# How to Improve Your Search Engine Ranking
by iMaxWebSolutions.com

*Do you want better search engine results and more visitors to your web site?*
*Here's what you need to know.*

## Introduction

**If you are going to improve your results, you will need to work at it.**

Strong search engine results don't just magically happen. The real estate agents who achieve the best results spend time, energy, and in some cases, money in order to attain their rankings. They put this effort in monthly, weekly, or even a few times a week.

Additionally, search engine results are a moving target. Real estate agents are constantly joining and leaving the business, starting up or taking down web sites when they do so. Existing web sites are adding and removing content or being re-designed entirely. The search engines themselves often change their complex formulas ("algorhythms") for determining the rankings. These changes can be minor or quite significant.

Because of all this ongoing change, you cannot simply work on improving your search engine results once, leave it alone, and reap the rewards. It is a continual process. Understanding this is very important if you wish to succeed.

**Set realistic expectations.**

"Those who've been in the search engine optimization biz for a number of years know how much more competitive it is these days as compared to a few years ago. The number of web pages indexed by search engines has doubled, tripled, and quadrupled in the past few years." – Jill Whalen, President, High Rankings.

Ms. Whalen was speaking generally, but it's no different for real estate: Think of all the Realtors in your area who want the same search engine results, web site visitors, and leads that you want. They've all got real estate web sites and are trying to set up their web sites to get the same search engine results you want. There are a lot of them and it's very competitive.

So while a lofty long-term goal might be to get into the top 10 results for an important search term, shorter-term goals might be more along the lines of continually improving your search ranking or increasing the number of visitors to your web site each month or each day.

Climbing the search engine ladder is usually not a quick process. Therefore, you will benefit from taking this patient and long-term view of improving your search results. For one thing, as we will cover later in more detail, the search engines (most notably Google) are believed to give added weight to older sites and domains in search results, while actually imposing a negative weighting on newer web sites as pertains to search results. So if you have a newer domain or web site, you might not be playing on a level playing field with older web sites for a period of time, and there's not much you can do about it.

OK, so now that you have a general idea of the search engine landscape, let's go over all the things you can do to improve your search engine rankings.

## Inbound Links, PageRank, and Link Building

Inbound links are links from other web sites to your web site. Inbound links to your web site are a very important factor, estimated to be potentially as high as 25% of Google's formula for determining search engine results.

**PageRank**

Much of Google's formula is built upon their "PageRank" concept. PageRank is based upon other web sites indicating to Google whether your web site is valuable. How does this happen? Basically, if another web site links to yours, Google gives your web site one vote. If a really important web site links to your web site, Google might give you 10 votes. A higher number of votes signifies to Google that your web site has value and you will be moved up the search results accordingly.

Here is Google's own explanation of PageRank:

> "PageRank relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the web by using its vast link structure as an indicator of an individual page's value. In essence, Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote, by page A, for page B. But, Google looks at more than the sheer volume of votes, or links a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves 'important' weigh more heavily and help to make other pages 'important.'

> "Important, high-quality sites receive a higher PageRank, which Google remembers each time it conducts a search. Of course, important pages mean nothing to you if they don't match your query. So, Google combines PageRank with sophisticated text-matching techniques to find pages that are both important and relevant to your search. Google goes far beyond the number of times a term appears on a page and examines all aspects of the page's content (and the content of the pages linking to it) to determine if it's a good match for your query."

So increasing the number of web sites linking to your web site is important if you want have better search engine results.

How do you go about getting other web sites to link to your web site? There are a few ways to do this:

**Link Building Through Profiles**

We recommend that you make sure there is a link to your web site on every profile you have on another web site. Examples would include:

- remax.com
- remax-newengland.com
- your office's company web site
- realtor.com

We recommend that you also create a profile on activerain.com. ActiveRain is a real estate network whereby real estate agents, mortgage loan officers, appraisers, lawyers, and others involved in the real estate field can network and promote themselves. The site receives a lot of traffic and therefore would likely qualify as an "important" web site in terms of PageRank. To create an ActiveRain profile, simply go to [www.activerain.com](http://www.activerain.com) and click "Join" in the upper right. Once your profile is created, be sure to add a link to your web site.

