

WEB  
PRO

# Search

What do you do when your rankings drop?  
One of the first things you should do is read  
our handy guide to maintaining your SEO

## Careful SEO maintenance

The search landscape is always evolving, and what worked before may not always prove so fruitful. It's easy to become complacent, especially with an established site, and most of us have had the discomforting experience of seeing our prized rankings dip abruptly. Naturally, rankings will fluctuate over time, but what can we do when things suddenly turn awry?

Let's assume your site is content-rich with no reason for a rankings penalty. First, I suggest avoiding rash wholesale change. A series of fine-tuning may be the solution. Wait a week or so to see if the drop is just part of the natural flux or a slight algorithmic shift. Meanwhile, evaluate your site structure, server traffic and market trends. Is your site still primed for usability? Backtrack over recent updates and ensure your content is still crawlable and fulfils the criteria of good, organic SEO. Consult Google's Webmaster Guidelines and consult an SEO expert.

Have you implemented a strategy that may be negatively affecting your rankings? It may be any one of a vast number of reasons, each of which may be largely beyond your control, yet major search engines are unlikely to castigate you for small spam issues.

Study your inbound links – are they from quality websites? Is your text thoughtfully presented and free of the hallmarks of spam? Sign up to Google's Webmaster Tools console. Upload an XML site map and look for any indexing errors that Google flags up.

Monitor the incremental changes you make. It's good practice to keep a journal, logging each change and its affect a week or two later. Above all, don't wait to be prompted by a change in form to update your site. Once you've found a search engine "friendly" fix, stick with a template that works.

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### This month's recommended...

#### Online SEO Tools

Name: Link popularity checker  
URL: [www.selfseo.com/link-popularity-checker.php](http://www.selfseo.com/link-popularity-checker.php)  
Info: Link popularity (inbound links to a website) is an important facet of SEO. This tool enables you to check the link popularity for any page and see how many links are "noticed" by the major engines.

Name: SEO Tools  
URL: [www.seochat.com/seo-tools/keyword-density](http://www.seochat.com/seo-tools/keyword-density)  
Info: It's always worth keeping an eye on your keyword density. This tool will analyse your URL and return a table of keyword density values for one-, two-, or three-word key terms.

Name: Site Analysis  
URL: [www.linkvendor.com/seo-tools/site-analysis.html](http://www.linkvendor.com/seo-tools/site-analysis.html)  
Info: This tool generates a site analysis, including the number of backlinks, indexed sites, Google PageRank and whether your domain is listed in DMOZ and Yahoo directories.

## How to... Optimise your site structure



### Expert advice

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Optimising your site structure should be an integral part of the design process and should enhance the overall user experience. It's about finding a healthy balance. In most cases, there doesn't need to be a stark compromise between SEO and design. Your

aim should be to ensure that all content on your site is crawlable. If you overlook this process, you may end up with an eye-catching site but fall short on the search engine exposure you may otherwise deserve. Here are six top tips to consider when designing a new site.

#### 1 Make every page in your site crawlable.

If your site uses graphic/image rollovers as navigational links, add additional HTML links somewhere on each page and provide internal links in the text to help the search engine robots find their way around. As a rule of thumb, every page in your site should be navigable through no more than three or four links.

2 Add a site-map.html page. Organise in an easy-to-read, hierarchical

layout. You should always include a link to your site map somewhere on each page, too.

3 Optimise your file names. Rather than [yourdomain.com/webdesign.html](http://yourdomain.com/webdesign.html), opt for a descriptive filename separated by an underscore or a hyphen or two.

4 Image tags. Always include succinct four- to seven-word image tags for as many images as possible, but be sure to make them relevant to

the images, and then subject matter, on the page.

5 Present your text clearly. There's nothing worse than blocky text to put readers off. And a page with little or no content is a missed opportunity for engines to index and rank your content. Include your primary keywords corresponding to each page, but be careful not to overdo it. Think about the positioning of your text, and always use catchy subheaders to draw the reader in.

#### 6 If appropriate, add an FAQ page.

This is informative and search engine-friendly. Categorise all subjects at the top (using anchor tags) and display clearly, so it's easy for the reader to scan the page when seeking an answer.

### How to ...

Do you have a suggestion or question about SEO? Use the subject line "Pro Search" and email us at [haveyoursay@netmag.co.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@netmag.co.uk)

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