



NAME **Web Strategy** | No. **007**

WHITE PAPER:

**Writing Effective
SEO Articles & Content**

version one.dot.three



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Web marketers seeking to increase the visibility of their site in search engines can tap into an emerging technique called Search Engine Optimization (SEO) article writing. This technique allows a website to be search optimized for dozens or hundreds of keyword phrases.

Success in SEO article writing is contingent on 4 key strategies:

1. Keywords
2. Content
3. Formatting
4. Links

These 4 strategies are addressed in depth in the following White Paper.

II. WHAT IS AN SEO ARTICLE?

A Search Engine Optimization (SEO) article is a piece of content developed to include targeted keywords. SEO articles are written so that their targeted keywords will rank high on search engines. When SEO articles are created en masse, they can attract large quantities of visitors from search engines.

III. KEYWORD SELECTION

Before you begin to write your articles, you need to start with the building blocks. The building blocks of all search optimization efforts are keywords. An entire whitepaper can be written on keyword selections. We will address this subject at a high level.

It is important to note that keyword selection is the first of the 4 key strategies to SEO article writing.

One of the most important tactics in keyword selection for SEO article writing is not finding the right keywords, but rather knowing which of the right keywords **not to select**. Note that with each keyword there is competition, so going after the same keywords that others also select to pursue can often prove to be a wasted effort.



Let's begin by understanding which keywords are the right keywords before we decide which ones are wrong for our purposes. In selecting keywords, understanding of the motive behind each one is critical. It is by understanding motives that we are able to understand not only which keywords to select, but also what type of content will appeal to people who perform a keyword search.

Here is an example of motives:

KEYWORD PHRASE	MOTIVE
Adobe Photoshop Features	The motive behind this keyword is “learn more”. This searcher seeks to understand what Adobe Photoshop software is about and is looking for content that will educate. Companies that are exclusively focused on selling Adobe Photoshop might not want to target this term.
Try Adobe Photoshop	The motive behind this keyword is “trial”. This searcher seeks to try Adobe Photoshop software and as such will respond well to content that satisfies this need. Companies that don't offer a trial of Adobe software would be best served to avoid this term.
Buy Adobe Photoshop	The motive behind this keyword is “buy”. This searcher seeks to purchase Adobe Photoshop software and as such will respond well to content that presents an immediacy of purchase. For a retailer of Adobe products this is a high value term.

Organize and prioritize your keyword lists

There are many ways to organize your keyword lists. Often this is referred to as keyword categorization or segmentation. One of the keys is to look at your basic product or service categories and match those to your motives. Here is an example:

	<i>Product: Adobe Photoshop</i>	<i>Product: Adobe Illustrator</i>	<i>Product: Adobe Acrobat</i>
<i>Motive: Buy</i>	Keyword Category 1	Keyword Category 2	Keyword Category 3
<i>Motive: Try</i>	Keyword Category 4	Keyword Category 5	Keyword Category 6
<i>Motive: Learn More</i>	Keyword Category 7	Keyword Category 8	Keyword Category 9

Other ways to organize your keyword lists include:

- Geography (“San Francisco data recovery services”)
- Attribute (“Foam fitted ski boots”)



- Intended use (“Network solutions for small businesses”)
- Price (“Discount solar panels”)

Once you have carried out this exercise, you have a better sense of which keywords are important for your business.

Keywords also need to be analyzed by weight. Weight is determined by how many people are searching for a given keyword. Understanding which terms are most searched for will give you a sense of their relative importance. There is nothing more futile than expending the effort to search optimize for a phrase that no one is searching for.

Below is a distribution of the term “Preschool Curriculum” and its many permutations. For example, a permutation of the phrase preschool curriculum can be seen in the fifth row down as “Christian preschool curriculum. To the left of each phrase is the monthly estimated search count.