**Link Building Through Link Exchanges**

We also recommend that you see if you can exchange links with attorneys, mortgage loan officers, handymen, and any one else you do business with related to real estate. You offer to link to their web site if they will do the same for you. This is called a "link exchange."

Next, run searches for the communities you do business in using the major search engines. As an example: Barrington, RI. Then see what web sites come up in the top 10-20. Take a look at some of those web sites and see whether they have a page of links or recommended links. If so, contact them (you can do this by email too) and see whether they would be willing to add you to their links page. Offer to add them to your web site as well. Some web sites will agree to add your link and some will just ignore your request entirely.

When looking through the search results for a community, keep an eye our for "community portal web sites." Some communities have community portal type web sites that include a business directory area (note: the portals are different from official community web sites owned by the town or city). The portals are web sites that focus on one town or city and provide information of interest to residents, businesses, and potential visitors of the town or city. Definitely contact community portal web sites within your area of service and see if they will add a link to your web site. Many of them get significant amounts of web site traffic.

We recommend that you set up a page on your web site just for links. This page will allow you to fulfill your part of the link exchange by adding companies and web sites that add you. You can call the page "Recommended Links" if you want.

**Link Building Through Quality Content**

Ideally, the search engines want your web site to provide unique, quality content of high value. This is the way that the search engines want you to get more other web sites to link to yours. The idea is that because of the value of the page(s) you created (and ideally, its uniqueness), other web sites will want to link to the page(s). They will therefore link to your page of their own accord, without you having to request anything from them.

An example of creating quality content would be to write an article on a particular tip for buyers and post it to your web site, on it's own web page. Because you wrote the article, it would not be available anywhere else. When you are writing an article like this, try to work in important keywords, which takes us to our next topic:

# Keywords

Keywords are one of the most important areas of focus in trying to improve your search engine results. Because search engines lack the ability to actually read or comprehend a web page or online article and subsequently analyze whether the content was unique and valuable, they instead place significant emphasis on keywords and phrases, which they detect when they scan your web pages.

**Researching Effective Keywords**

The first thing you need to do is to spend some time researching and identifying effective keywords and phrases that you will then place in important areas of your web site.

Put on your thinking cap and try to put yourself in the shoes of someone looking to buy a home or trying to find an agent to list their home with. What would such a person type into a search engine? What words and phrases are they likely to use in trying to find web sites of value? Make a list of all the words and phrases you think they might search for.

Next, you need to find out if you're right. In other words, does anyone actually use the phrases and words you identified when running searches? Luckily for you, there is a great tool that will help you determine this.

Go to: http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/

Overture is part of Yahoo and their free keyword tool uses Yahoo's search data. (Yahoo is the second largest search engine). The keyword tool allows you to enter your phrases and keywords and then tells you how many people searched for that term using Yahoo in the past month. It will also give you suggestions of related phrases or words and show you what results those had in the past month. Quite simply, this tool allows you to weed out useless keywords and identify important ones. Having the top ranking for a search term that no one searches for is not at all useful in driving more traffic to your web site.

Many search engine experts believe that identifying the right keywords is the most important step in the entire process. So make sure you spend some real time on this crucial part of the process.

After you have finished checking to see if people search for the phrases on your original list, create a final list of keywords that you want to place throughout key places on your web site to improve your search ranking.

And now, where should you put the keywords on your list?

**Page Title**

The page title is one of the most important areas to put your top keywords. Depending on the search engine, the first 10 to 60 characters are important. Recent information suggests that you should not include special characters.

In the iMax system, the page title is comprised of two parts. The first part is a part of the title that is used for all the pages on your web site. We call it the "Site Name." The second part of the title is specific to individual pages on your web site and gets tacked on to end of the Site Name for each page.

