

The graphic features the word "Google's" in its multi-colored font, followed by "SEO" in a large blue serif font. The "SEO" is annotated with HTML tags: "<title>" to its left, "<h1>" above it with a double-headed arrow, and "</a>" to its right. Below "SEO" is the text "report card" in a blue sans-serif font.

# Google's SEO report card

by Brandon Falls, Adi Goradia, and Charlene Perez

## Purpose

Google's SEO Report Card aims to identify potential areas for improvement in Google's product pages. If implemented, these improvements could:

- help users find our pages more easily in search engines
- fix bugs that annoy visitors and hurt our pages' performance in search engines
- serve as a good model for outside webmasters and companies

We reviewed the main pages of 100 different Google products across a number of common SEO topics. The results are below, followed by a discussion of each topic.

## Report card

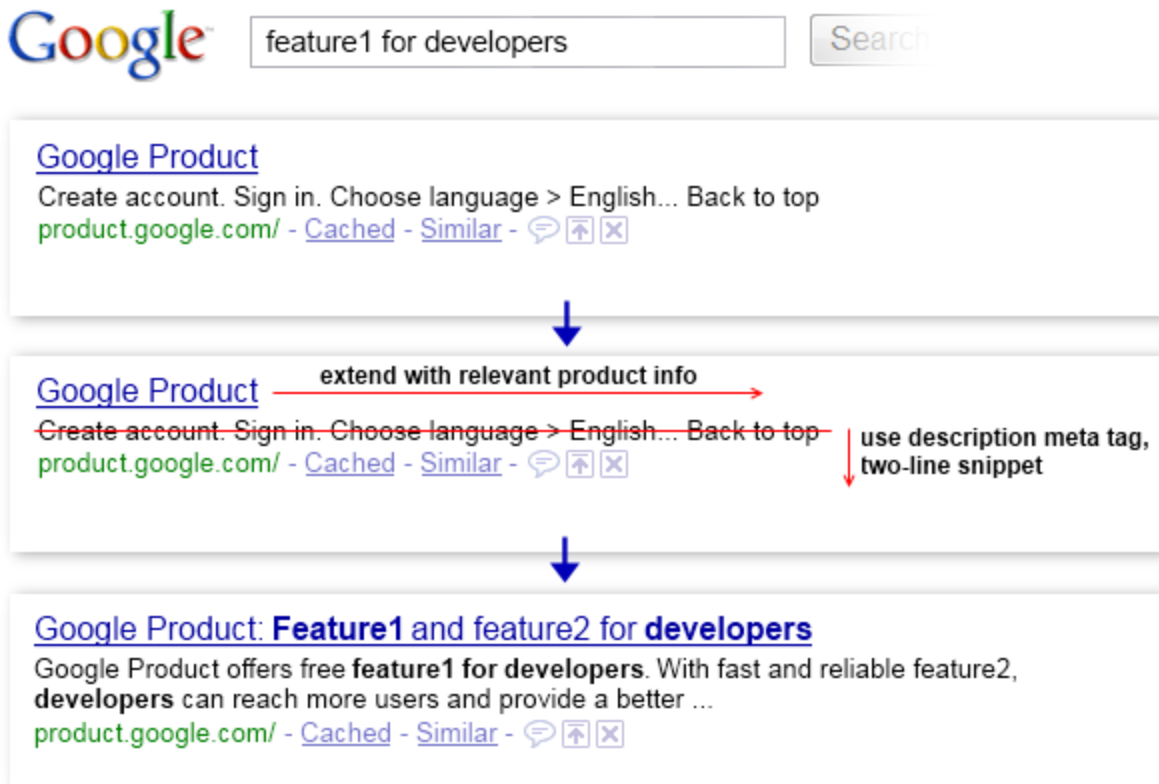
<i>Subjects and topics</i>	<i>Products passing</i>	<i>Grade</i>
<b><u>Subject I: Search result presentation</u></b>		
<u>Title tag format and length</u>	<b>10%</b> (10 / 100)	<b>Needs improvement</b>
<u>Description meta tag use</u>	<b>33%</b> (33 / 100)	<b>Needs improvement</b>
<u>Google sitelink triggering for [google product]</u>	<b>44%</b> (44 / 100)	<b>Not for grading</b>
<u>Appealing Google sitelinks</u>	<b>32%</b> (14 / 44)	<b>Needs improvement</b>
<u>Clear main page result on Google for [google product]</u>	<b>89%</b> (89 / 100)	<b>Excellent</b>

<b><u>Subject II: URLs and redirects</u></b>		
<u>Directory form, www.google.com/product(/)</u>	<b>59%</b> (41 / 70)	Not for grading
<u>www.google.com/product</u>	<b>46%</b> (19 / 41)	Not for grading
<u>www.google.com/product, add '/', 301s</u>	<b>26%</b> (5 / 19)	Needs improvement
<u>www.google.com/product/</u>	<b>54%</b> (22 / 41)	Not for grading
<u>www.google.com/product/, remove '/', 301s</u>	<b>68%</b> (15 / 22)	Satisfactory
<u>Convert to subdomain form, product.google.com/, 301s</u>	<b>54%</b> (22 / 41)	Not for grading
<u>Subdomain form, product.google.com/</u>	<b>41%</b> (29 / 70)	Not for grading
<u>Convert to directory form, www.google.com/product(/), 301s</u>	<b>36%</b> (10 / 29)	Needs improvement
<u>https:// in canonical</u>	<b>7%</b> (7 / 100)	Not for grading
<b><u>Subject III: On-page optimizations</u></b>		
<u>Heading tag use</u>	<b>68%</b> (61 / 90)	Satisfactory
<u>&lt;h1&gt; tag use</u>	<b>43%</b> (26 / 61)	Needs improvement
<u>Logo image link destination</u>	<b>39%</b> (38 / 97)	Needs improvement
<u>Logo image alt text</u>	<b>58%</b> (57 / 99)	Needs improvement
<u>Descriptive internal anchor text</u>	<b>67%</b> (67 / 100)	Satisfactory

# Subject I: Search result presentation

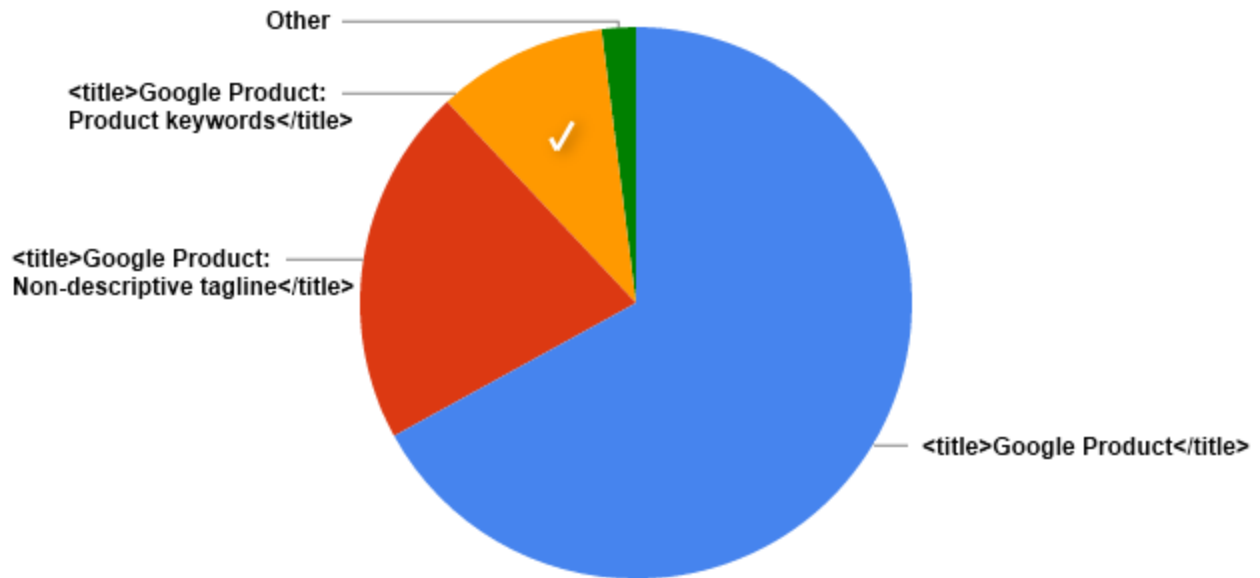
We have a lot of control over how our pages appear in search results. Optimizing a page's title tag, description meta tag, and the look and structure of the URL can go a long way towards improving its presentation in the search results. This helps users make more informed decisions about the results they click on. Also, a more descriptive title tag and URL naming structure can help the search engine understand the content of the page better.

*A descriptive title and description meta tag can help a result pop out better to search users*



## Title tag format and length

Using descriptive words and phrases in your page's title tag helps both users and search engines better understand the focus of the page.



**68 / 100** with form: `<title>Google Product</title>`

*Short title with only the product's name; google.com result for [google adwords], Sept. 2009*

→ [Google Adwords](#)

PPC program where webmasters can create their own ads and choose keywords.  
[adwords.google.com/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) -

**Use the space provided** - Most major search engines display approximately 60 characters from a page's title tag in the title of a search result. These 60 characters are an opportunity to tell both users and search engines what the focus of the page is. There's no need to go past this many characters, as most search engines will display ellipses ( ... ) after this limit. Also, search engines may give less weight to words after a certain point.

**Give the search engine important clues about the page** - Imagine that the text in the title tag is the only signal that a search engine has to figure out what a page is about (in reality, [Google uses over 200 signals](#), but let's just imagine). Would your title tag do a good job if this were the case? The product name is great to have in the title tag; however, it's good to include other important information like what the product does, who it targets, or what its main features are.

**Know about the "NOODP" meta tag** - If your site is listed in the [Open Directory Project](#), Google may choose to use information listed there in the title and snippet of your main page's result. When

this occurs, it may be a signal that your page is missing its title or description meta tag, or both. We can confirm from the Open Directory Project's [Pay-Per-Click Advertising category](#) that Google is using this information in the AdWords result shown above. To prevent this behavior, webmasters can make use of the "[NOODP](#)" meta tag.

