www.mikes-marketing-tools.com/ranking-reports`	Free
SERank	`www.ragesw.com/products/search-engine-rank.html`	Free trial; then $79.95
SiteReportCard	`www.sitereportcard.com/checkranking`	Free
WebPosition 4 Standard	`http://webposition.com`	Free trial; then $149
ZoomRank	`www.zoomrank.com`	Trial period $4.95; then $8.95 per month

SEO is a long-term strategy to deliver solid traffic over time to your hub Web site or blog. It takes time for your investment in SEO to pay off, and results can vary unpredictably from one week or month to the next. Generally, after you have everything set up and running smoothly, monitoring once per quarter should be enough except for exceptionally large and constantly growing sites.

REMEMBER

Enter your preferred SEO tools in your Social Media Marketing Plan and insert the tasks into your Social Marketing Activity Calendar.