To edit the "Site Name" part of the page title, login to your web site, click "Web Site" at the top, then "Site Branding." Edit the "Site Name" and save your changes.

To edit a specific page title, login to your web site, click "Web Site," and then "Web Pages." From the list, find the web page you would like to edit and click "edit" for that web page. Next click the "Show Page Controls" button located towards the top of the screen. The page controls area will expand. Edit the title field in the upper right. To save your changes, click the button entitled, "Save Page Controls."

iMaxWebSolutions allows you to designate that the specific page title you create for a web page will be placed before the "Site Name" in the page title. This allows for more effective search engine positioning as well as targeting specific pages towards specific keywords. To do this, go to the Page Controls box on a web page and check off the box for "Display Title Before Site Name," (located right below "Title.") Then click "Save Page Controls." This will ensure that the specific keywords you created for this page title will be among the first 10-60 characters of the title that the search engines weigh most heavily.

**Description**

Another important area is the page description for your web pages. In addition to affecting the search results themselves, the description has also been shown to be a significant factor in which search result users actually decide to click on.

When you search using a search engine, the description for each web site in the search results appears underneath the linked page title. Below is a screenshot that shows remax.com in search results. The description is the black text that begins with "Search for homes."



As mentioned above, if a person sees several web sites in the search results that appear to match what they are looking for, a well-written description may be the deciding factor in the user choosing to go to your site instead of one of the others. Ideally, when writing the description, you want to balance writing for search engines (and therefore including keywords) and writing for people who are viewing search results.

Here's how to edit page descriptions using iMax. To edit a web page's description, login to your web site, click "Web Site," and then "Web Pages." From the list, find the web page you would like to edit and click "edit" for that web page. If you are trying to edit your homepage, choose "Homepage" on the Web Site Manager screen instead of "Web Pages."

Once you are on the web page you want to edit, click the "Show Page Controls" button located towards the top of the screen. The page controls area will expand. Edit the "description" field in the lower right. To save your changes, click the button entitled, "Save Page Controls."

**Content**

What are people searching on search engines most concerned with? They are primarily interested in the content that a web site has to offer. Consequently, as you can imagine, one of the key missions of any search engine is to identify web sites that have the best and most relevant content as pertains to a given search. In fact, if they fail to do this, they fail period. Suffice to say, search engines weight keywords in the content of your pages *very* heavily.

Just to be clear, for our purposes, content is defined as all the words that are visible to a user on a web page you create in the iMax system.

Here is the challenge: Unlike with the title, you cannot simply jam pack a sentence with a bunch of keywords. Your content needs to make sense and be readable. So you need to work the keywords into your content in such a way that it reads like a normal piece of writing.

Let's take an example. Say you are creating an "About Me" page and want to work in the following keywords to the content you are going to create: "Boston," "house," "condo," "free property search," and "MLS listings."

You might create something like this (which would be added as "text" on your iMax site):

"Hi, I'm (your name). I'm a RE/MAX realtor in Boston and have been a real estate agent in the Boston area for over 15 years. I grew up in Boston and know the city's neighborhoods and real estate properties very well.

I would love to help you find the house or condo of your dreams. My website, with its 100% free property search, allows you to search all MLS listings in the Boston area and beyond; the MLS listings include all the houses and condos currently in the MLS."

Note that if you are trying to do well for a keyword, you want that keyword to appear a number of times throughout a web page, not just once.

Ideally, whatever content you are creating should have value to buyers and sellers on its own, and then you work in keywords to help consumers find your valuable web page while growing your business.

**Suggestions for Custom Content**

So you've decided to create a few pages of custom content to provide more value to buyers and sellers and to improve your search engine results, and you understand how to incorporate keywords into the content. What should you write about?

You are a real estate agent with extensive knowledge that you share with your clients throughout the process of buying or selling a home. You can share some of this knowledge with visitors to your web site as well. Think of the web page you are creating as an article about real estate through which you are sharing some of your expertise. You could write articles about specific tips for buyers or sellers, you could create your own list of tips (lists are popular with Internet users) or an article about the state of the real estate market in a town, group of towns, or county (and then update it every few months). You can create a page of testimonials for yourself and an About Me page that provides some

information about you and outlines what sets you apart and why you would be a good choice as an agent. These are simply a few suggestions.

