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Reputable websites for research

Websites across the internet are starting to look more and more similar to each other which is why The Conversation conducted an investigation to answer the question: Why are all websites starting to look the same?The news outlet's Sam Goree, Bardia Doosti, David Crandall and Norman Su ran a series of data mining studies to scrutinize almost 200,000 images across 10,000 websites to find their answer.To conduct their investigation, they used the Russell 1000, which is made up of the websites of the top US businesses by market capitalization, along with Alexa's 500 most trafficked sites and sites nominated for Weebly Awards. Additionally, the team used images of web pages from the Internet Archive to better understand the similarities in the visual elements of these websites.The Conversation investigated specific attributes including color and layout along with attributes learned automatically from data using AI. For the color and layout attributes, the team measured how many pixel-by-pixel edits were need to transform the color scheme or page structure of one website into another. As for AI-generated attributes, they trained a machine learning model to classify images based on which website they came from and to measure the attributes the model learned.Website similaritiesThe investigation found that across all three metrics (color, layout and AI-generated attributes), the average differences between websites peaked between 2008 and 2010 and then decreased between 2010 and 2016. Of the three metrics, layout differences decreased the most and declined by over 30 percent in that time frame.The findings confirm that websites are indeed becoming more similar but not because site owners are copying each other's code. In fact, code similarity has actually significantly decreased over time while the use of software libraries has increased a great deal. These software libraries contain collections of generic code used by site owners for common tasks such as resizing a page for mobile or adding a hamburger menu that slides in and out.The Conversation also found that sites with average similarity scores in 2005 tended to look less similar than those with average similarity scores in 2016.Websites becoming increasingly similar is both a good and bad thing. On the one hand similar looking sites are more accessible to users who can visit a new site and instantly know how to interact with it but on the other hand less creative expression now goes into designing a website.We've also highlighted the best web hosting servicesVia The Conversation September 30, 2005 10 min read Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own. How well you rank in the search engines when someone searches for your products or services is a function of two things: relevance and reputation. Relevance has to do with how easily the search engines can tell if your page is relevant to the terms that were searched for. That's addressed through classic search engine optimization techniques for enhancing on-page keyword relevance. Reputation, on the other hand, is measured by your link popularity, which is the number and quality of websites that link to you. Search engines view incoming links as "votes" for the quality of your site by the websites that link to you. So obviously, it's critical to obtain a good number of inbound links to your site. But not all links are created equal, and it's important to understand why, especially if you want to improve your link popularity. Here are some concrete strategies that'll spell out just where to look for links, how to evaluate potential links and--when you request a link--how to specify the exact link you want. What Are Good Links and How Do You Get Them? There are a lot of very valuable link opportunities out there, if you only know where to look. But first, what makes a good link? Good links share a few basic common features: 1. A high "PageRank" standing. The page that links to your site should have a good Google PageRank. PageRank is Google's measure of your link popularity, on a scale of 0 to 10. Because your site inherits a piece of the PageRank of every page linking to you, links from pages with high link popularity count more for you. 2. Limited links on the source page. The portion of the PageRank for each page that links to you that you actually benefit from is based in part on the number of outbound links from that page. In this instance, the fewer links there are, the better. Let me offer an example: A link from a PageRank 4 page that has just three outbound links is likely to be more valuable than a link from a PageRank 6 page that has 150 outbound links. 