*Short title with only the product's name; google.com result for [google fast flip], Sept. 2009*

→ [Google Fast Flip](#)

Check out the mobile version of Google Fast Flip! .... 2009 Google - Google Labs Terms of Use - Privacy Policy - Report an Issue - About Google Fast Flip.  
[fastflip.googlelabs.com/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Give the search user important clues about the page** - Many users may not be familiar with all of Google's products. For users discovering our products through search results, it's important that each product puts its best foot forward with descriptive title tags (shown in the title of the result) and description meta tags (sometimes shown in the snippet). In the result above, if a user is unfamiliar with Google Fast Flip, he or she still has no clue what the product does after reading the result's title and snippet.

**Remember that some users only look at titles** - Each user reads a search results page in a slightly different way. Some look at all parts of the result, others look more at the snippet, and some only look at titles. If you skimp on your title tag, you're missing out on clicks from users who only scan result titles on a search results page.

## **20 / 100** with form: `<title>Google Product - Non-descriptive tagline</title>`

*Title with product's name and non-descriptive tagline; google.com result for [google knol], Sept. 2009*

→ [Knol: a unit of knowledge](#)

Knol makes it free and easy to create, collaborate on, and publish credible web content. Put your name behind your content; write a knol.  
[knol.google.com/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

*Title with product name and non-descriptive tagline; google.com result for [google opensocial], Sept. 2009*

→ [OpenSocial - It's Open. It's Social. It's up to you.](#)

OpenSocial helps these sites share their social data with the web. Applications that use the OpenSocial APIs can be embedded within a social network itself, ...

[www.opensocial.org/](http://www.opensocial.org/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Be selective with your words** - Not many words fit into 60 characters, therefore words in a title tag are precious real estate. Above, "a unit of knowledge" and "It's Open. It's Social. It's up to you." are clever phrases; however, they don't do a good job of informing users or search engines what the product is about. If a word doesn't further this goal, think about replacing it with something more meaningful.

**Think about what users will search for** - Users are unlikely to include general words from the phrases "a unit of" or "It's up to you" in their search queries for your products, meaning that these words will rarely get bolded. Remember that bold words in a result—whether they're in the title, snippet, or URL—are a positive sign to the user that the page is relevant.

## 10 / 100 with form: <title>Google Product - Product keywords</title>

*Descriptive title with product name and related keywords; google.com result for [google grants], Sept. 2009*

→ [Google Grants: In-kind advertising for non-profit organizations](#)

Google Grants is a unique in-kind donation program awarding free AdWords advertising to select charitable organizations. We support organizations sharing ...

[www.google.com/grants/](http://www.google.com/grants/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

*Descriptive title with product name and relevant keywords; google.com result for [google talk], Sept. 2009*

→ [Google Talk - Chat online and make free internet calls](#)

Google's approach to IM adds internet calls, file sharing, notifications and other features for a richer instant communications experience that is more than ...

[www.google.com/talk/](http://www.google.com/talk/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

*Descriptive title with product name and relevant keywords; google.com result for [google voice], Sept. 2009*

→ [Google Voice - One phone number, online voicemail, and enhanced ...](#)  
Google Voice gives you one number for all your phones, voicemail as easy as email, free US long distance, low rates on international calls, and many calling ...  
<https://www.google.com/voice> - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Great!** These titles:

- take advantage of the title space given
- accurately describe the page and product to search engines and users
- include words that users would likely search for to find the product

## **1 / 100** with form: <title>Non-descriptive text</title>

*Short and non-descriptive title; google.com result for [google profiles], Sept. 2009*

→ [Create your profile](#)  
What do people see when they find you online? You can control how you appear in Google by creating a personal profile, and people will see it on their ...  
[www.google.com/profiles](http://www.google.com/profiles) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) -

**Take advantage of your brand name** - Some users may not look at the URL of the result and realize that "Create your profile" is for Google Profiles. If you have a popular brand, be sure to use this to your advantage in your title and snippet.

## **1 / 100** with form: <title>Unrelated Google Product</title>

*Incorrect product listed in title; google.com result for [google appengine], Sept. 2009*

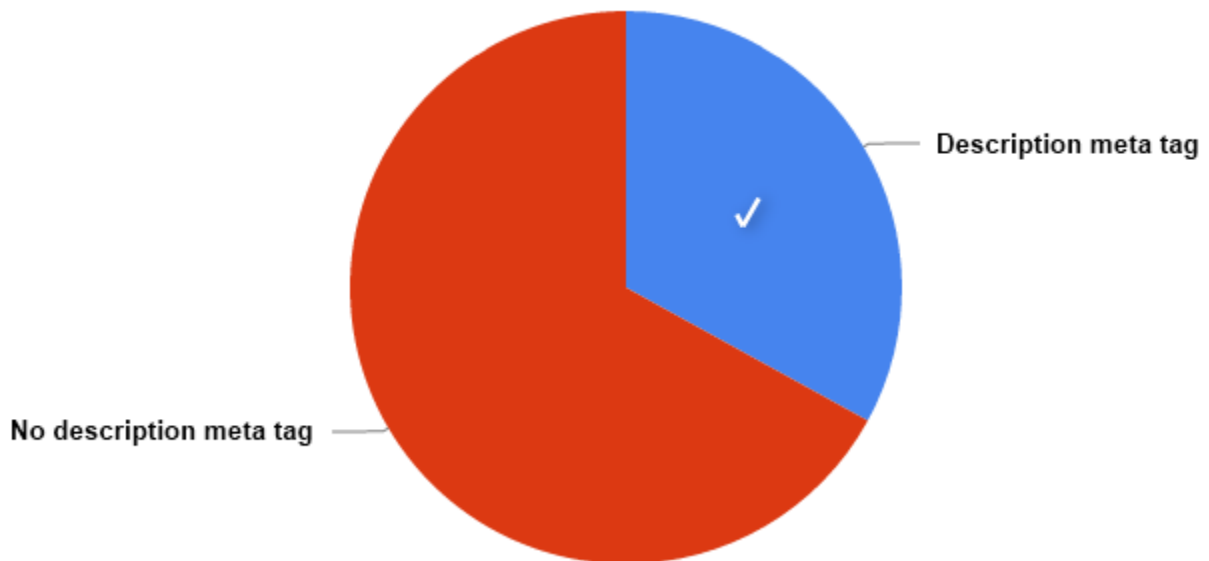
→ [Google Accounts](#)  
Google App Engine enables developers to build web applications on the same scalable systems that power our own applications. ...  
[appengine.google.com/](http://appengine.google.com/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Oops!** - While this example is a rare oversight on our part, a title tag that doesn't accurately describe the focus of the page makes it harder for the search engine to evaluate the page's relevancy. Also, some users may see the inaccurate title and say, "This isn't what I searched for!" and move on to the next result.

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## Description meta tag use

Including an informative description meta tag on your pages can influence the quality of the snippets shown in search results.



**67 / 100** with: no description meta tag

*Snippet containing page's footer text; google.com result for [google sky], Sept. 2009*

[Google Sky](#)  
→ Sky | Moon | Mars - See sky in Google Earth | Help | About Google Sky. e.g.: Galaxy, M31, NGC3628, Mars ... Link to this page, Print. Loading Sky Maps...  
[www.google.com/sky/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

*Snippet containing legal disclaimer from page; google.com result for [google gadgets], Sept. 2009*

[Google Gadgets For Your Webpage](#)

→ Much of the content in this directory was developed by other companies or by Google's users, not by Google. Google makes no promises or representations ...  
[www.google.com/ig/directory?synd=open](http://www.google.com/ig/directory?synd=open) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Take control of your snippet** - The snippets above are great examples of why to use description meta tags. Although description meta tags don't count in Google's ranking (nor do keyword meta tags), the text contained in them is sometimes used in the snippet of search results. In the examples above, Google may have chosen to display a description meta tag, but as it didn't exist, the alternative option for the snippet was the page's content. Since the main page of Google Sky doesn't have much text on it, the only text Google could find was the page's navigational and boilerplate text. The Google Gadgets main page is light on text as well, so the legal disclaimer at the bottom of the page was chosen. Neither of these snippets are attractive to search users. Since you have the chance to take control of your snippet with a description meta tag, do it!

*Short snippet pulled from Open Directory Project; google.com result for [google.org], Sept. 2009*

[Google.org](#)

→ The philanthropic arm of the company. Lists its activities.  
[www.google.org/](http://www.google.org/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Interest the user** - A search result may be a user's first acquaintance with your product. An interesting, catchy, and relevant description meta tag can lead to a high quality snippet that entices users to click and find out more. Google.org has a lot of exciting initiatives. Why not express this to search users?

**Fill your two lines** - Similar to the title tag, you want to use all of the space given to you in the snippet. You'll describe your product better to users, have the opportunity for more bolded words, and take up more real estate on the search results page. By not having a description meta tag that fills both lines of the snippet, you're giving the results underneath you a slight advantage because they're now higher in the user's line of sight.

*Missing snippet due to robots.txt blocking; google.com result for [google picasa web], Sept. 2009*

[Sign into Picasa Web Albums](#)

[picasaweb.google.com/](http://picasaweb.google.com/) - [Similar](#)

**Diagnose empty snippets** - The vast majority of search results have snippets. When users see a result without one, they're suspicious of it. They may think that the page is down, is spam, or isn't the official one they're looking for, which means fewer clicks for that result. A result with no snippet usually means that the search engine was told not to crawl that URL because of a robots.txt file or a "nosnippet" meta tag. The former was the case with Picasa Web Albums' robots.txt file, which includes the line "Disallow: /".

*Snippet taken from page's text, no description meta tag: google.com result for [google insights], Sept. 2009*

[Google Insights for Search](#)

→ With Google Insights for Search, you can compare search volume patterns across specific regions, categories, time frames and properties. ...

[www.google.com/insights/search/](http://www.google.com/insights/search/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Take other search engines into account** - Let's assume that you don't have a description meta tag, but that you're happy with the text your favorite search engine is choosing for your page's snippet. There's no need to create a description meta tag, right? Not necessarily. Each search engine has its own way of deciding what text is shown in snippets. Providing a rich description meta tag can help search engines create better snippets for your pages.

*Almost empty snippet on another search engine: bing.com result for [google insights], Sept. 2009*

[Google Insights for Search](#)

→ | English (US)

[www.google.com/insights/search/](http://www.google.com/insights/search/) - [Cached page](#)

*Snippet containing the page's footer text: yahoo.com result for [google insights], Sept. 2009*

[Google Insights for Search](#)

- With Google Insights for Search, you can compare search volume patterns across ...  
©2009 Google - Terms of Use - Privacy Policy - Insights for Search Help Center ...  
[www.google.com/insights/search](http://www.google.com/insights/search) - 124k

One major search engine displays an almost empty snippet while another is showing navigational/boilerplate text. Neither of these is attractive to users, meaning less clicks.

