

Going Beyond the Backlink

Welcome to 'The Click Side of SEO'



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Introduction

Going Beyond the Backlink

Welcome to 'The Click Side of SEO.' This guide is not your typical SEO eBook. While many guides talk about theories and short-term tactics, this eBook provides practical, evergreen knowledge that will withstand any algorithm update. It focuses on the most important aspect of SEO: driving traffic to your site.

As *merchants*, organic search is one of the most important sources of traffic to our online stores. We work hard to get our products and pages to rank as high as possible on search engine results pages (SERPs). However, as *marketers* our job doesn't stop with achieving the desired rankings. We need to maximize our organic listings' potential to get the greatest number of clicks. This guide isn't about organic rankings and how to improve them. Instead, we're going to focus on how to maximize the click-through rate from your organic listings. We're going 'beyond the backlink' to maximize your existing rankings.

What is 'The Click Side?'

Organic search result click-through rate optimization is more important than ever. Smart marketers understand that they cannot rely upon rankings alone to drive traffic to their online stores. With the continual search engine algorithm updates, top rankings don't provide the same traffic they used to. Here's what impacts your search results traffic:

- **Rankings are hard to achieve.** It takes a lot of hard work and time to impact organic result rankings.
- **Rankings are fluid.** Your rank for a given keyword or search term can fluctuate with greater frequency.
- **Rankings are personalized.** Each potential customer will see different rankings based on his/her location, individual search history, and personal search 'profile.'
- **Organic rankings are being de-emphasized.** The search results have become more cluttered with new items taking up space that were previously allotted to organic results. They include PLAs, paid search, news results, images, videos, localized results, and more.



Our goal is to ensure that you're fully trained in the following three areas when you've finished reading this guide:



You'll discover what a typical SERP looks like, learn what type of search results are returned, determine which elements of the SERPs you can influence and control to generate more clicks to your store, and master best practices that can be applied to attract as much traffic as possible.

Covering these fundamentals will give us the foundation we need to understand the levers we can pull to drive up click-through rates. Next, we'll explore five strategies for increasing click-through rates. Finally, we'll teach you how to analyze the performance of your click-through rates so you can measure the return on your efforts and refine your approach to growing your store's traffic.



Anatomy of the SERPs

What are the search engine results?

The search engine results pages (SERPs) are the pages in the search engines that display the results of your search queries. The search results pages typically return two types of results: non-paid (organic listings), and paid listings, which can be bought in a bid-based process. For most search queries, a search engine will return ten organic listings, plus a variety of paid listings above and to the side of the organic listings. You can see an example of the "normal" search results to the right.

These days, search engine results have much more diversity, with additional types, localized information breakouts, media results (images and videos), news results, and Knowledge Graph results (quick-access information, like sports scores or encyclopedia entries). For an even more detailed breakdown on the types of search results returned, take a look at this **SERP breakdown** by industry experts at Moz.com.

Marketers should only be concerned with three types of search results: *organic*, non-paid results, *paid placements*, and *media placements* like product images or videos.

You can see the paid and non-paid results above, and to the right you can see examples of image and video media results for product searches. Generally, through optimized naming conventions and proper image markup in your online store, you may see your products pop up from time to time in the media results, but you don't need to worry about many overt optimizations. Images and videos are a great secondary source of traffic.

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Optimization Basics for Organic Listings

Before we explore how to increase your organic result click-through rates, let's look at the anatomy of an organic search result. There are four key components to a basic organic listing:

- 1. Clickable headline
- 2. URL with breadcrumbs
- 3. 150 character meta description
- 4. Google highlights/bolds the search term if it appears in your description

Anatomy of Basic Organic Search Results

When setting up the home page, product pages, category pages, or CMS pages, the most direct and easiest elements to edit (that we have control over) are the meta tags—primarily the Title and Description tags, followed by the media Alt tags. Meta tags still play a very large role in search engine optimization (with the exception of the Keyword tag, which is nearly unanimously ignored), so it's an important and easy set of elements to optimize.