5891	preschool curriculum
1272	creative curriculum for preschool
1269	free preschool curriculum
471	home school preschool curriculum
453	christian preschool curriculum
286	home preschool curriculum
258	preschool monthly curriculum
253	preschool curriculum sample
245	curriculum magnet mudpies preschool science
227	toddler preschool curriculum
180	preschool curriculum idea
179	preschool curriculum kit
167	preschool curriculum activity
161	curriculum for preschool day care
157	free curriculum for preschool day care
154	5 curriculum old preschool year
150	curriculum for 3 year old preschool
147	high scope preschool curriculum
142	4 year old preschool curriculum
135	curriculum november preschool
112	preschool curriculum theme

The chart above is a classic a keyword distribution. As you can see, the distribution tapers from *head* keyword phrases, like “free preschool curriculum” with 1,269 estimated monthly search counts, down to *long tail* keyword phrases with little search count like “4 year old preschool curriculum” with 142 estimated



monthly search counts . It is within the body and the tail of a distribution that SEO articles can play a strategic role.

Part of ensuring success from SEO article writing lies in deciding which terms you can feasibly win with an article. An SEO article can be a powerful weapon, but it must be targeted towards terms that are not highly competitive. As an example, the keyword “Mortgage quote” might be hard to win with a SEO article, whereas the tail term “Santa Rosa Mortgage” would have a far better shot.

Winning head terms can involve very concerted and exhaustive strategies. Tail terms, on the other hand, can be pursued in large numbers with SEO articles. Many professional SEO agencies write dozens or hundreds of articles to drive significant incremental traffic to their site. They understand that it is not the success of a single article that matters, but the success of a collection of articles.

IV. QUALITIES OF A GOOD SEO ARTICLE

What are the qualities of a good SEO article? We highlight seven key qualities below. Content is always king in SEO, and the next section will discuss the second of 4 key strategies for successful SEO article writing: effective content.

1. Avoid duplicate content

One of the most important rules in creating SEO articles is to avoid duplicate content penalties. When search engines come across duplicate content on the Internet, they need to decide which website is the original source of the articles. Once the engines decide, the other sources are not given credit for the article. The result is that if you copy content from other sites, you may end up not getting credit for your content, not to mention potential problems from copyright violations.

The other aspect of duplicate content comes to play on your own website. Many SEO practitioners will create the same article over and over again, only changing a few key words.

Here is a great example of a very egregious duplicate content violation we recently found:

This file was named: “arizona.htm”

Don't get overwhelmed by the process of applying for an Arizona mortgage, inform yourself about the different types of Arizona mortgages so you will know which one is best for you.

No matter if you are refinancing, buyer another home or a first time buyer, it's important to understand each distinctive Arizona mortgage available. There are different variables to each type of mortgage and there is one that fits your exact financial needs.

This file on the same site was named: "louisiana.htm"

Don't get overwhelmed by the process of applying for an Louisiana mortgage, inform yourself about the different types of Louisiana mortgages so you will know which one is best for you.

No matter if you are refinancing, buying another home or a first time buyer, it's important to understand each distinctive Louisiana mortgage available. There are different variables to each type of mortgage and there is one that fits your exact financial needs.

As you might imagine, this SEO strategist created 50 nearly identical pages, one for each state. This is the exact type of content that can come under the scrutiny of search engines.

How do you avoid duplicate content penalties? The answer: create unique content. The simplest way is to do a visual review – if it looks like duplicate content, it probably is duplicate content.

More specifically, the following guidelines should be followed:

- If your content looks as though it was created by doing a "find and replace", then you have duplicate content
- Try to have at least three unique paragraphs on each page.
- Make sure your HTML heads (Title, Meta description and keywords) are unique and appear hand-crafted

2. Keyword density and length

Your SEO article should have a healthy dose of your keywords without overdoing it. We recommend 3%-5% keyword density. That means that for every 100 words the target keyword is used between 3 to 5 times.

In addition to density, it is important to have the requisite amount of content. We recommend that an SEO article be between 250 and 500 words.



