

DOES SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT SEO?

act-on



Introduction

One of the most heavily debated topics in marketing circles today is whether or not success on social media translates to a bump in search rankings in the major search engines. There are SEO experts firmly planted on both sides of the fence on this one, with some saying social has no effect on SEO rankings, and others saying it absolutely does. The truth lies somewhere in between.

For the purpose of this eBook we will focus on Google, the most widely used search engine. However, just know that 95% of what ranks highly on Google also ranks highly on Bing, Yahoo, and Ask. Also understand that search engine algorithms are a highly guarded secret, and only the people who actually write them understand the best combination of factors that will result in a high ranking.

Top 5 Ranking Factors

According to industry experts, if you do these five things well, you will increase your chances of being rewarded in search engine rankings:

- 1 Provide high-quality, relevant content.**
- 2 Receive links from reputable sources that are relevant to the content.**
- 3 Publish articles/blogs that fit the overall theme of the site.**
- 4 Use high-value, relevant keywords and key phrases.**
- 5 Ensure good technical performance of a page.**

Notice that social signals (actions such as retweets, Likes, shares, votes, pins, reviews, etc.) aren't mentioned at all in that list. So why is it then that the one thing the top ranking pages in organic search all have in common is a strong presence on social?

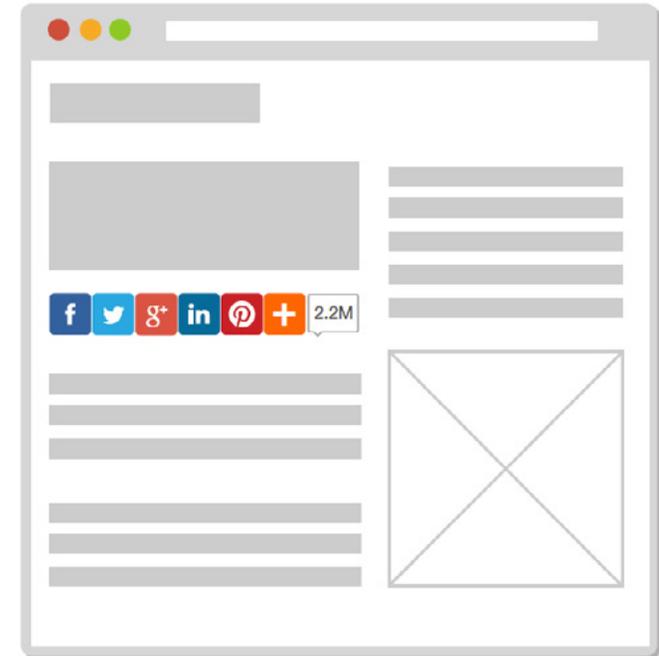
Here are five social+SEO facts to consider...

Fact 1: High-quality, Relevant Content Drives Engagement

You can post high-quality content all day long, but if no one actually sees it, it isn't providing search value. Although sending email to your existing mailing list about a new piece of content is a tried-and-true way to drive traffic to it, social media has a much broader reach (including those people who should know about your company, but don't yet). You can increase your social signals with clickthroughs by doing the following:

- 1 Make all of your content shareable on social media.**
- 2 Craft social media share messages that encourage people to click through to your content.**
- 3 Engage with the people who are sharing your content.**

Engaging with people on social media can result in a higher ranking for relevancy if they actually read the content and re-share to their social networks.



Fact 2: Social Influence Can Result In Quality Links

Quality links don't materialize out of thin air. They're either sought for or earned. Knowing who the social influencers are (both people and companies) in your industry is key to getting high-quality links back to your content. You can increase the likelihood of an influencer linking to your content by doing the following:

- 1** Listen on the major social media networks, and find out who your major industry influencers are.
- 2** Repost and retweet their content on social media.
- 3** Mention them on social media with an @mention (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest), #hashtag (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+), or a +name (Google+).

SOCIAL SIGNALS



According to a research team at SearchMetrics, social signals don't have a direct influence on search engine rankings, but there is a high correlation of social signals to high-ranking pages.

"Correlation" means that while social signals may not directly affect ranking, there are certain factors that affect each of them, and those factors are probably related.

Fact 3: Social Metadata Matters

Have you ever tried to share a piece of content on Facebook only to realize the photo that showed up didn't match the article – or even worse – there was no photo at all? Social media metadata tags are important for two reasons:

- 1 Search engines are constantly crawling online content, and return social sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn as well as web pages.** If your social media metadata is outdated, missing high-value keywords, or totally nonexistent, your company may not show up in organic search results as highly as it could.
- 2 The metadata tags also determine how your content looks when shared in other contexts.** It is crucial to control the look of your content when shared across social networks in order to maximize your brand reach and increase clickthroughs.