Clickable headlines come from the page title (or 'meta title') value for the page being ranked. This includes product pages, CMS pages, or home page. The best practice recommendation is to set unique page titles on all of your pages, or as many as you can. It's common to see many pages with similar page titles in eCommerce stores. In these cases, the differences may only extend to product names or variation details (like color, material, or other differentiators). We recommend that you try to include a common set of keywords on these pages to optimize your rankings and click-through rates for your site's core offering.

The meta description returned in the SERPs is usually pulled from your page's meta description as well. However, search engines will excerpt other content from your page to form the meta description if you haven't defined a meta description for the page. To avoid letting Google decide what the page is about, it's important to write a unique meta description that includes your target keyword phrase for every page on your site.

TIP: The following link will show you how to **set your meta titles and descriptions in Magento** on a per-page basis for product pages, and set defaults for the other pages on the site in Magento's backend.



Organic Search Results Best Practices

When crafting your meta data to rank as well as it can for your product's search terms, there are some important fundamentals to keep in mind to guarantee the highest chances of successfully showing up for your keywords:

- 1. Page titles should be kept to a maximum of 60 characters.
- 2. Meta descriptions should contain about 150 characters.
- **3. Place your keywords near the beginning of your page titles and meta descriptions**. This will provide a slight rankings boost and people will see them faster, which may help improve the number of clicks you receive.

Why it's Important to Place Keywords Up Front:

Search engines put more weight on the early words,
so if your keywords are near the start of the page
title, you are more likely to rank well.

People scanning result pages see the early words first. If your keywords are at the start of your listing, your page is more likely to get clicked on. 99

- Joost de Valk, a foremost recognized authority on SEO



On-Page Meta Options

The page title is what is displayed in blue in the search results (or purple if the link has been clicked). It is the largest font on the search results list, with the matching keywords bolded for additional effect, and is often the deciding factor for what people choose to click on. The title can display up to 69 characters, depending on the search engine, but 55-60 characters are recommended due to Google's recent algorithm updates. Exceeding this length won't penalize your site, but the remainder of your message will get truncated, as shown in the example below.

Amazon.com: LG 42LE5400 42-Inch 1080p 120 Hz LED ...

General guidelines for title tags include utilizing the primary keyword near the front, including your brand or company name, and writing a descriptive title. In content creation, a teaser title is often a good way to drive traffic from the SERPs, as few people can withstand the temptation to click a provocative headline.

The description meta tag is displayed below the title in a normal font size. Again, any keywords that match the search phrase are bolded. There is some debate about how much weight the description tag gives to search engine placement, but there are two good reasons to use it:

- **1. The extra bolded keyword placement** is sure to help your listing stand out against competitor listings.
- **2. The description is a text message-length sales copy spot** to quickly draw in your prospects. It is designed to give them an idea of the page, but smart marketers will also highlight current offers and savings, unique product features and updates, or an appeal to a customer's emotions (fear of loss) to draw in more traffic than their competitors.

As an example of the power of proper keyword usage, if we were to search for "Nikon underwater camera housing," a camera reseller's meta description on its "Underwater Housings" category page might read like this:

"**Underwater Camera Housings** and Waterproof Cases for **Nikon** D7000s, Sony CyberShots, and more. FREE Shipping on All Orders over \$100!"

Do you see how the sample meta description contains not only a couple of the most popular brands and models in order to help rank for that traffic, but also includes an incentive to get customers through the door—rather than to competitors' sites? That's the value of a good meta description.



Enhancing Organic Listings: Sitelinks and Rich Snippets

Organic results are enhanced beyond basic listings. There are two types of enhanced listings—sitelinks and rich snippets.

- 1. Clickable headline
- 2. Site URL
- 3. Clickable site links
- 4. Site link description

Sitelinks, seen at the right, let the user click directly to subpages within a site. Each sitelink has a clickable title and a short description; similar to adding 4-6 extra organic results. Google's Webmaster Tools Support has **more information about sitelinks**, but the two primary takeaways we can gather from their documentation are:



- **1. At the moment, sitelinks are automatically applied by Google.** You cannot create sitelinks on your site and expect Google to use them.
- **2. If you do get sitelinks** and feel that they are not the best representation of your site, you can demote them within Google Webmaster Tools.