**Domain Name**

If your domain name includes an important keyword or keywords that you are trying to gain placement for, this significantly impacts search results. It has the most impact if the keyword is either the first or second word in the domain name. Words should be separated by hyphens. Remember that you can have unlimited domains on your iMax account. Domain registrations are $15 for a one year registration term and hosting is $3 per month per domain if you have more than 2 domains (hosting for the first 2 domains is free). So you can register domains specifically to target keywords if you wish.

Examples:

1) boston-real-estate.com

2) bostonhomes.com

**Page URLs**

Keywords in the rest of the URL also impact search engine results for those keywords. You can place keywords in the names of pages you create on your web site. The same concept applies here: Search engines place the most weight on the first and second words in a page name.

When possible, we recommend that when you create new pages on your web site, include related keywords in the name.

You can also change the page names of your existing web pages. It is important to do this the right way. Search engines do not like it when pages simply disappear (ie your page used to have a particular name but you changed it to improve the keywords causing the search engine to think the original page has vanished). Additionally, people may have bookmarked your original page and web sites may have linked to your original page so we don't want to get rid of it entirely. Here is the correct way to rename the page:

1. Login to your site and click the "Web Site" button at the top of the screen.
2. In the right column, click "Duplicate Pages."
3. On the left side, click into the drop down menu and choose the web page you want to change the page name for.
4. On the right side, beneath "or create new page," enter the name of the renamed page, complete with the keywords you want to use. Again, remember to separate keywords with hyphens.
5. Click the "Copy" button. You now have a new version of the page to use.
6. We are now going to make an adjustment to the old page so that if someone goes there or if a search engine goes there, they are immediately "re-directed" to the new page, meaning that they will be seamlessly taken to the new page instead.
7. Click the "Web Site" button at the top.
8. Click "Web Pages" and then click "edit" for the old version of the web page you are working on.
9. Click the "Show Page Controls" button near the top.
10. In the lower right of the Page Controls box, click the "Show Advanced Page Controls" link.

11. The Advanced Page Controls section drops down. Enter the URL for your new page in the "Redirect to URL" field. You can enter a full URL or a relative URL (for example /pages/yourpagenamehere).
12. Click "Save Page Controls." Test it out by going to the old URL and you will see that it now takes you to the new page.

An example of a full URL that includes a page name targeting keywords for search engines (within the iMax system) would be:

www.yourdomain.com/pages/boston-condos
boston-condos is the page name. Use hyphens to separate words.

**Headers and text formatting**

Search engines regard words that are large enough font sizes to be titles and regard titles to be more important than other words. They also regard bold words to be more important than other words. Consider it an attempt at an educated guess on the part of the search engines.

As a result, the search engines give additional weighting in their search engine results formulas to titles and bold words. So making high value keywords either titles or bold benefits your search ranking. The caveat is that if you overuse this concept (a drastic example would be that your entire page is bold), it will actually have a negative effect on your search results.) The reason for this is that search engines build in protections to make sure parts of their formulas are not misused.

As far as font size and titles go, the most effective technique is to use the <H1> tag in HTML. When editing a page, click into the "Select New Section to Display" drop down menu where you wish to place a title, and select "HTML," located under "Text Tools." On the next screen, paste the following line of HTML code into both sections (be sure to replace "Put Your Title Here" with your desired title):

<center><H1>Put Your Title Here</H1></center>

Then save the changes.

To utilize bold, simply add text to an iMax page and check off "bold text" when creating or editing the text block.

# Domain Age

Believe it or not, how old your domain is, as well as whether the registration history of the domain is consistent (meaning that it has a history of ownership by the same person or organization), are significant factors in search engine results depending on the search engine. Unfortunately, Google, the most important search engine, is also the search engine which is believed to weight this factor most heavily.