*Another product's description in description meta tag; google.com result for [google patents], Sept. 2009*

[Google Patent Search](#)

- Search and preview millions of books from libraries and publishers worldwide using Google Book Search. Discover a new favorite or unearth an old classic.  
[www.google.com/patents](http://www.google.com/patents) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Oops!** - The description meta tag on Google Patent Search was copied from Google Books. This result might confuse users who rely heavily on snippets to decide which result to click on.

## 33 / 100 with: description meta tag

*Rich description meta tag used in snippet; google.com result for [google blogger], Sept. 2009*

[Blogger: Create your free blog](#)

- Blogger is a free blog publishing tool from Google for easily sharing your thoughts with the world. Blogger makes it simple to post text, photos and video ...  
[www.blogger.com/](http://www.blogger.com/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

*Good description meta tag used in snippet; google.com result for [google finance], Sept. 2009*

### [Google Finance](#)

→ Google Finance offers a broad range of information about stocks, mutual funds, public and private companies. In addition, Google Finance offers interactive ...  
[www.google.com/finance](http://www.google.com/finance) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Great!** These snippets:

- come from text specified in the description meta tag
- take advantage of the space given in the snippet
- accurately describe the page and product to search users
- include words that users would likely search for to find the product

*Catchy description meta tag used in snippet; google.com result for [google map maker], Sept. 2009*

### [Google Map Maker](#)

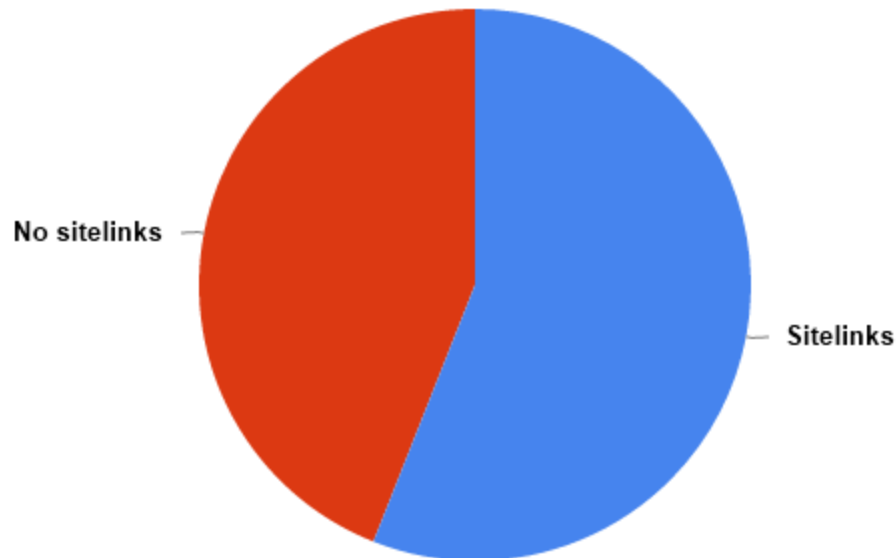
→ Edit the map in more than a hundred countries and watch your edits go into Google Maps. Become a citizen cartographer and help map your world!  
[www.google.com/mapmaker](http://www.google.com/mapmaker) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Nice!** This snippet also comes from a description meta tag and does a good job of empowering and exciting users.

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# Google sitelink triggering

Sitelinks are often a signal to users that they've found the result they're looking for and can help in finding information faster.



**56 / 100 with: no sitelinks**

Webmasters can't choose when sitelinks are shown; however, they can optimize their site's organization and internal linking to improve their chances. The following can help:

- use a hierarchical site structure
- use descriptive anchor text for links pointing to internal pages
- avoid deep nesting of content behind many subdirectories

These optimizations assist both search engines and visitors as they navigate your site.

## 44 / 100 with: sitelinks

Sitelinks shown in result; google.com result for [google 3d warehouse], Sept. 2009

[3D Warehouse](#)  
Free 3D modeling software. Google 3D Warehouse FAQ Learn about the 3D Warehouse.  
Google Earth Search the globe for 3D models. ...  
[sketchup.google.com/3dwarehouse/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

→ [SketchUp Components](#)      [Google 3D Model Map](#)  
[Interior Furnishings](#)      [Kitchen and Bath by Google](#)  
[3D Modelling Services](#)      [Transportation](#)  
[CADdetails SketchUp Collection ...](#)      [Green Design Products](#)

[More results from google.com »](#)

Sitelinks shown in result; google.com result for [google enterprise], Sept. 2009

[Google Enterprise](#)  
Google enterprise products make your users more productive by combining the innovation and ease of use of Google's consumer products with the features, ...  
[www.google.com/enterprise/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

→ [Solutions Marketplace](#)      [Search Appliance for website](#)  
[Google Search Appliance](#)      [Tours & demos](#)  
[Product Models](#)      [Industry Solutions](#)  
[Google Mini](#)      [Partners](#)

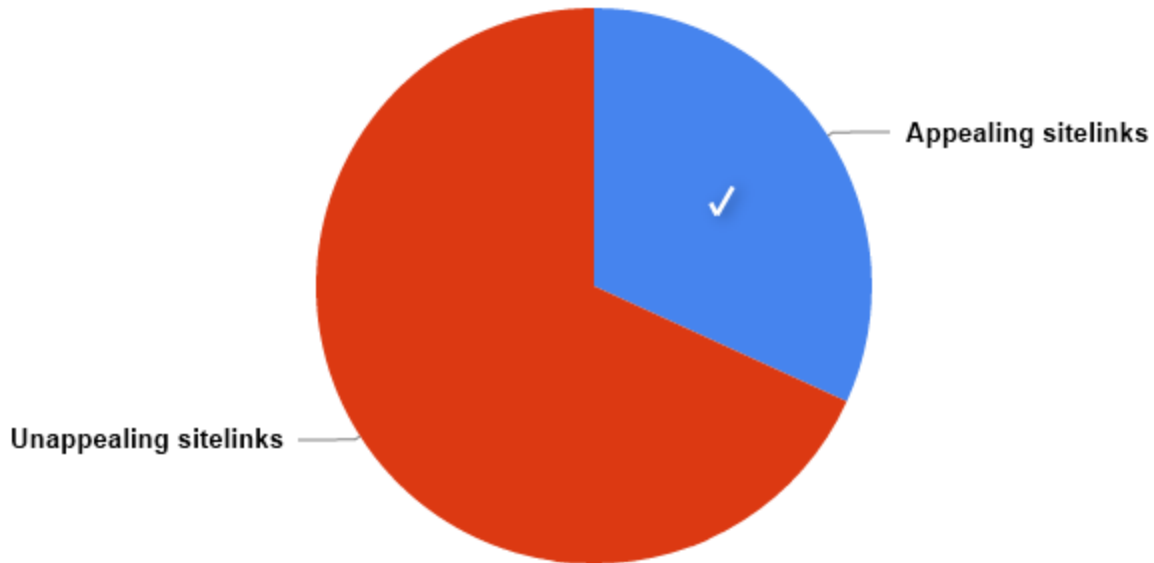
[More results from google.com »](#)

**Nice!** For the main page top results above, Google has chosen to display sitelinks. These links:

- are relevant to the product
- help users find the content they want faster
- take up more real estate on the search results page

## Appealing Google sitelinks

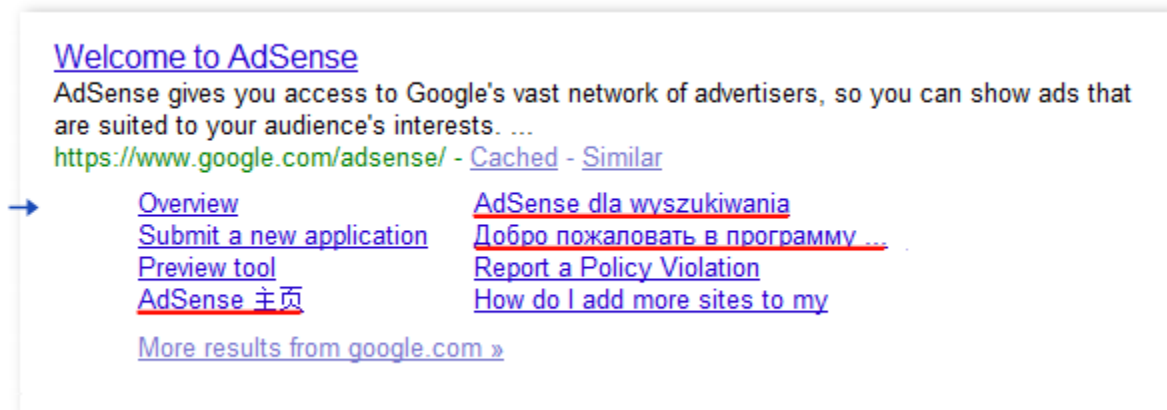
Sitelinks that lead to the most relevant and important content on your site help your users find the content they want faster.