While Google does not provide direct methods for creating and managing sitelinks, we can infer helpful tips from their documentation and from studying best practices of sites that acquire sitelinks:

- **1. Sitelinks appear most for branded searches**. If your store carries products under your brand, you're more likely to see sitelinks returned for branded searches of your products.
- 2. Make your site easily crawled ('spidered') and use structured data.
- **3.** Google's Webmaster Guidelines advocate sites with an easily-understandable structure: 'Make a site with a clear hierarchy and text links.'
- **4. Popular pages have the highest chances of being ranked.** Useful content that gets links and traffic are deemed popular. This means your sitelinks will most likely be CMS pages or top-level category pages.



It is important to create structured site navigation, develop compelling content to get indexed and draw traffic, and focus on your branded search terms to help your site pick up additional sitelinks in the search results. Just remember that, as of this writing, there is no way to directly influence sitelinks, so don't get frustrated if you don't see any show up.

Anatomy of Organic Search Result Snippets

- 1. Product image/ video
- 2. Ratings and reviews
- 3. Inventory amount
- 4. Pricing

Rich snippets, or 'micro-data,' are a type of secondary **structured data markup** that can show additional information for relevant search queries.

Through coding of content on a page with micro-data, the search engines are able to better understand the content of the page as well as what specific elements



of the page are about. This is extremely powerful for eCommerce websites, where much of the content on a page is structured data that follows a predictable format. Details such as product name, pictures, videos, pricing, inventory, and ratings and reviews can be pulled right from the product page and displayed in the SERP listings.

Right now, Google can read several types of rich snippet markup, but it prefers Schema.org Microdata. Schema.org is "a collaboration between Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo to improve the web by creating a common vocabulary for describing the data on the web." Of all the types of rich snippets markup that you can use, the most common types of structured data markup found on eCommerce sites are:

• **Reviews:** a **single review** on a single product page containing the reviewer's name and a rating of 1-5 stars. A good implementation would review individual products in your store on a CMS page and link to the specific product pages within the review. The markup should therefore contain your name (reviewer's name), your review rating, in stars, and a brief description to pull people in to read the review.

TIP: By creating a logical site structure and using **Magento's CMS Page Hierarchies**, you can create Google ready orders and content that is easily crawled. This structure will help increase your chances of gaining sitelinks for product guides and other content.



- Aggregate Rating: the average of multiple reviews. Most retailers use this type of rating to procure product reviews from customers. They are represented as a 1-5 star rating and show the number of reviews contributing to the rating. In the image on the previous page you can see the review star count (4), and total number of reviews (16) contributing to the score for the LG TV.
- **Products:** This type of rich markup is the most applicable to retail sites and should be used on all product pages. It contains **product details** such as the product name, brand, model, and price, and will often contain stock information if available.
- Video Object Markup: right now Google doesn't recognize images in product searches (though they are used heavily in recipe searches), so many retailers have turned to using video markup. While some retailers are incorrectly using video markup on pages without videos, our recommendation is to embed a video on your product page and mark it up with the Video Object markup. In the near future, Google will likely drop search results containing video markup without videos, so it's best to play by the rules here.

Taking Advantage of Rich Snippet Data on Your Magento Store

There are a wide variety of Magento Extensions, free and paid, in the Magento Connect marketplace. When choosing an extension, make sure to check the extension reviews, pricing information and installation guides to ensure that you're getting the right extension for your needs and capabilities.

You can also custom-code rich markup into your site's theme. This is a very advanced technique, and it's recommended that you use a **Magento Professional Partner**, an expert rigorously tested and certified to understand Magento's intricacies front and back. If you have the funds and desire to go this route, this is the most comprehensive option, allowing you to specify exactly which rich snippet markup definitions you want to use, and how you want them to work on your product pages and in the Magento backend.



Strategies for Increasing CTR

There are many ways to improve the click-through rate of your organic listings. We will explore four strategies that marketers can start implementing right away:

- 1. Rank and its impact on click-through rate
- 2. The relationship between paid and organic results
- 3. How to leverage rich snippets to increase CTR
- 4. How to use copywriting strategies to improve your organic listings

Rank Drives Click-Through Rate

Anyone who has worked on SEO knows that the goal is to get ranked as high as possible. As marketers, we aim to at least be on the first page, but always strive to be ranked as high as possible.