3. Quality

One of the things that some SEO experts lose sight of is the fact that humans will actually read the articles. Oftentimes SEO articles are produced in great numbers by writers with poor English or grammar skills.

This strategy of “bad content stuffing” can easily backfire. Not only will users abandon your site once they arrive, but your brand can be negatively affected if users create a relationship between that poor content and your brand.

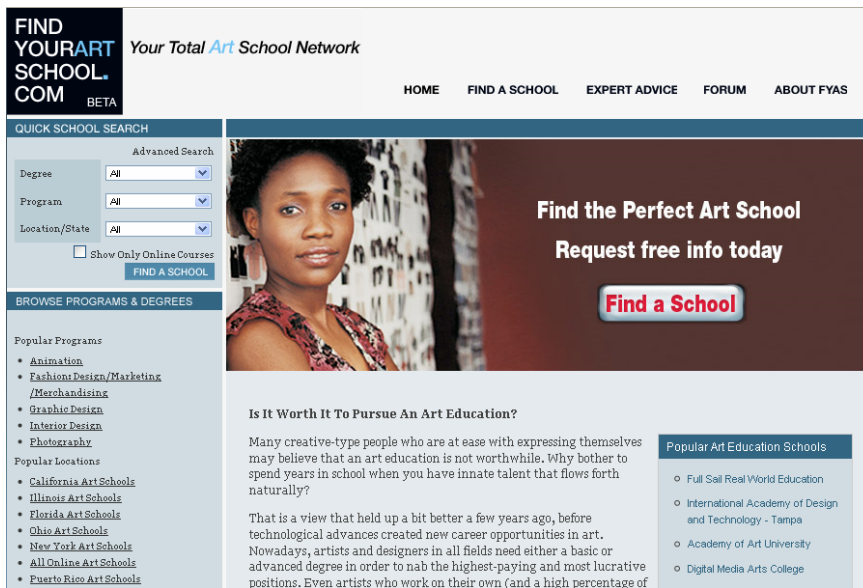
4. Link-worthy

More important than making content simply palatable is creating powerful and noteworthy articles. Not only will strong articles get you sticky website visitors, but they can also attract visitors from beyond just search engines. Great content is rewarded by other website owners and bloggers linking back to it. These references and links from other websites and blogs can result in highly targeted traffic to your site. These links will also help to boost your search engine rankings. We recommend that readers more interested in this subject conduct searches and further research on the topic “link bait.”

5. Conversion-focused

Quite often, SEO managers forget that they are in business to make money, not just to attract traffic. As such, they do not put enough focus on conversion events on their SEO article pages. We recommend that a conversion event is clearly placed high up on the page, well above the fold.

An example can be seen in the article page below.



As you can see from the example above, the web marketer has placed a very significant conversion event, “Find a School,” very high up on the page.

6. Addressing the motives

At this point we have addressed the motives of search extensively. Now it is time to close the loop. In order to have a successful SEO article, it is critical for you to address what users are looking for. If you do not address the search motive in the content of your article you will be not satisfying the needs of your visitors and they will quickly leave your site.