## 30 / 44\* with: unappealing sitelinks

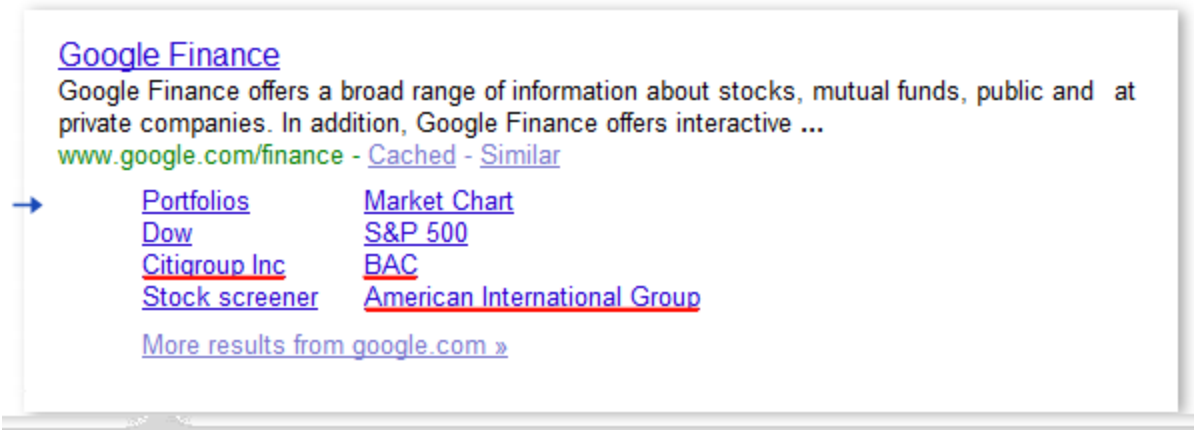
\* includes only products with sitelinks

*International sitelinks shown on google.com results for [google adsense], Sept. 2009*



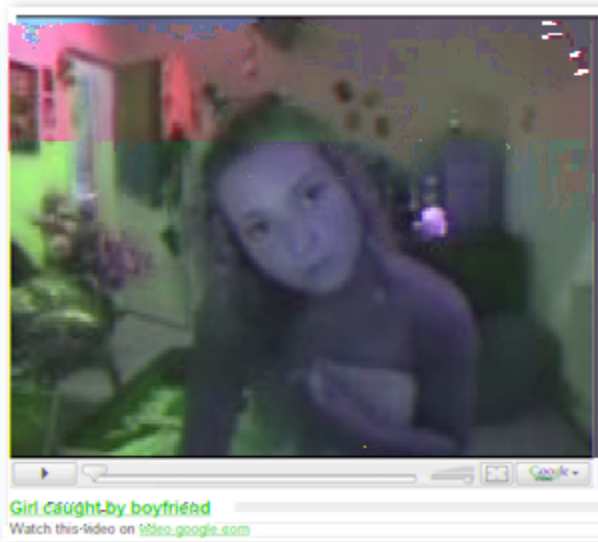
**Block unappealing sitelinks** - Google Webmaster Tools allows webmasters to block unwanted sitelinks. In the example above, links to deeper international AdSense pages are shown on google.com results. While these pages are relevant to search users in those languages, many more users searching for AdSense on google.com may find other content more relevant.

*Non-feature-like pages chosen for sitelinks; google.com result for [google finance], Sept. 2009*



**Block unwanted sitelinks** - Occasionally, Google might choose some sitelinks that lead to popular and relevant content on your site, but they're not the pages that you prefer. In the example above, the highlighted sitelinks might interest some users, but probably not as many as more generic sitelinks like "News", "NASDAQ", or "Google Domestic Trends" would. An amusing incidence of this occurred a few months ago when Google Video's first sitelink was "Girl caught by boyfriend," which led to a popular video on the service. Yes, it's popular content; however, there's probably another sitelink that the Google Video team prefers to be shown over this one.

*Destination of Google Video's first listed sitelink; from google.com result for [google video], Sept. 2009*



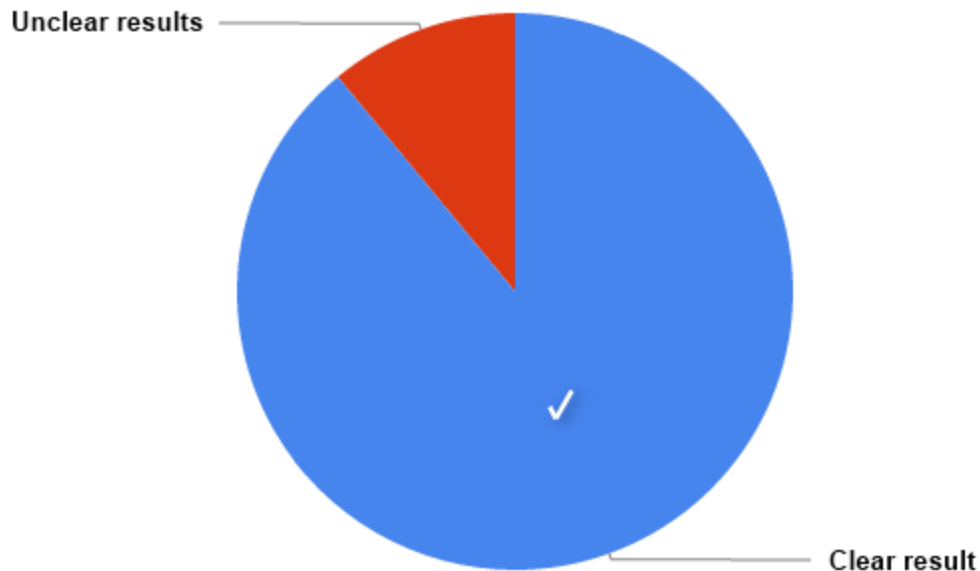
## 14 / 44 with: appealing sitelinks

**Good!** The sitelinks for these products' main pages are relevant and appealing to users. Users can click them to easily navigate to the specific content they want.

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## Clear main page result for [google product]

Having content accessible through one URL (a preferred/canonical URL) helps it rank better and is easier on search users trying to reach your product.



## 89 / 100 with: a clear main page result

**Excellent!** The top ten results for the navigational query [google product] on Google don't contain multiple results that may confuse search users over which one leads to the product's main page.

## 11 / 100 with: an unclear main page result

Three similar results for users to choose from; google.com result for [feedburner], Sept. 2009

- [FeedBurner](#)  
[www.feedburner.com/](http://www.feedburner.com/) - [Similar](#)
- [FeedBurner](#)  
[feedburner.google.com/](http://feedburner.google.com/) - [Similar](#)  
  
[FeedBurner - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)  
FeedBurner is a web feed management provider launched in 2004. FeedBurner provides custom RSS feeds and management tools to bloggers, podcasters, ...  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FeedBurner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FeedBurner) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)
- [Google FeedBurner](#)  
Allows weblog owners and podcasters the ability to manage their RSS feeds and track usage of their subscribers.  
<https://www.google.com/accounts/ServiceLogin?...feedburner> - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

Three similar results for users to choose from; google.com result for [google picasa web], Sept. 2009

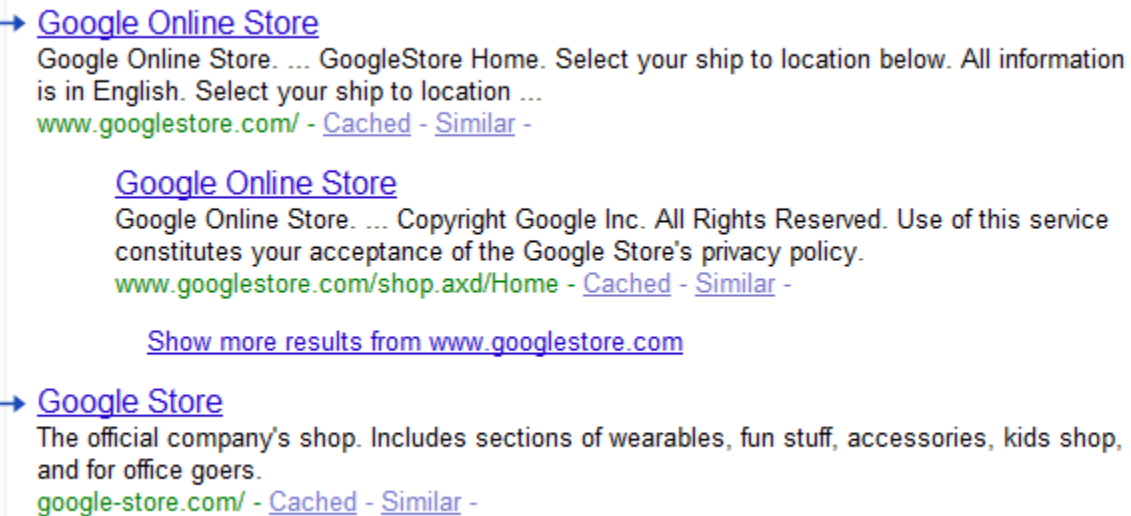
- [Sign into Picasa Web Albums](#)  
[picasaweb.google.com/](http://picasaweb.google.com/) - [Similar](#)
- [Picasa Web Albums](#)  
Picasa Web Albums. Fast and easy photo sharing from Google. Just added! ... Sign in to Picasa Web Albums with your. Google, Account. Email: Password: ...  
<https://www.google.com/accounts/ServiceLogin?service=lh2> - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)  
  
[Picasa 3: Free download from Google](#)  
Learn more about Picasa and Picasa Web Albums · Watch a video introduction ... ..and go to Picasa Web Albums to share and explore photos. ...  
[picasa.google.com/](http://picasa.google.com/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)
- [Picasa Web Albums: free photo sharing from Google](#)  
Fast and easy photo sharing from Google. Share with friends and family, or explore public photos.  
[lh2.google.com/](http://lh2.google.com/) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

**Consolidate URLs** - Although the highlighted results above all go to the main page of the service, users should never have to ask, "Which one do I click and how are these different?" Choosing one version of a URL and consolidating the others with [301 redirects](#) or the [canonical element](#) makes everything easier for the search engine and for users.

**Prevent dilution of reputation** - If the same content is accessible through multiple URLs, this could cause [duplicate content](#). This content may rank worse because its reputation is spread over multiple URLs. Consolidation of the URLs, as mentioned above, resolves this.

**Allow crawling for 301 redirects** - A URL must allow crawling before the search engine will recognize that it redirects. [www.feedburner.com's robot.txt file](#) currently disallows search engines from crawling pages on the domain, so its 301 is never seen. In some cases, a site might choose to allow crawling for just its main page and block crawling on the rest of the site.

