

HOW TO GET GOOGLE SITELINKS

by **Jonathan Hochman**

<http://www.hochmanconsultants.com/articles/sitelinks.shtml>

WHAT ARE GOOGLE SITELINKS?

In 2005 Google started experimenting with an enhanced listing in their natural search results that can increase a site's visibility and reputation, and provide more traffic. For a long time we didn't know what to call these deluxe listings, but now we do. On September 7, 2006, Google's sitemap guru, Vanessa Fox, wrote a blog entry titled [Information about Sitelinks](#). She explained that Sitelinks are generated automatically, and that Sitelinks are designed to provide searchers with more valuable search results. Fox also said that Google will be expanding the Sitelinks program. Since then we've been getting many questions from webmaster interested to know how they can get a Sitelinks listing.

Here's an example of a Sitelinks listing. On a Google search for the keyword "IntelliTrack," beneath the main search result, we see links to various areas of the IntelliTrack web site. This would help a searcher in two ways: they can get a better understanding of what the site is about before they visit, and they can take a shortcut from Google to the topic that interests them.:

IntelliTrack - Barcode Software, RFID Software, Mobile Inventory ...
IntelliTrack, the leading developer of affordable barcode and RFID software, offers a full range of products, including: inventory control, fixed assets, ...
www.intellitrack.net/ - 18k - Cached - Similar pages
Demos - www.intellitrack.net/demos.asp
Software - www.intellitrack.net/barcode_software.asp
Warehouse Management System - www.intellitrack.net/warehouse_management_s...
Order Fulfillment - www.intellitrack.net/inventory_shipping_receiving_pic...
More results from www.intellitrack.net »

Only the best sites seem to get Sitelinks. Virtually all of the webmasters I've spoken with feel that Sitelinks enhance a web site's visibility and reputation.

GOOGLE DOESN'T SAY HOW TO GET SITELINKS

The workings of many Google algorithms, including Sitelinks, are kept secret to discourage people from manipulating the rankings, but we can still look at examples and try to understand where Sitelinks come from. I've worked on a number of sites with Sitelinks, and these sites are similar in the following ways:

- Site ranks first for the keyword(s) that generate the Sitelinks listing
- Easily spiderable, structured navigation
- Fairly high natural search traffic
- High click through rates from the search results page
- Useful outbound links
- Inbound links from high quality sites
- Site age is several years or older

These factors may, or may not, be exactly what Google uses to trigger Sitelinks. Nevertheless, everything on this list is desirable for a web marketing program, so using the list to guide our strategy will probably help our sites become more effective in any case.

WHAT SIGNALS DOES GOOGLE USE FOR THE SITELINKS ALGORITHM?

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Again, we do not know for sure, but we can deduce some of the signals by looking at Google's Webmaster Guidelines and by studying the Google Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs). Google's [Webmaster Guidelines](#) say, in the first item under design and content guidelines, "**Make a site with a clear hierarchy and text links.**" That's good advice for several reasons. A clear navigation hierarchy is good for visitors and helps search engines understand the topic of each page. Google can't create sitelinks if it can't fix the meaning of the sub-pages, either by analysis or by observing visitor behavior.

We know that Google search results pages (SERPs) contain links with tracking info, and that many users have Google accounts, so Google can watch their behavior over time. Google isn't expending resources to do all this tracking without reason. We can safely assume that Google will somehow use all that data to improve their search results, and possibly to deliver new features like Sitelinks.

If I were Google, I'd be very interested to know which search results have above-average click through rates for particular keywords. I'd also like to know if searchers were happy with my search results. If too many searchers choose a listing and then return to the SERP, that could indicate a poor quality search result. All this information is collected automatically, providing a scalable way to identify search spam, and the opposite, search "gems." A search gem with significant search volume would be the ideal candidates for a Sitelinks listing.

THINGS WE CAN DO TO IMPROVE THE ODDS OF GETTING SITELINKS

While we can only make educated guesses, we may as well do things that are also good for Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and user experience. Even if our guesses are off, we won't be wasting effort with these recommendations:

- Create structured navigation using HTML features like unordered lists (UL) and text links. Use CSS to style menus with the desired appearance. Lists can be displayed horizontally or vertically, and be any size or color. We can add background images, colors and border to create the appearance of a box or button. All this can be done with text links.
- Organize navigation to present a smallish number of logical destinations that visitors will choose frequently. Don't overwhelm the visitor with too many choices on the main menu. If necessary, add second level menu items using [CSS hover menus](#).
- Brand the web site with a unique name. If the name is too generic, no matter what we do, the click through rates on natural search may not be very good, because the user will have too many choices on the SERP for similarly named sites. Google probably won't give Sitelinks to a site that is just average for a particular search term. We want to be the overwhelming first choice.
- Add really useful titles and META descriptions to the site, especially the home page, to improve click through rates from the SERP. Make sure the meta information is accurate to avoid misleading searchers. We don't want people to bounce off the site because it fails to meet their expectations.
- Make the site really useful. Even if the site's information is not exactly what the visitor wants, if we provide useful outbound links throughout the site, the visitor may browse to another site rather than returning to the SERP. (See my article, [Don't Be a Link Miser](#).) Remember, Google can tell if a searcher bounces back to the SERP, and that's probably not a good thing for a site's reputation.

SITELINKS VERSUS SPAM

Even unsophisticated web users recognize Sitelinks, and most of them feel that they signify an important site. Sitelinks sites are the opposite of search spam, and thus, Sitelinks are highly desirable for the savvy webmaster.

LATEST NEWS ABOUT SITELINKS

On December 21, 2006, the US Patent and Trademark Office published a patent application by Google that describes the process of selecting internal

links to display within the search results. A good overview of this patent is presented in William Slawski's article, [Google's Listings of Internal Site Links for Top Search Results](#). What Google applies for in the patent may or may not be what they actually use in practice. The article tends to confirm my suspicions that user behavior plays an important role in selecting Sitelinks.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After graduating from Yale with two degrees in Computer Science, Jonathan Hochman set up his own consulting company in 1990. He has been an Internet marketer since 1994. To send feedback, please visit <http://www.hochmanconsultants.com/>.

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