V. INTEGRATING YOUR ARTICLES

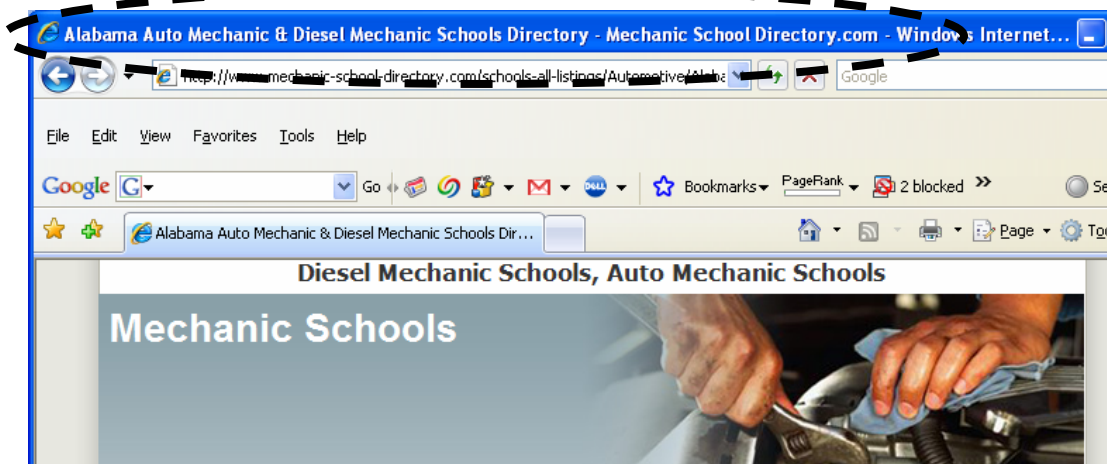
Making sure that your articles are incorporated correctly into your site is as critical as making sure the articles are written correctly. Correct page formatting is the third of 4 key strategies for SEO article writing. Here are some key elements of incorporating your articles successfully:

Title Tags – Title tags are the single best weapon in the game of optimizing SEO articles. Make sure that the title tag contains your keywords, but also make sure that your title tags also are friendly to humans because they are the first thing that humans see in the organic search results. You can see this in the example below, which shows one of the top listings for a search for “Alabama Mechanic School” on Google.

[Alabama Auto Mechanic & Diesel Mechanic Schools Directory ...](#)

Featured Auto **Mechanic** & Diesel **Mechanic** Schools listings in the following **Alabama** cities:
. **Mechanic School** Directory.com is the best way to find, ...
www.mechanic-school-directory.com/schools-all-listings/Automotive/Alabama/AL/11.php -
20k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#)

Here is the title tag in action that brought us to the site:



It is critical to list more than just your keywords. The site above has the following title tag: Alabama Auto Mechanic and Diesel Mechanic School Directory.

Meta Tags – There are two Meta attributes important for SEO:

1. Meta description – this is the “snippet” often (but not always) seen in a search engine’s index. It is important that the Meta description is succinct, descriptive, and inviting. While some SEO’s give a hard and fast limit for the number of characters that should be in the description, the mistake they make is that they determine this limit by the maximum number of characters a search engine will publish. Our tests have shown that descriptions longer than the allotted max in search engine results are still effective. In fact, search engines give you the opportunity to write sentences for more keywords. The search engines (often) will publish portions of a longer description if they find part or all of the keyword phrase in the description.
2. Meta keywords – this is the code wherein you place your targeted keywords. Our tests have shown that Google, MSN, and Ask.com do not weigh the Meta keywords for ranking, but Yahoo! does.

Headline Tags – these HTML tags, also known as <H1> tags, are formatting tags for article or paragraph headlines. We recommend that the title of your article be put into an <H1> tag and also contain your targeted keywords.