*Similar results for the US and UK Google Store sites; google.com result for [google store], Sept. 2009*



→ [Google Online Store](#)  
Google Online Store. ... GoogleStore Home. Select your ship to location below. All information is in English. Select your ship to location ...  
[www.googlestore.com/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) -

[Google Online Store](#)  
Google Online Store. ... Copyright Google Inc. All Rights Reserved. Use of this service constitutes your acceptance of the Google Store's privacy policy.  
[www.googlestore.com/shop.axd/Home](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) -

[Show more results from www.googlestore.com](#)

→ [Google Store](#)  
The official company's shop. Includes sections of wearables, fun stuff, accessories, kids shop, and for office goers.  
[google-store.com/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#) -

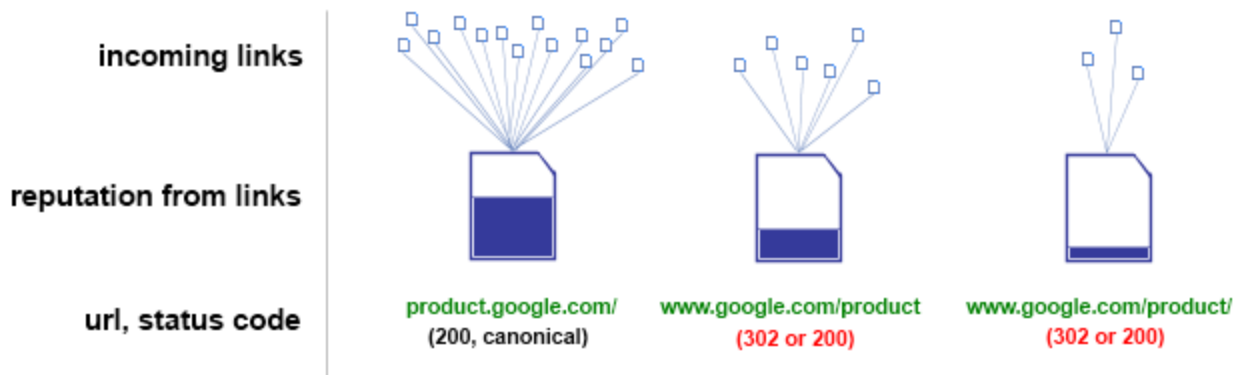
**Geotarget international content** - Google Webmaster Tools allows webmasters to [geotarget domains, subdomains, and directories](#). In the example above, a user might have a hard time choosing between [www.googlestore.com/](#) and [google-store.com/](#). Each have very similar URLs, titles, and snippets. Assuming that a user in the US does choose the [google-store.com/](#) result (the UK version of the Google Store), he or she might be surprised upon checkout when the price is listed in British pounds. To better geotarget users with the appropriate domain/subdomain/directory, login to [Webmaster Tools](#) and check if the "Geographic Target" feature is available for your content.

# Subject II: URLs and redirects

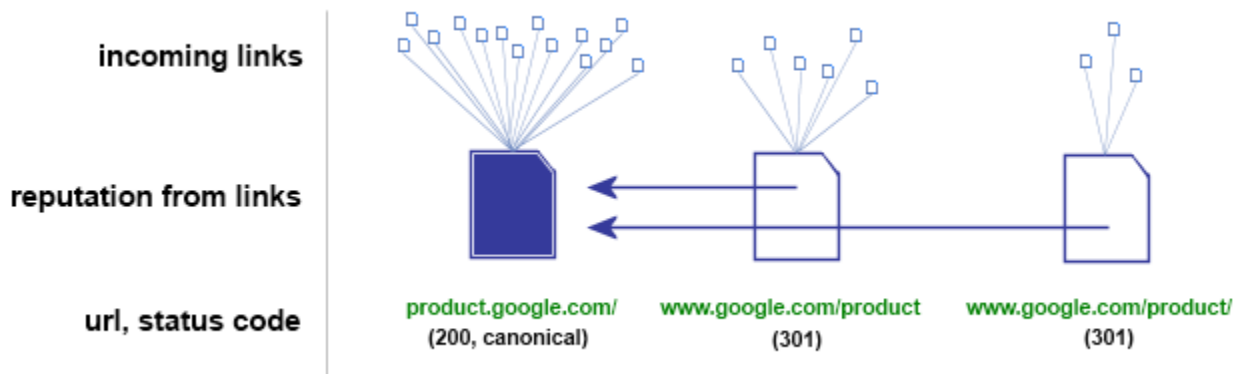
Google products' URLs take many different forms. Most larger products use a subdomain, while smaller ones usually use a directory form, with or without a slash (note that `www.google.com/product` is considered a different URL than `www.google.com/product/` by search engines). With so many products and different forms of URLs, users face a daunting task knowing which URL format to use for which product. Such varied URL behavior can lead to 404 pages (users following broken links or directly typing the URL in) and split reputation between multiple URLs, hurting the ranking of content. The following recommendations can help with this:

- choose the easiest to remember form of the URL as the canonical (likely `product.google.com/`)
- be consistent with this canonical form across all products
- think of the most common URL forms visitors may try and 301 redirect these to the preferred/canonical URL or use the `rel="canonical"` link element if you cannot redirect

*Reputation is diluted when the same content is accessible at multiple URLs*



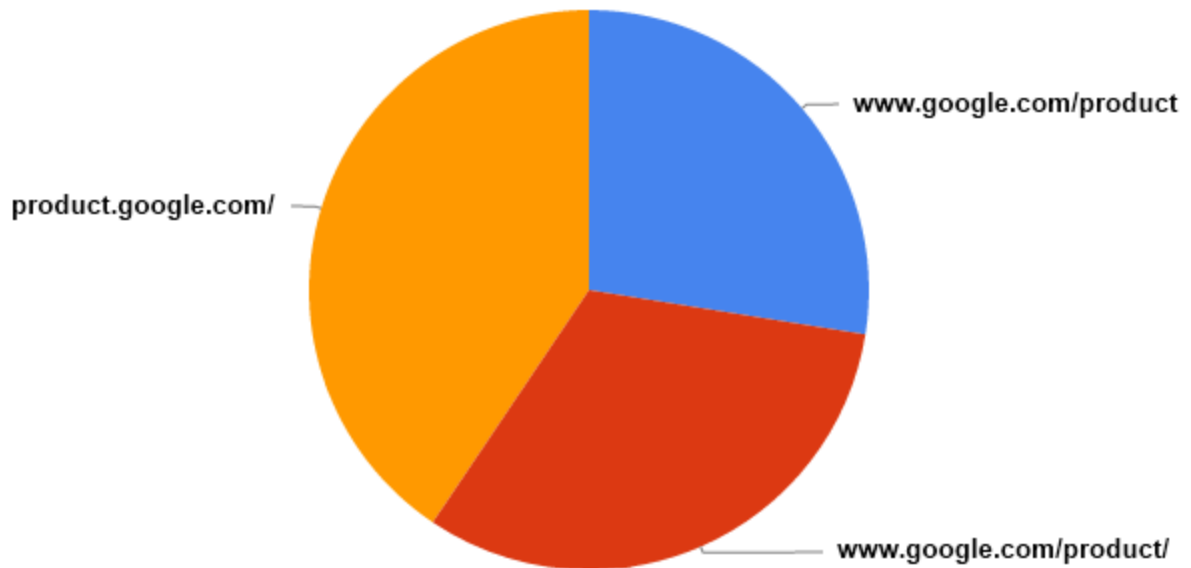
*Consolidating non-canonical versions with 301 redirects recaptures reputation and prevents duplicate content*



## URL format

Whichever URL format your product uses, the other common forms should properly route both users and search engines to the preferred/canonical form.

*Google product URLs are split between a few main forms. Can you name which products use what form?*



## Directory form, [www.google.com/product\(/\)](http://www.google.com/product/)

**41 / 70\*** using: directory form

\* excludes product main pages using a deep URL or separate domain name

Nearly two-thirds of our products use a directory form for their URL, with or without a trailing slash. The products not using a slash (technically we'd refer to this URL as a filename instead of a directory) sometime serve parameters off this URL (e.g. [www.google.com/finance?q=](http://www.google.com/finance?q=)) and many make use of a slash (turning it into a directory) to serve deeper pages out of (e.g. [www.google.com/finance/stockscreeener](http://www.google.com/finance/stockscreeener)). To simplify our terminology in this section, "directory form" will refer to [www.google.com/product](http://www.google.com/product) and [www.google.com/product/](http://www.google.com/product/).

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## www.google.com/product

**19/41\*** using: directory form, no trailing slash

\* includes product main pages in directory form

A little under half of these products using a directory form don't use a trailing slash for the canonical URL. Examples of these products include [www.google.com/chrome](http://www.google.com/chrome), [www.google.com/finance](http://www.google.com/finance), [www.google.com/products](http://www.google.com/products), and [www.google.com/profiles](http://www.google.com/profiles).

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## www.google.com/product (canonical), try version: www.google.com/product/

**14/19\*** with: suboptimal behavior when trailing slash added

\* includes product main pages in directory form without a trailing slash

*200 status code given when slash added to Google Products' canonical URL, Sept. 2009*

The image shows a browser's developer tools interface. On the left, there are labels for 'canonical:', 'status code:', 'try version:', and 'status code:'. The 'canonical:' label points to a text box containing 'www.google.com/products'. The first 'status code:' label points to a dropdown menu showing 'HTTP Headers' and 'HTTP/1.x 200 OK'. The 'try version:' label points to a text box containing 'http://www.google.com/products/'. The second 'status code:' label points to another dropdown menu showing 'HTTP Headers' and 'HTTP/1.x 200 OK'.

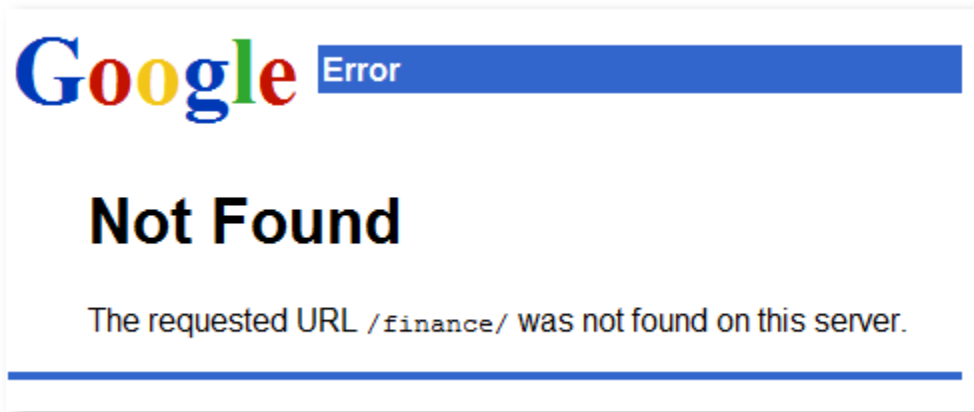
**Avoid multiple URLs that serve the same content** - From the example above, the good news is that visitors will reach the content no matter which version of the URL they choose. This is because

a "200 OK" status code is given for both URLs. The bad news is that each of these URLs will get crawled and indexed by search engines, creating duplicate content. Search engines will have a tougher time deciding which URL is the canonical. Also, each URL will have its own reputation. Using a 301 on [www.google.com/products/](http://www.google.com/products/) will consolidate this valuable reputation so that the canonical can rank to its fullest.