The logic of the search engines is this, whether right or wrong: Older sites with consistent ownership are more likely to provide searchers with high quality, valid content.

Moreover, Google is rumored to take an actual negative action towards new domains. This has alternately been termed the "Google Sandbox" or the "Google Aging Delay." Theories on this fall into 2 major categories:

1) New web sites have no chance at all at achieving strong search results for 6-8 months.
2) A less impactful negative weighting that gradually diminishes over the time frame.

Here's what Scottie Claiborne, a search engine expert from Right Click Web Consulting writes about the topic:

"I haven't seen any brand new sites with new domains appear at the top of the search engine results pages (SERP) since early in 2004. There seems to be a delay of about 6-8 months. I've checked with many site owners and I haven't found anyone who's gotten a brand new domain ranked well in Google. If there's a magic bullet, no one's spilling the beans… If you are launching new sites, make sure you set the expectation that it is likely to be 7-8 months before the site achieves any real results in Google."

This "domain age" factor contributes to a point we made previously in this document, namely, that significantly improving search engine results is a process that will only happen over time rather than quickly, and will require a level of patience and taking a long term view in order to succeed. There is not a lot you can do about the domain age and registration history part of the search results formulas. Unfortunately, some search engine experts have recently theorized that these domain factors, bundled with some smaller domain related factors, may account for as high as 25% of Google's current algorhythm. It is believed that MSN and Yahoo do not weight this factor nearly as much.

## Freshness of Your Content and Web Site

Search engines have a favorable view of web sites that update their content frequently (ie web sites that change and add content to existing pages and create new pages). If your site's content does not change, the search engines view that as a sign that your site is not a site that people will want to look at frequently. On the other hand, if your web site is constantly offering new content, the search engines make an educated guess that your web site is offering high value to web surfers, as well as greater reason for them to return to your web site again and again. Additionally, Google is believed to calculate ratios of new pages to old pages on individual web sites and factor this in.

We recommend that you take the time to add valuable new content to your existing pages and periodically create new pages. Your customers will also benefit from and appreciate the new content.

## The Process

Here's what to do when making changes to improve search engine rank and assessing your results:

1) Run searches in the 3 primary search engines (Google, MSN, Yahoo) on search terms that you have targeted. Note where your web site is in the results for each term on each search engine, if it is in the results at all.
2) Make your changes, then wait a few days for the search engines to re-crawl your pages and pick up the changes. (this may take up to a week)
3) Re-run the searches on the primary search engines that you ran previously. See if your results improved and again note where your site is in the results. If you are still not where you want to

be, make more changes, and again wait for the search engines to pick up the changes. It is a back and forth process of making changes and checking the results.

## Recommended Technologies

iMax recommends the following technologies for improving search results:

Google Analytics: Provides in depth statistics on visitors to your web site, both in relation to what they did on your web site and how they got there (including what keywords they used to find your site).

Sitemaps: Auto-updating XML Sitemaps ensure that the search engines are able to find all the pages on your web site.

Contact iMax at help@imaxwebsolutions.com for more info on these technologies and to take advantage of our special set up offers.

## Search Engine Advertising

You can also pay for better search engine results. You may have seen the targeted ads that display prominently for search terms. They are outside of the actual search results, but are very visible. Generally, the way it works is that you will pay a certain price to the search engine every time the link of your ad is clicked.

To learn about search engine advertising, view these pages:

Google: https://adwords.google.com/
Yahoo: http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com
MSN: http://advertising.msn.com/microsoft-adcenter

## Conclusion

In conclusion, to achieve high search engine results for your web site, you will need to invest time and effort over a period of time. You'll need to work at it. Search engine results are very competitive for real estate and many, many other Realtors® in your town, county, and state want to do well on the same search terms that you do. This document has given you knowledge that the majority of your competitors do not possess and if you are willing use this knowledge and put in the time and effort, you can succeed in achieving high search results and in growing your business online. If you have any questions, please direct them to help@imaxwebsolutions.com.