VI. LINKING YOUR ARTICLES

1. Setting up Your Sitemap

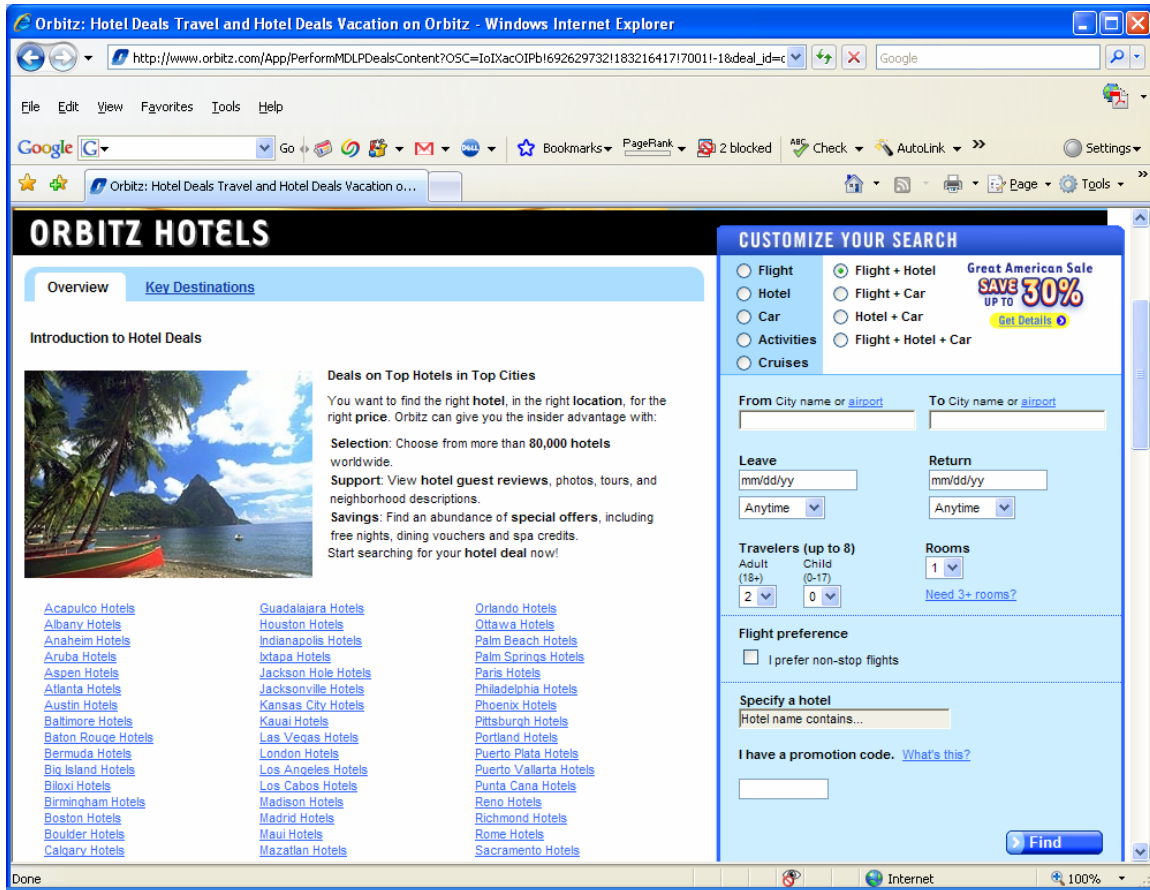
So far we have avoided any discussion of links. They play a critical role as you set up your sitemap. Links are the last of the 4 key strategies of a successful SEO article campaign. Links are the best way to educate search engines about the theme of a web page. When creating an SEO article page, the theme should be consistent with the desired keywords for that article.

Links are like road signs for search engines. When a search engine visits a web page it also takes time to crawl the links of that page. The words in the clickable link text will educate the search engine as to the theme of the destination page. For example, the link [used books](#) can be used to build the theme “used books” for the homepage of Alibris.com.

The more text links with targeted keywords that lead to a page, the more strongly a theme is built for said page. A sitemap is a great place to make sure that every page has a keyword-rich link to it. It assures your strategy that you are providing the minimum number of links for an SEO article to be successful.

Internal links also can be used to pass Google PageRank deep into your site -- down to individual SEO article pages. PageRank is a measure of the importance of a web page. Google assigns a value from 1-10 to every pages it indexes. PageRank is usually highest on the homepage of a website, but links can be used to move PageRank within a website.

Below is an example of a specialized sitemap that Orbitz has set up. Orbitz, as you can imagine, has thousands of travel terms that they would want to optimize their site for. The sitemap below is just one of their many sitemaps -- this one is focused on “Top Hotel Destinations.”