3. Relevant links. A relevant link is one that's related to your target page's topic and keywords. It's even possible to get all the relevance you need from links alone, without ever having the appropriate keywords on your site. An example is the recent "miserable failure" prank. In this instance, one or more people created lots of links from many web pages, all of them having the same link text--the text, often blue and underlined, of the link itself--that said "miserable failure." Then they pointed all those links to the official biography of President George W. Bush on the White House's website. Pretty soon, President Bush's bio page was the number-one ranked site in Google for the keyword phrase "miserable failure"--all without that phrase ever appearing on the target page itself. Relevant links exert a powerful influence because you get a double whammy: They help both your reputation (because they're links) and your relevance (because they're related to your page's keywords. But just what makes a relevant link? Consider these factors: If the page title of the page linking to your site includes one of your keywords or is clearly related to the subject of your site, that makes it a relevant link. Similarly, if the text content of the source page is clearly related to your content, that makes it a relevant link. And finally, if the link text itself contains a keyword for your page, that makes it a relevant link. Think how powerful a link can be if it matches all three factors! Finding Good Link Partners The first place to look is in general purpose directories. Yahoo! Directory, the Open Directory Project, Zen Searchand Joe Antare a good start. Not only are such links coming from a website with a decent PageRank, but they're also coming from a page that's likely all about the topic of your site. Vertical directories are directories with a focus. Examples might include FindLaw.comfor lawyers, MetroNJ.comfor New Jersey businesses or ContractorGuide.comfor building contractors. Many of these directories charge a fee for listings, and when they do, it's usually quite a bit more than fees charged by general purpose directories. But if the vertical directory has enviable search engine rankings for your keywords and gets tons of traffic, any fee you have to pay may turn out to be a bargain. Think about posting online press releases about developments at your company. New product releases, the grand opening of a second location or obtaining a new, significant customer are all good reasons to write a press release, and online releases are often picked up by search engines like Google News and Yahoo! News. Links from such press releases certainly count as well as links from any other site. The nice thing about press releases is that you have control over the title or headline, the text content and maybe even the link text. Websites that are related to yours without competing with yours make great link partners, whether or not they request you to link back to them in return. Think about the nature of your business. If you're a florist, for example, chances are you often provide flowers for weddings. Wedding directories are great places for links. But what about local musicians who play at weddings? Or local wedding officiates? How about local catering venues that host wedding receptions? Or the local tuxedo rental store? What about other florists who are too remote to impact on your local target market? All these businesses may be willing to link to your site, and it may be a value to the visitors on your site to know about these other resources, as well. Once you've found other pertinent sites, how do you go about requesting links? For directory listings, look in the directory for an "Add Your Site" link and fill out the necessary forms. For online press releases, search for sites that post them, then visit them and locate their guidelines. For complementary websites, you may need to be a little more creative. Webmasters are constantly bombarded with form e-mails asking them to link to another site. Most active webmasters with a large number of client websites get tons of these requests and treat them pretty much like spam. Getting through that defensive wall will take some effort. If you send an e-mail to a website asking them to link to your site, explain to them why they should. Don't just tell them they should because you'll link back and that'll increase their PageRank--the best link prospects for you have an enviable PageRank already, so that argument won't work. Explain why a link from their site to yours provides extra value to the visitors on their site. If they agree and ask you for a return link, give it to them. Speaking of outbound links, links from your site to others don't really impact your link popularity. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't link to a website that's valuable for your visitors to know about just because that site doesn't link back to you. So if a site turns down your request to link from their site to yours, link to them anyway if it provides additional value to your site's visitors--it can't hurt you that much, and you'll get some benefit from certain search engines from that inbound link. If there's a site you really want a link from and you get no response to your e-mail request, call them on the phone. (It's harder to say no on the phone than to ignore an e-mail request. Why do you suppose the telemarketing business makes so many phone calls?) Then be prepared to explain clearly and succinctly why it's good for their site to have a link to yours. When asking for a link, there are three rules you should follow: 1. Don't ask for links to just your home page. Instead, have the other site link to the page on your site that's most relevant to the link source--and that will vary from one link partner to the next. Be sure to have them link to your optimized pages, and don't get all the links sent to the same place. 2. Ask your link partner to use one of your keywords in the link itself. Then make sure the link points to the page on your site that's been optimized for that keyword. Remember, the link doesn't have to reflect the actual web address. For example, you wouldn't want a link that says www.marionettes.com/howdy-doody.htm. A much better link would be Howdy Doody Marionettes. 