Although all of the major social networks support the Open Graph (OG) tag format, there are some tags specific to each social network, and some tags specific to different types of content. For example, your website product pages should have different tags than your blog, so make sure you make that distinction in your metadata.

NOTE

Metadata tags should be placed in the <HEAD> section of the HTML on the page. Your webmaster will know exactly what to do.

QUICK TIPS



Defining at least one main image on a web page is especially important if your site is rendered in Flash, because there will be no images for Pinterest and LinkedIn to pull from if you don't specify one. Also note that LinkedIn pulls the first image it finds, so check to see which image is the highest up in the source code on the page.

Name your image files with high-value keywords and the name of your company to increase the accuracy in search results.

Fact 3: Social Metadata Matters (continued)

Correctly defining your social metadata tags will not directly affect your ranking for on-page SEO, but it does have a huge effect on clickthrough rates from social media channels ... which means traffic to your web pages. Make sure you have at least these three pieces of metadata incorporated into every piece of content to ensure a boost in social signals and page traffic:

NOTE

This is just a partial list of available social metadata tags. Refer to the developer pages on each social network for a complete list of tags you should be using.

OG Tags for Facebook and Pinterest

```
<meta property="og:title" content="Title to be shared" />
<meta property="og:type" content="article" />
<meta property="og:url" content="http://www.YourCompany.com/" />
<meta property="og:image" content="https://YourCompany.com/image.png" />
<meta property="og:description" content="Description" />
```

Twitter Card Data:

Twitter looks for specific Twitter Card tags first, and then OG tags if no Twitter Card tags are defined

```
<meta name="twitter:card" content="summary">
<meta name="twitter:site" content="@publisher_handle">
<meta name="twitter:title" content="Page Title">
<meta name="twitter:description" content="Page description less than 200 characters">
<meta name="twitter:creator" content="@author_handle">
<meta name="twitter:image" content="http://www.YourCompany.com/image.jpg">
```

Tags for Google+:

Google + looks for itemprop tags first, and then OG tags if no itemprop tags are defined

```
<meta itemprop="name" content="The Name or Title Here">
<meta itemprop="description" content="Page description">
<meta itemprop="image" content="http://www.YourCompany.com/image.png">
```

Fact 4: Search Is Personalized

If I searched for “running shoes,” I would undoubtedly get a different result than you would. That’s because of the relationships we have with different brands and different people in the running world. If I have engaged with Brooks on Twitter and Nike on Facebook, and also purchased running shoes from ShoeBuy, you can bet those companies will show up higher in my results, because those brands are more relevant to me. I have a history of a brand relationship with them, and Google knows that.

Running Shoes |



Fact 5: Search Is Extremely Dynamic

Don’t let your content rust, and don’t do sporadic social marketing. Aim for quality and consistency, keep close tabs on your results – and keep innovating.



A Checklist to Follow

All of the most recent research agrees that although social media signals don't have a direct effect on SEO, they are certainly well correlated. Content that is shared on Facebook thousands of times is more likely to be shared through blogs and other media, where Google will give credit for the link (which can help boost rankings). If you want to boost your social signals and possibly increase your SEO ranking, start with this checklist:

- ✔ **Use social media to promote your content.**
- ✔ **Engage with your audience on social media, and create genuine relationships with them.**
- ✔ **Add the relevant social metadata tags to every piece of content you publish.**
- ✔ **Find, follow, and engage with influencers.**
- ✔ **Make all your content shareable.**

Remember that the effect of social media is transient. One social media post that goes viral can cause a temporary spike in page traffic that may result in better placement in the page rankings. A week later you may find yourself back on Page 2. It's important to keep up your efforts.

The key to producing strong social signals is to provide quality content, and have a predictable cadence and voice. That's what will draw your audience in – and keep them there.

Acclaim for Act-On



See all of Act-On's
awards & accolades...

About Act-On Software

Act-On Software is a marketing automation company delivering innovation that empowers marketers to do the best work of their careers. Act-On is the only integrated workspace to address the needs of the customer experience, from brand awareness and demand generation, to retention and loyalty. With Act-On, marketers can drive better business outcomes and see higher customer lifetime value. The Act-On platform provides marketers with power they can actually use, without the need for a dedicated IT resource.

Connect with us to learn more