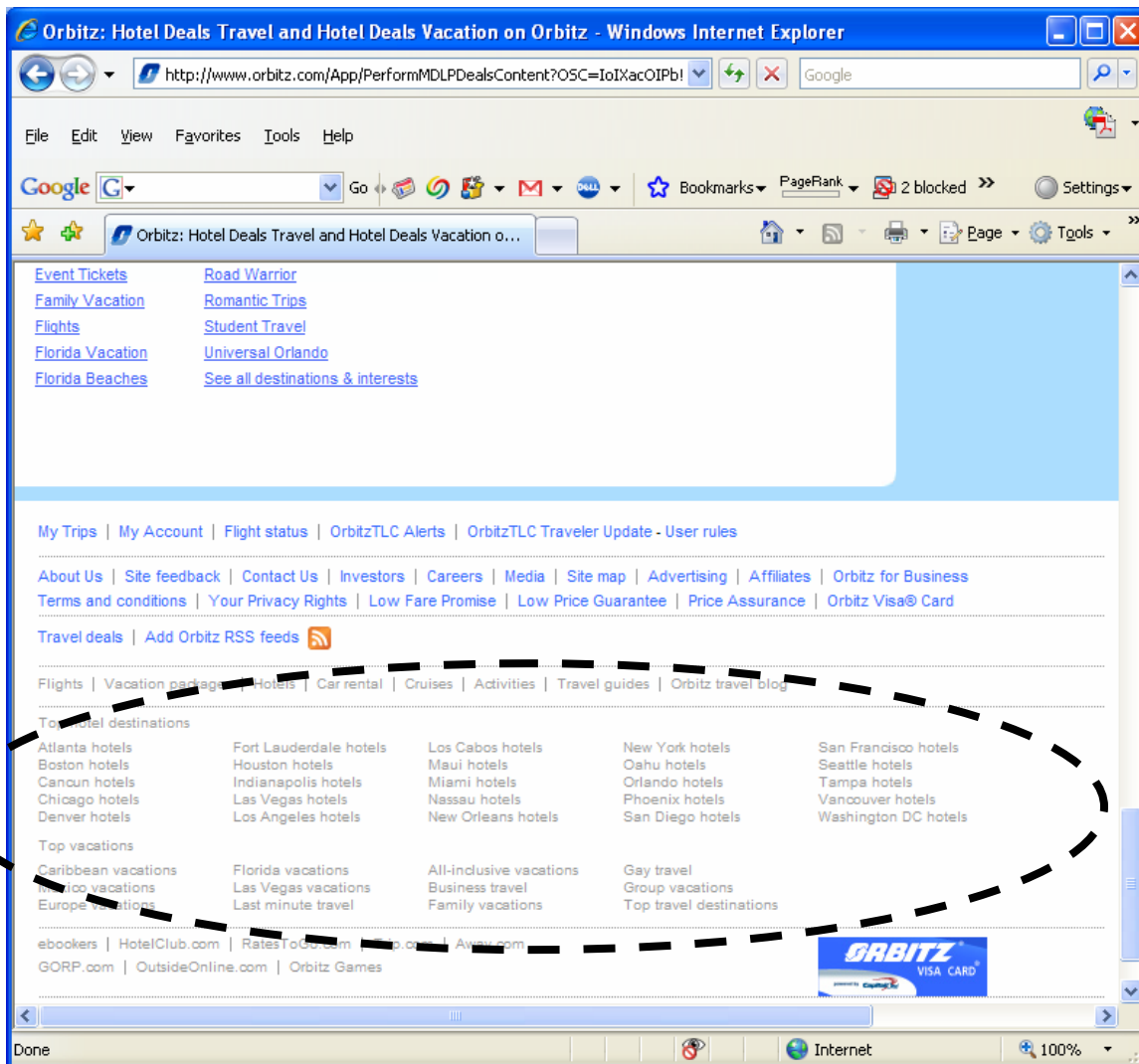
As you can see, Orbitz has set up their sitemap to link to many internal pages. Each link from the sitemap, in turn, is focused on a building the theme of a unique keyword phrase on the destination page.