3. Vary your links. Use different keywords in the links. Point to different pages on your site. Mix them up the way they'd occur naturally if you'd never asked for them in the first place. A Few Bad Ideas In the process of getting more sites to link to yours, there are a few things you'll want to avoid doing: Don't sign up for "Free For All" link sites. These are websites set up solely for the purpose of selling links to other sites that need better link popularity. The search engines are aware of this tactic and don't count those links in your favor at all. Avoid setting up multiple dummy domains just so you can put up sites that'll link to your main site. The search engines are on the lookout for that trick, too. Finally, hang in there! Building link popularity is a long-term, labor-intensive project. You won't get links from everyone you ask. And even if you could, you don't want to get too many links all at one time. To the search engines, that looks like you went out and "bought" a bunch of links. If they think that's what happened, they can simply fail to count those links. After all, bought links aren't true votes for the value of your site. So spread out your efforts. Spend just an hour or two a month on this project. Even if you can spend more time on it, don't devote too much effort to it. And don't assign someone to work full time, 40 hours a week requesting links for your site. If the links come in too fast, they may not be counted. Remember, you're not cheating the search engines if you follow these strategies. You're convincing people that it's valuable for them to link to your site. Those kinds of links are just the kind of votes for your site the search engines hope to find in order to gauge your reputation. By actively seeking links, you're not violating the spirit of the process--you're just speeding it up a bit. Bill Treloar is president of Rank Magic, a consulting firm in East Hanover, New Jersey, that specializes in making internet marketing and search engine optimization more efficient and cost effective. He can be reached at (866) RANK MAGIC or online at www.RankMagic.com. We're all familiar with professional websites and e-commerce portals, but a website doesn't have to be all business. It's easy to create a personal website where you can explore your interests, share your feelings, or update loved ones on your family life. Here's a look at getting started with a personal website along with some topic ideas. The terms "blog," "personal website," and even "online diary" are sometimes used interchangeably. How you refer to your platform is largely about the subject matter, whether you want an audience, and how it's hosted. Your personal website can be about anything you want, including hobbies, pets, or other interests. It can be a family website that shares your adventures with loved ones along with an area for comments and discussion. If you're an author, your personal website can be a platform to get feedback on story ideas or book rough drafts. Dedicate a personal website to sharing how you're getting through a difficult experience in life, or add an e-commerce element to showcase handmade jewelry or other creative ventures. There's no wrong topic idea for your personal website. Once you decide what you'd like to dedicate your site to, find an appropriate host. For example, a blogging platform would be perfect for a simple online journal-style website, while attaching e-commerce functionality would require a more full-featured web host. There are many excellent free website platforms with varying features. Here are a few favorites. About.me is a personal web-hosting service that lets you showcase who you are and what you like to do, allowing people to have a more personal and direct way to connect with you. About.me is also a great platform for small business owners or entrepreneurs. If you're imagining more of an online-journal-type website, LiveJournal is all about self-expression, with the added benefit of an involved and active community. Create an account and start a blog in minutes, and enjoy yourself. WordPress is another great option for a blog-style personal website or a more complicated setup. Create a professional, sophisticated website in minutes with a variety of themes and functions. WordPress is easy to use with more advanced web design features if you want to dig deeper into how your site looks. WordPress has a free service option as well as a number of Premium service subscription options. If you may venture into e-commerce with your personal website, Squarespace is a great option, although it's not free. Beautiful pre-built templates and drag-and-drop functionality make web design an intuitive, if not easy, process. Blogger is one of the easiest and fastest blog-creation tools around. It's free to use, the content creation interface is easy, and all you need is a free Google account to set up your blog. Tumblr blogs are a great choice if you're visualizing a website with online communities and content curation. You'll be showing off your passions and projects with multimedia posts in no time. Google Sites is a fantastic, easy website-creation tool. If you have a Google account, you have access to Google Sites' straightforward drag-and-drop site builder. Create pages and easily add text, graphics, or video. It's easy to integrate content from other Google services, notably documents, spreadsheets, or other items from Docs.