What's interesting is that the correlation between rank and CTR on the first page is not linear; it's exponential. On average, CTRs hit a high of nearly 25% for a 1st position ranking, and drop steeply for all subsequent positions. Based on this data, you almost have to be in position 1, 2, or 3 to matter.

So, certainly as a CTR optimization strategy, we want to push our listings to the highest possible rank. However, lest we think it is only about rank, let's look at the range of values from the study. Remember that these are average click-through rates.





This chart shows that the CTR range is tremendous in first position. Its high of more than 76% is undermined by its low of 2.43%. This means that some organic results have poor click-through rates, even when they rank in first position on the SERPs. The variance in the range underscores that, while rank is important in driving CTR, achieving a top ranking is not enough by itself to drive click-throughs to your store.

Increasing Click-Through Rates Via 'Share of Voice'

One of the more advanced strategies for improving click-through rates is the idea of increasing your "share of voice." The principle behind increasing share of voice is the understanding that the more space on the SERPs you can control, the better your click-through rates will be.

There are two ways to increase your share of voice in the SERPs: organic link clustering, and via a joint marketing effort combining paid results with your organic listings. When you increase your share of voice in the search results, wonderful things happen to your site's click-through rates, even if you don't have top rankings. Let's take a look at these options.

Increasing Share of Voice Through Link Clustering

One great strategy for increasing your share of voice is by having multiple pages on your site rank for the same search query. When two or more listings for your site show up in the search results for a given keyword or phrase, this is referred to as *link clustering*.



In some articles, link clustering is referred to as *domain clustering* or *domain crowding*. Over the past few years, Google has changed the rules regarding how many links will be displayed, and in what way they will be displayed. So, while link clustering is a powerful tactic, your exact results will probably vary over time. For more detail on different types of link clustering within search results, be sure to read this in-depth **blog post** on the subject by Justin Briggs.

How does link clustering work? Sometimes when Google sees multiple relevant pages from the same domain, it will display them next to one another in the SERPs based on the position of the higher ranking of the two pages. For example, if you have one page that is ranked for position 2, and one that is ranked for position 19 on the second page, Google will cluster these pages on the SERPs into positions 2 and 3.



In the example tot the right, you can see two different pages—Grilling and Grilling Basics—from the Better Homes and Gardens website showing up consecutively in positions 2 and 3 on the SERPs.

How can you get clustered link results for your site? Having two or more pages that rank well for a very similar set of keywords will often produce some overlap and result in link clustering. Making sure to create compelling content that attracts links to multiple pages is another big part of the equation. This is referred to as "deep linking," and internal CMS or services pages that have links pointing to them stand a better chance of ranking than those that do not.

Supplementing Organic Results with Paid Listings

Keeping with the theme of "share of voice" in the SERPs, let's take a look at the network effects that paid and organic search have on one another, and how using them together can increase your organic click-through rate. In 2012, Google released a **study** on the effects of click-through rates for ad campaigns with and without matching organic results. It found that click-through rates for paid listings were higher when associated organic listings were in the same SERP page as the ad.

The higher the organic listing ranked, the higher the CTR for the ad was. Google has recently released data through Google Adwords that let advertisers **understand the relationship** between their paid ads and organic listings. Magento uses paid search to complement its organic listings. Between the paid and organic listings, Magento commands a large amount of real estate on the page.



Effects of Having Both Organic and Paid Ads

Organic share of voice Increases 68% when supported by paid search.



Leveraging Rich Snippets to Improve Your CTRs

We discussed rich snippets in our conversation about the anatomy of organic listings. Rich snippets are a great way to attract extra attention to your listings and steal traffic from your competitors' listings. Keep in mind that any website can have multiple types of rich snippet markup on it, so you're not limited to a single type of markup. A typical structured data-optimized store might consist of the following:

- **Product markup on product pages** that display the stock levels, price, rating and reviews information right in the SERPs (image on the next page)
- Video markup to highlight product videos next to your product listings
- **Publisher markup information on the home page** and core information pages that displays detailed business information next to your listing (see second image below) when customers search for your brand
- Review markup on a set of CMS pages that you've created to review your products
- Authorship markup on CMS and blog pages that you or your staff has written