2. Inter-linking

Sitemaps are great for getting one link to your articles. But the more links you have to your SEO article, the better your chances of ranking for its targeted phrase. What if you want to get more links into your articles?

One of the key strategies for getting more links to your articles is to use the many pages in your website. Each page on your site can be used as a base to link to other pages, and help create the theme of those pages.

Let's take another look at that Orbitz website. Orbitz does a fairly good job of spreading links around its website in its page footer. Many web marketers actually use their website footer to rotate keyword links through. Here is the Orbitz example:



3. The Role of Third-Party Links

Link acquisition is most often sought from other sites. There are dozens of strategies for getting links from third-party websites – from soliciting them manually to buying link sponsorships. We will not cover this subject in depth here.

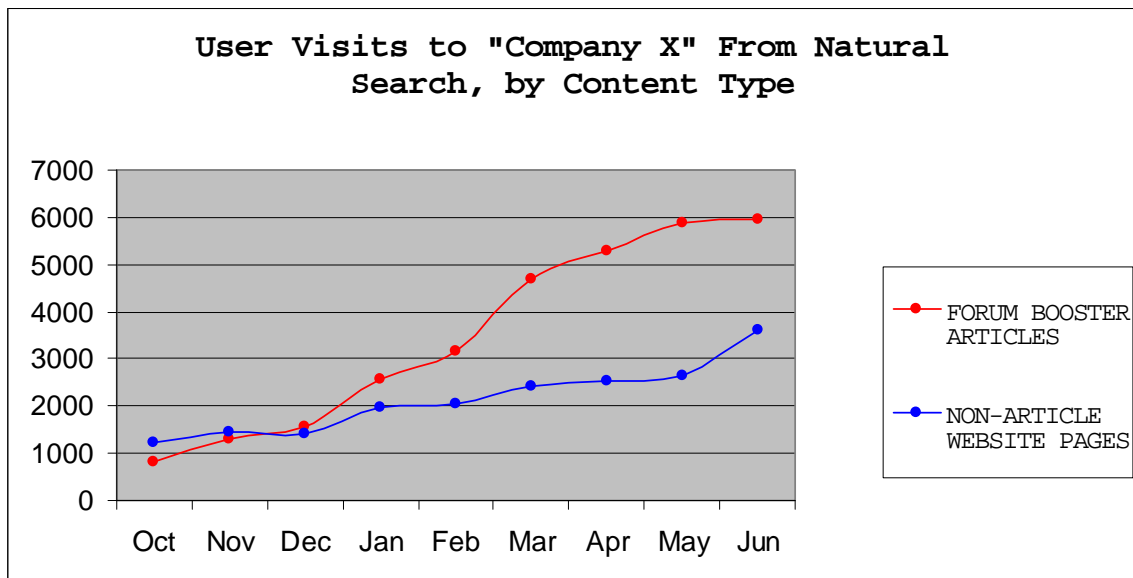
As discussed, one of the easiest ways to get quality links is to write quality content. Articles that have strong appeal to an audience will, by their nature, attract links. Bloggers can play a vital role in getting links to your SEO article pages.



For example, after reading a great article on the Low Impact Living website, a green blogger might comment within their blog. “Take a look at this great guide for [green insulation](#)”, thus enhancing the theme of that page and also passing PageRank.

VII. SAMPLE RESULTS

Below is a real life example of SEO articles at work. The client below (name masked) began putting Content Current SEO articles on their website in the fall of 2007. At that time the site traffic from Natural Search was quite light, both to SEO articles as well as to their regular site pages. Over the course of 8 months the company uploaded SEO articles to their site, averaging 8 a month. After several months of search optimizing both their regular website pages as well as the SEO article section, the latter saw tremendous growth. These articles pages saw an absolute growth of 5,000 natural search traffic visitors as well as a 600% relative growth.



This is one of the many thousands of examples of website marketers that have successfully incorporated SEO articles into their website, and been rewarded with significant traffic gains.