*404 status code given when slash added to Google Finance's canonical URL, Sept. 2009*

The image shows two instances of browser developer tools. The first instance shows the 'canonical' property set to [www.google.com/finance](http://www.google.com/finance) and the 'status code' as 'HTTP/1.x 200 OK'. The second instance shows the 'try version' as <http://www.google.com/finance/> and the 'status code' as 'HTTP/1.x 404 Not Found'.

*404 page shown when slash added to Google Finance's canonical URL, Sept. 2009*

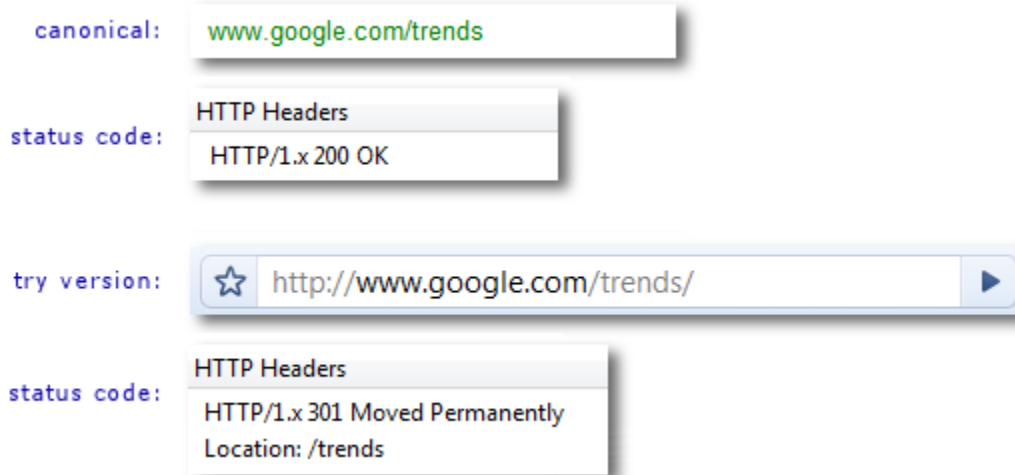


**Prevent 404s** - A lot of visitors will try to reach Google Finance with the URL [finance.google.com/](http://finance.google.com/). Many others will try [www.google.com/finance](http://www.google.com/finance), but a large number will also try [www.google.com/finance/](http://www.google.com/finance/), which leads them to an unhelpful 404 page. Some visitors will assume that the service is down ("Why wouldn't [www.google.com/finance/](http://www.google.com/finance/) work?"). Others might try another form of the URL, but say, "I never know which URL to choose for Google's products!" Think of the most common URLs that visitors might try in order to reach your product, then 301 redirect these to the canonical

URL. This will prevent a lot of frustration for users who access your product by typing the URL in their browser's address bar.

## 5/19 using: 301 redirect when trailing slash added

*301 redirect occurs when slash added to Google Trends' canonical URL, Sept. 2009*



**Nice!** - These URLs route both visitors and search engines to the canonical URL, preventing 404s and consolidating reputation.

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## www.google.com/product/

## 22/41\* using: directory form, trailing slash

\* includes product main pages in directory form

Half of our products using a directory form use a trailing slash. Products with this format include [www.google.com/analytics/](http://www.google.com/analytics/), [www.google.com/apps/](http://www.google.com/apps/), and [www.google.com/mobile/](http://www.google.com/mobile/).

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**www.google.com/product/ (canonical), try version:  
www.google.com/product**

**15/22\*** using: 301 redirects when trailing slash removed

\* includes product main pages in directory form with a trailing slash

*301 redirect occurs when slash removed from Google Custom Search Engine's canonical URL, Sept. 2009*

canonical:

status code: 

HTTP Headers
HTTP/1.x 200 OK

try version:

status code: 

HTTP Headers
HTTP/1.x 301 Moved Permanently
Location: http://www.google.com/cse/

**Excellent!** - Most products with a trailing slash correctly handle the removal of the slash. Numerous visitors likely try this version every day.

## 7 / 22 with: suboptimal behavior when trailing slash removed

*301 redirect to non-canonical URL when slash removed from Google 411's canonical URL, Sept. 2009*

canonical:

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 200 OK

try version:

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 301 Moved Permanently  
Location: http://www.google.com/goog411/index.html

**301 to the canonical URL** - The URL [www.google.com/goog411](http://www.google.com/goog411) does a 301, which is great; however, its destination isn't the canonical URL ([www.google.com/goog411/](http://www.google.com/goog411/)). This means that any reputation that [www.google.com/goog411](http://www.google.com/goog411) has from links gets sent to [www.google.com/goog411/index.html](http://www.google.com/goog411/index.html), bypassing the canonical. Choose one version of a URL as the canonical and use that across your entire site for links and redirects.

*302 redirect occurs when slash removed from Google Friend Connect's canonical URL, Sept. 2009*

canonical:

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 200 OK

try version:

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 302 Moved Temporarily  
Location: /friendconnect/

**Don't use 302s when 301s would be more appropriate** - When a 302 (temporary redirect) is used on a URL, the search engine is told that the destination URL is a temporary one and that the search engine should keep track of both URLs (the one with the redirect on it and the destination). In the example above, users will properly reach the canonical version through the 302, which is good; however, search engines won't transfer the reputation from [www.google.com/friendconnect](http://www.google.com/friendconnect) to the canonical version through a 302, only through a 301. With a 302, the search engine says, "This destination is just temporary, so I'll hold the reputation at [www.google.com/friendconnect](http://www.google.com/friendconnect) in case it's used again in the future." Avoid this situation by using a 301 to consolidate reputation.

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**[www.google.com/product\(/\)](http://www.google.com/product(/)) (canonical), try version:  
[product.google.com/](http://product.google.com/)**

**22/42\*** that: handle subdomain form

\* includes product main pages with a directory form, with or without a trailing slash

*301 redirect occurs when subdomain form attempted for Google Trends, Sept. 2009*

canonical: [www.google.com/trends](http://www.google.com/trends)

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 200 OK

try version: <http://trends.google.com/>

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 301 Moved Permanently  
Location: <http://www.google.com/trends>

**Great!** - For visitors who ask, "Is it [www.google.com/product](http://www.google.com/product) or [product.google.com/](http://product.google.com/)", these products correctly redirect visitors and search engines to the canonical URL with a 301 redirect.

## 20/42 that: don't handle subdomain form

*302 redirect occurs when subdomain form attempted for Google AdSense, Sept. 2009*

canonical: <https://www.google.com/adsense/>

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 302 Moved Temporarily  
Location: <https://www.google.com/adsense/login>

try version:

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 302 Found  
Location: <https://www.google.com/adsense/>

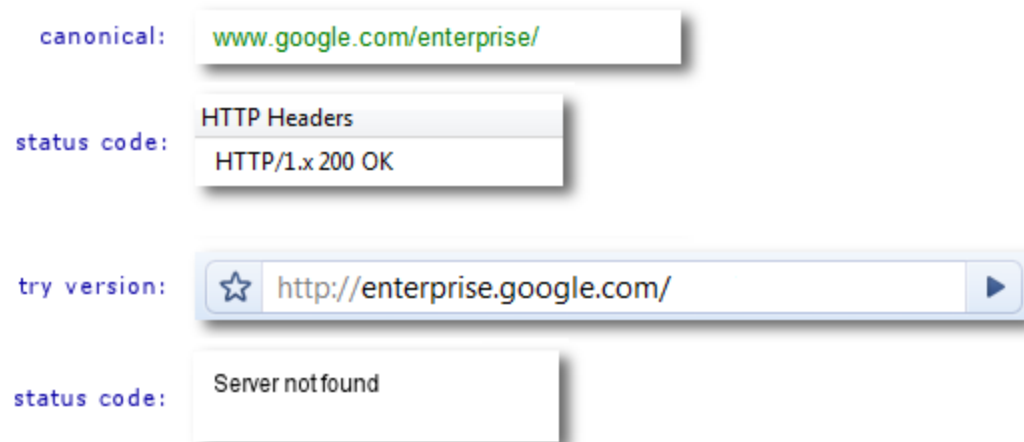
*Reference to the non-canonical subdomain version of Google AdSense's URL, Sept. 2009*

ne page as your map mashup, outside of the map.

or to learn how to put ad units on your page, visit [adsense.google.com](http://adsense.google.com).

**Consolidate reputation** - The reputation from [adsense.google.com/](http://adsense.google.com/), a commonly linked to URL (even by us!), isn't consolidated to <https://www.google.com/adsense/> because a 302 is used. To resolve this, a 301 should be used instead. Note that the canonical also does a 302 redirect (to a login URL), but this is expected and standard across Google properties that require login credentials.

*Server not found error when subdomain form attempted for Google Enterprise, Sept. 2009*



**Reduce server not found errors** - Only the largest products at Google have subdomains, so some of these "not found" errors are intentional for smaller products. Subdomains require an extra DNS lookup, slightly affecting latency, which is very important at Google. Nonetheless, not knowing whether to use the subdomain or the directory form of a URL for our products confuses users, who may not be clear on what's considered a "large Google product." Given that there are pros and cons to each side, you may want to discuss your individual product's situation with your team and others at Google.

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## Subdomain form

**29 / 70\*** using: subdomain form

\* excludes product main pages using a deep URL or separate domain name

About one-third of Google's product main product pages use a subdomain. Many of these include some of Google's largest products like [adwords.google.com/](http://adwords.google.com/), [earth.google.com/](http://earth.google.com/), [images.google.com/](http://images.google.com/), [mail.google.com/](http://mail.google.com/), and [news.google.com/](http://news.google.com/).