Rich Snippet Types: *Products*

Google sony bravia 52-inch Web Shopping Search tools Maps More Images for sony bravia 52-inch - Report images Sony Bravia XBR KDL-52XBR4 52-Inch 1080p LCD HDTV Best Buy www.bestbuy.com/.../olstemplatemapper.jsp?...Sony+Bravia...52-Inch... 6157 items - Shop for Sony Bravia XBR KDL-52XBR4 52-Inch 1080p LCD HDTV at Best Buy. Find low everyday prices and buy online for delivery or in-store ... Sony Bravia KDL-52EX701 52-inch 1080p 120Hz LED LCD TV ... www.overstock.com > ... > Audio & Video > Televisions > LCD TVs - Out of sto Buy Sony Bravia KDL-52EX701 52-inch 1080p 120Hz LED LCD TV (Refurbished) at



Rich Snippet Types Business/ Publisher

- 1. Images
- 2. Ratings
- 3. Price/ Price Range
- 4. Availability/ Stock

- 1. Location & Contact info
- 2. Price/ Price Range
- 3. Hours
- 4. Customer Reviews

The web is increasingly about people, not brands. With the rise of social connectivity, people are choosing to buy from people, not companies. Search engines can help you promote your people using structured data in addition to your brand and products. Use real people for content creation and blogs, and link to their social media profiles. This helps create more compelling listings in your organic results. The more content the search engine finds on a single item—person, product, or company—the more real estate it will devote to that item. In the example (above, right), the entire right-hand column is devoted to company information.

Calls to Action—Creating Copy That Converts

Earlier we talked about the anatomy of search results. We covered all the different features of listings within search engines, including clickable headlines, website URL with breadcrumbs, the use of keywords, and the 150 character meta description. Let's revisit the meta description.

The meta description is one of the most important elements on the SERP, yet it's often ignored. Most site owners either leave it to their developers to fill in, or if they do manage it, they only think about it from a keyword perspective. But if you really consider it, this content is hugely valuable real estate. It's an ad for your site and an ad for the page. We should think of our meta descriptions like ad copy.



Elements of Ad Copy that Drive Conversion

- 1. We should always use action-oriented verbs in our ad copy. If we ask the user to take an action, they are more likely to take the action we want them to take. Phrases like 'learn more' and 'discover' invite the user to click and take the next step.
- **2. Offers can also be important for driving clicks.** Offers like free shipping, limited time discounts, promotional coupon codes, and seasonal sales are all great copywriting elements for motivating prospective customers to choose your listing over others.

Ideas for Creating Killer Copy in Your Meta Tags

Being creative is the key to success in writing short, targeted copy in your ads, and meta descriptions are no different. Here are some questions to keep in mind as you write your miniature sales pitches:

- Can we be provocative in our meta description copy? Can we make it seductive to the point where customers have no choice but to click?
- What if we use cliff-hangers in our meta descriptions? Cliff-hangers leave people wanting more. They keep us engaged from episode-to-episode on our favorite shows, bait us into watching the news, and click articles with provocative headlines.
- Are we always testing!? You need to test many different strategies here and see what works best for your business. While meta tags do not reflect updates in real time in the search engines, a great recommendation is to test your copy with AdWords paid listings, and then apply your highest performing copy to your organic listings' meta descriptions.

Putting it All Together

Now that we've looked at the different types of SERPs results, studied best practices for organic listings, and looked at advanced tactics for employing rich snippets markup, let's take a look at what some of the biggest online retailers are doing to take advantage of these techniques.



The image to the right shows a live example of three different retailers selling the same brand and style of shoes. At the top of the image are product listing ads.

In the first highlights, product markup is listed with aggregate review ratings, total review count, pricing information, and the corresponding product highlight video.

In this example, Zappos is the only link to use product markup, ratings, pricing and review count details. By contrast, the site 6pc.com relies exclusively on its video object markup to attract the attention of searchers. In many cases that may be enough, but with Zappos providing even more useful listings, they probably get the larger share of traffic.