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**product.google.com/ (canonical), try version:  
www.google.com/product(/)**

**19 / 29\*** that: suboptimally handle directory form

\* includes product main pages with a subdomain form

*301 redirect to a non-canonical URL when directory form attempted for Google Blog Search, Sept. 2009*

canonical: [blogsearch.google.com/](http://blogsearch.google.com/)

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 200 OK

try version: <http://www.google.com/blogsearch>

status code: HTTP Headers  
HTTP/1.x 301 Moved Permanently  
Location: <http://blogsearch.google.com/blogsearch>

**301 to the canonical or use the rel="canonical" link element** - [blogsearch.google.com/](http://blogsearch.google.com/)  
[blogsearch](http://www.google.com/blogsearch) is a duplicate of [blogsearch.google.com/](http://blogsearch.google.com/) (the canonical) and benefits from the reputation sent from [www.google.com/blogsearch](http://www.google.com/blogsearch).

302 redirect to a non-canonical URL when directory form attempted for Google Images, Sept. 2009

canonical:

status code: 

HTTP Headers
HTTP/1.x 200 OK

try version:

status code: 

HTTP Headers
HTTP/1.x 302 Found
Location: http://www.google.com/imghp

**Avoid 302s when 301s would be better** - Not only does [www.google.com/images](http://www.google.com/images) do a 302 redirect when a 301 would be more appropriate, but it goes to [www.google.com/imghp](http://www.google.com/imghp), an odd duplicate version of the canonical, [images.google.com/](http://images.google.com/). There's likely a lot of reputation held up at these non-canonical versions.

404 status code given when directory forms attempted for Google AdWords and Images, Sept. 2009

try version:

status code: 

HTTP Headers
HTTP/1.x 404 Not Found

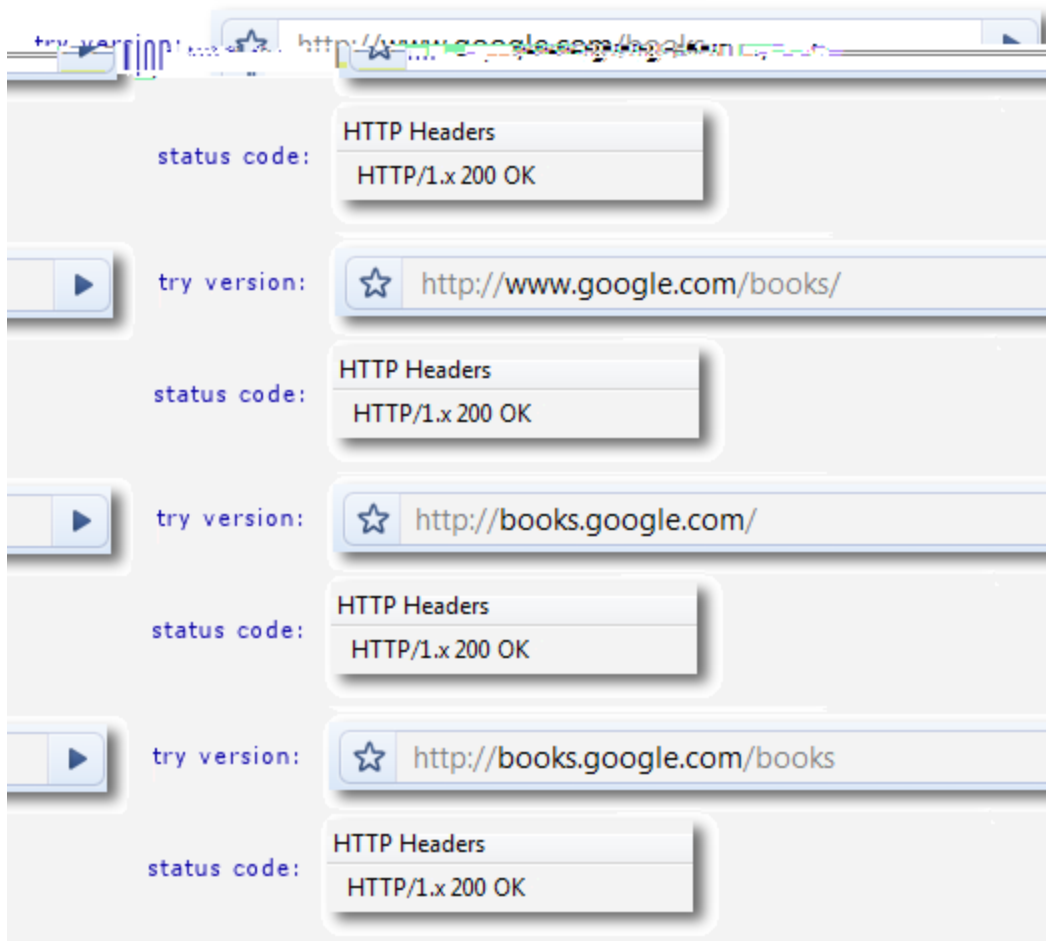
try version:

status code: 

HTTP Headers
HTTP/1.x 404 Not Found

**Prevent 404s** - Thousands of visitors a day likely try to reach Google AdWords and Images with these URLs. These versions probably have many external links pointing to them as well. 301 redirecting these URLs to their canonical would recapture lost visits and consolidate valuable reputation.

200 status codes given for four different Google Books URLs, Sept. 2009



**Eliminate duplicate versions** - Above are four different URLs for Google Books that give "200 OK" status codes. Each one has its own reputation, so choosing one and using a 301 or the rel="canonical" link element on the others could give this product a nice boost in the reputation department.

## 10 / 29\* that: handle directory form

\* includes product main pages with a subdomain form

301 redirect when directory form attempted for Google Earth, Sept. 2009

The image shows two examples of search engine results for the URL 'earth.google.com/'.

The first example shows a 'canonical:' field with the value 'earth.google.com/'. Below it, the 'status code:' is shown as 'HTTP Headers' with a sub-entry 'HTTP/1.x 200 OK'.

The second example shows a 'try version:' field with a star icon and the URL 'http://www.google.com/earth/'. Below it, the 'status code:' is shown as 'HTTP Headers' with sub-entries 'HTTP/1.x 301 Moved Permanently' and 'Location: http://earth.google.com/'.

**Good!** - Each product with a subdomain should handle the directory form, with or without a trailing slash. The example above 301s to the canonical, earth.google.com/.

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## https:// in canonical

### 7 / 100 with: https in canonical

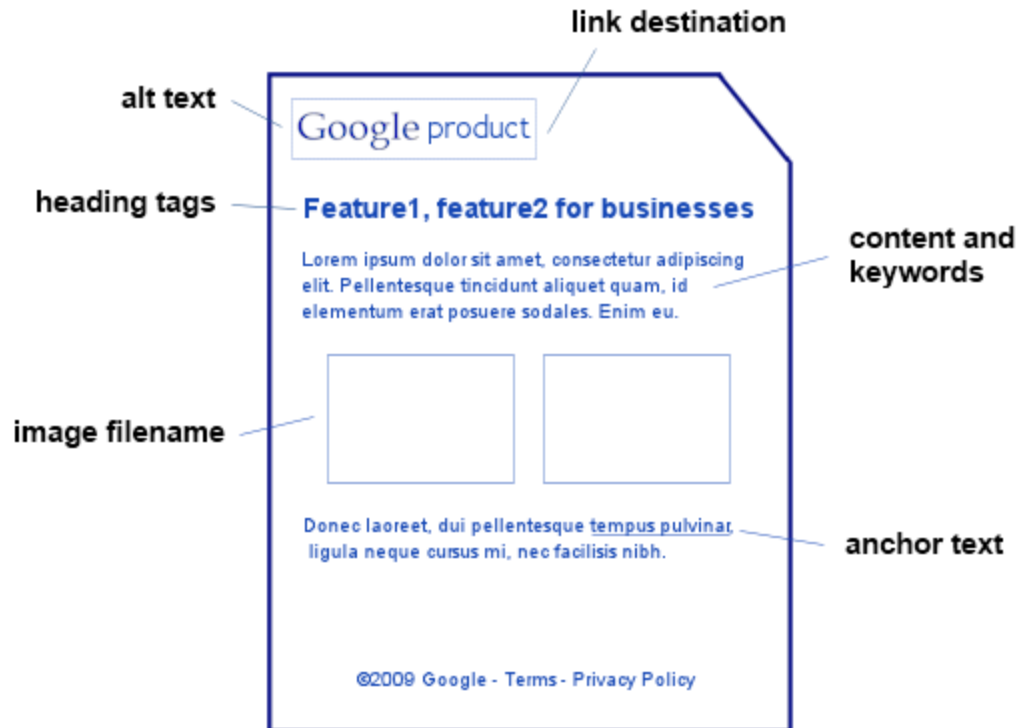
A small percentage of our products' canonical URLs contain https instead of http. Some of these include Google Accounts, AdSense, Health, and Voice. This isn't a problem, but note that https://www.google.com/adsense/ is a different URL than http://www.google.com/adsense/. If the https version is preferred, we should use https in all internal links to that product and either 301 redirect the http version or use the rel="canonical" link element to properly consolidate reputation.

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# Subject III: On-page optimizations

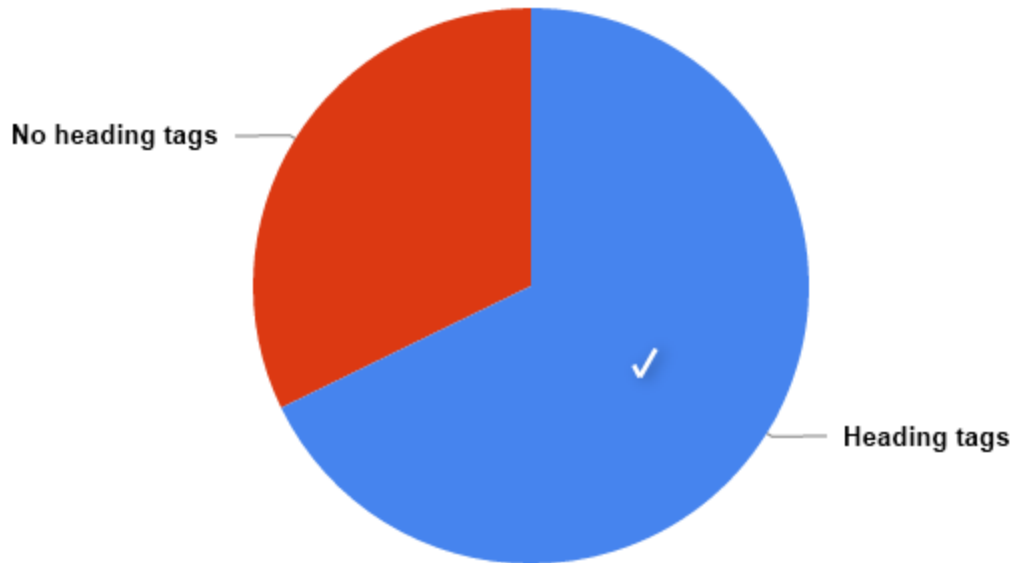
Optimizing on-page elements of Google's pages, such as keywords, heading tags, and internal links can help search engines better understand the content of these pages and how they're structured. Also, many of these optimizations aid users' navigation and usability of the site.