Below the Zappos listing, you can see link clustering, giving 6pm.com a very powerful traffic-snagging advantage for this search. This, combined with the video still image, may make up for its lack of product details when people search for its product. Thus giving 6pm.com a good percentage of traffic for this term.

The last highlight calls out Zappos.com's excellent use of a hook to draw customers



to its site over its competitors' and its use of action verbs to prompt customers to take action. Zappos is using the hook of '*FREE Shipping*,' and the command for potential visitors is to come to the site and read reviews on the product.

Looking at these results, it's easy to guess that most customers would either click on Zappos or 6pm's listings before they would click Converse's listing, despite it being a #1 ranking. That is the power of optimizing your organic listings results for click-through rates!



Measuring CTR

Now that we've talked about many different strategies for improving your site's click-through rate, how do we know if our efforts have been successful?

CTR is the measure of the number of clicks you received relative to the number of times your organic listing showed up in the SERPs. Where do we get this data from?

Google Webmaster Tools is the most commonly used tool for gathering CTR data, and is a fantastic resource overall. The Search Queries report inside the Search Traffic menu will provide you with the CTR calculation, as well as the two inputs—impressions and clicks that make up the CTR percentage. You'll want to make sure that you select the 'Top Pages' tab at the top of the Search Queries report so that you can see the performance of individual pages and evaluate pages' CTR rate as you make changes to their meta title and description. You can see a sample of Magento's real click-through rates for different keywords in the image below.

You can also use third party SEO tools to help you calculate your CTR. At Magento, we use a set of tools called **Conductor** and **SEMRush**, both of which are very effective at analyzing SEO data.

	Query	Impressions 🔺	Clicks	CTR
	magento enterprise	15,000	2,000	13%
	magento enterprise edition	1,300	200	15%
	magento enterprise vs community	400	170	42%
	magento enterprisedownload	320	70	22%
	manegto enterprise 1.13	200	60	30%
ζ Ι	manegto enterprise cost	200	50	25%
ζ Ι	manegto enterprise pricing	170	60	35%
	manegto enterprise features	170	60	35%
	manegto enterprise support	170	22	13%



Don't Stop With Clicks

While our specific goal here is to drive additional clicks from our organic search listings to our website, we must always remember that our ultimate goal as merchants is to sell more products and drive revenues for our online store. Therefore, in addition to looking at our click-through rates, we must also look deeper down the buyer's journey to understand what's happening to this incremental traffic we're sending to the site. Here are some key KPIs to measure our effectiveness:

- **1. Bounce rate:** We can measure the quality of the traffic our search listings bring by looking at the bounce rate of organic search-sourced traffic. Our meta descriptions and titles might drive clicks, but are they consistent with the value proposition and experience on our site? We need to make sure our organic ads support our sites to create consistent, seamless experiences to go beyond clicks and drive conversions.
- **2. Conversion rate:** Look at the conversion rate of organic traffic on your site. Do these customers buy? How do they compare to other sources of traffic in terms of conversion rate and average order value?

You can check both your **conversion rate** and your **bounce rate** in Google Analytics. Make sure that you have your Analytics account **connected to your store**, and make sure that eCommerce Goal tracking is enabled within Analytics; otherwise you will not be able to track your transaction conversion data.





Summary

In this guide, we've taken you step-by-step through a process of discovering the key components of the search results pages and how to optimize them, demonstrated the underlying foundations of all search campaigns, looked at onsite modifications and third party tools for measuring results, and provided you with expert resources to help you in your path to further optimizing your site.

To summarize, organic search, like any other marketing channel, is all about driving qualified traffic to your website.

As we've discovered, showing up in the search results—even in the top position—is not enough. You must actively manage your listings to drive clicks. Ultimately, you do this by providing compelling content in your listings through relevant, compelling descriptions, augmented by rich snippets full of images and useful data that searchers are looking for.

In addition to optimizing your listings, you can also increase your site's traffic by maximizing your share of voice on the SERPs with sitelinks, clustering, and aligning your paid and organic messaging into one cohesive search strategy.

Next Step

Learn more about the ways Magento Enterprise Edition can help your business attract and convert more customers by visiting **Enterprise.Magento.com**.