*There are plenty of optimization opportunities on every page*



## Heading tag use

Using semantic markup like heading tags can provide search engines with useful information about how your document is structured that wouldn't be possible with plain text.



**61 / 90\*** using: heading tags

\* excludes product main pages with little text like Google Images, Maps, and Web Search

*Proper heading tag use by Google AdSense for Games, Sept. 2009*

Google In-Game Advertising **<h1>**

Google AdSense for Games: In-Game Advertising  
**PREMIUM CONTENT**  
 BILLIONS OF MINUTES OF PLAY

A network for web-based games **<h2>**

**For Marketers**  
 Learn about in-game ad placements on the Google content network

**For Publishers**  
 Learn about using AdSense to earn from your web-based games

Featured marketers and members of the network **<h2>**

Proper heading tag use by Google Enterprise, Sept. 2009

The screenshot shows the Google Enterprise: Earth and Maps page. The main heading is "Welcome to Google Enterprise: Earth and Maps" with a blue code annotation "<h1>". Below it is a sub-heading "Drive Customer Connections and Business Intelligence with Google Maps" with a green code annotation "<h2>". Further down is another sub-heading "Why Use Google Maps API Premier?" with a green code annotation "<h3>". The page includes a navigation menu on the left with links like "Home", "Maps API Premier", "Earth Pro", "Earth Enterprise", "News and Events", "Success Stories", and "Support". A bulleted list of features is also visible.

**Great!** - Nearly two-thirds of product main pages utilize heading tags, which help provide structure to the pages' content for both search engines and visitors.

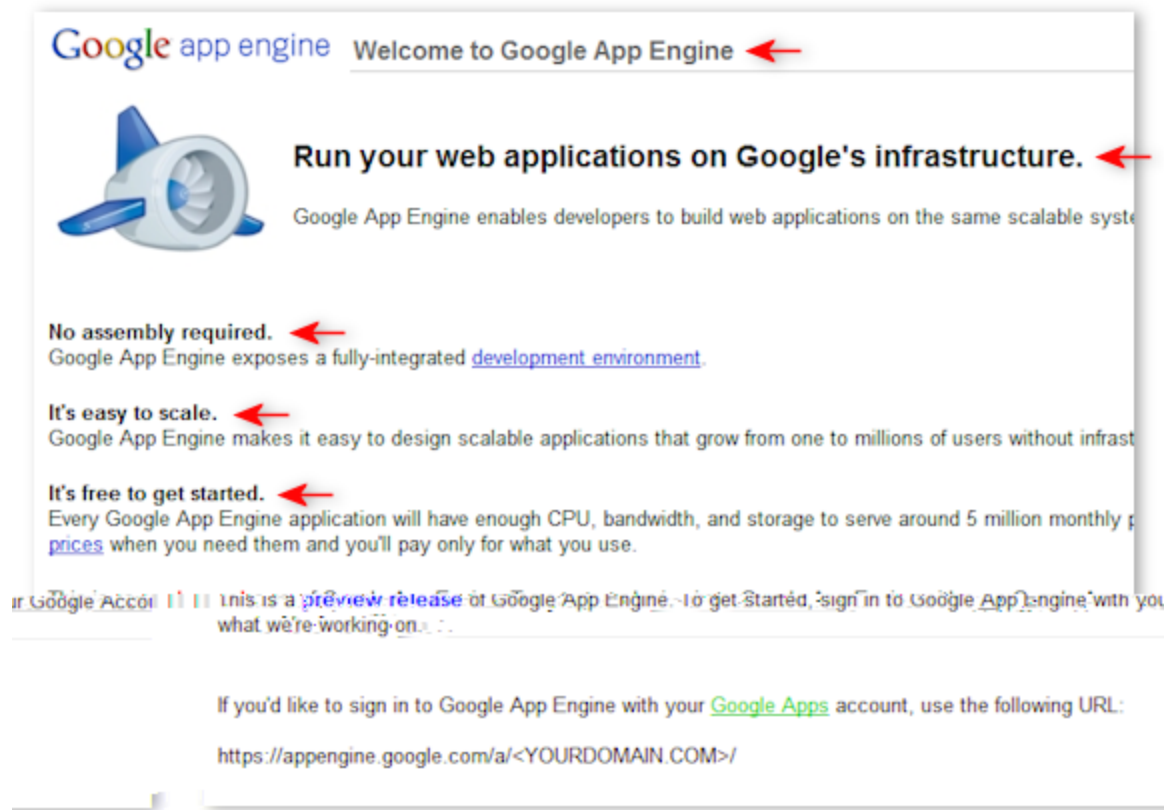
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## 29 / 90 using: no heading tags

Text styling used instead of heading tags for Google Insights, Sept. 2009

The screenshot shows the Google Insights for Search interface. It features a "Compare by" section with radio buttons for "Search terms", "Locations", and "Time Ranges". The "Search terms" section has a text input field containing "All search terms" and a link to "Add search term". The "Filter" section has dropdown menus for "Web Search", "Worldwide", "2004 - present", and "All Categories". Below the filters, there is a blue link "See what the world is searching for." with a red arrow pointing to it. The main content area has a paragraph of text followed by two sections: "Categories" with a green plus icon and a red arrow, and "Seasonality" with a red line graph icon and a red arrow. The "Categories" section includes a sub-heading "Categories" and a paragraph of text with examples. The "Seasonality" section includes a sub-heading "Seasonality" and a paragraph of text.

Text styling used instead of heading tags for Google App Engine, Sept. 2009



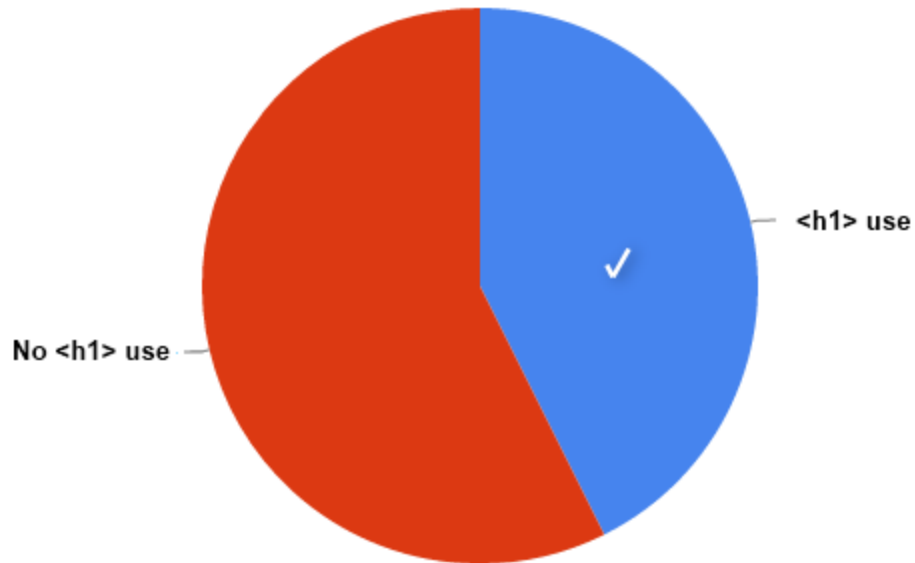
**Tell the search engine how the page's content is structured** - Heading tags on a page are similar to the points on an outline for a large paper. They help convey where portions of content begin and end and which ones may be more general or specific in nature. The lines of text highlighted in the above examples are candidates for placement in heading tags.

**Give visual cues to visitors** - Text in heading tags is often larger than normal text, which should catch visitors' eyes and say, "Different content is below and here's what it's about."

**Be selective with your words** - Similar to the advice on title tags, you don't have many words to work with using heading tags, so make them count. Use concise phrases that accurately describe the content below the heading tag.

## <h1> tag use

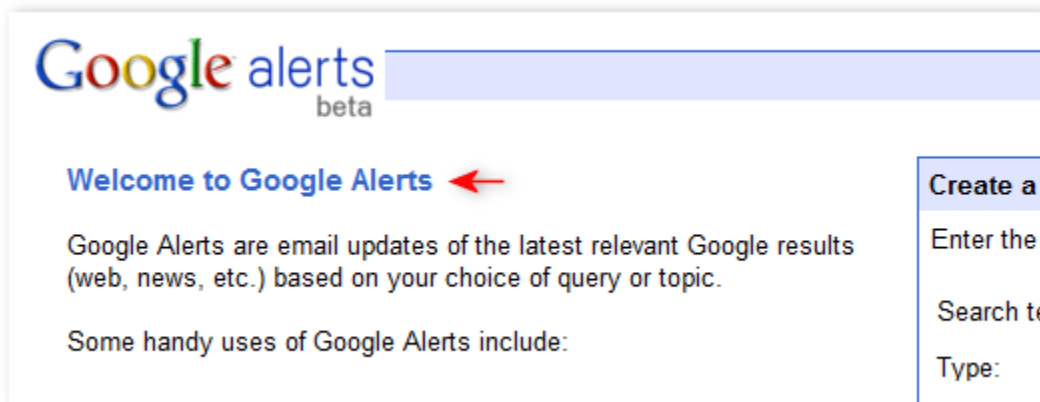
<h1> is the most important of the heading tags and helps search engines understand the main focus of the page. Also, text in an <h1> tag is usually larger than normal text and helps users learn what the page is about.



**35 / 61\*** with: no <h1> tag

\* includes product main pages with heading tags

<h3> used instead of <h1> for the page's main focus: Google Alerts, Sept. 2009



**Make use of <h1> tags** - Most product main pages have an opportunity to use one <h1> tag, like the example above, but they're currently only using other heading tags (<h3> in this case) or larger font styling. While styling your text so it appears larger might achieve the same visual presentation, it does not provide the same semantic meaning to the search engine that an <h1> tag does. The product's name and/or a few words about its features are great to have in an <h1> tag for the product main page.

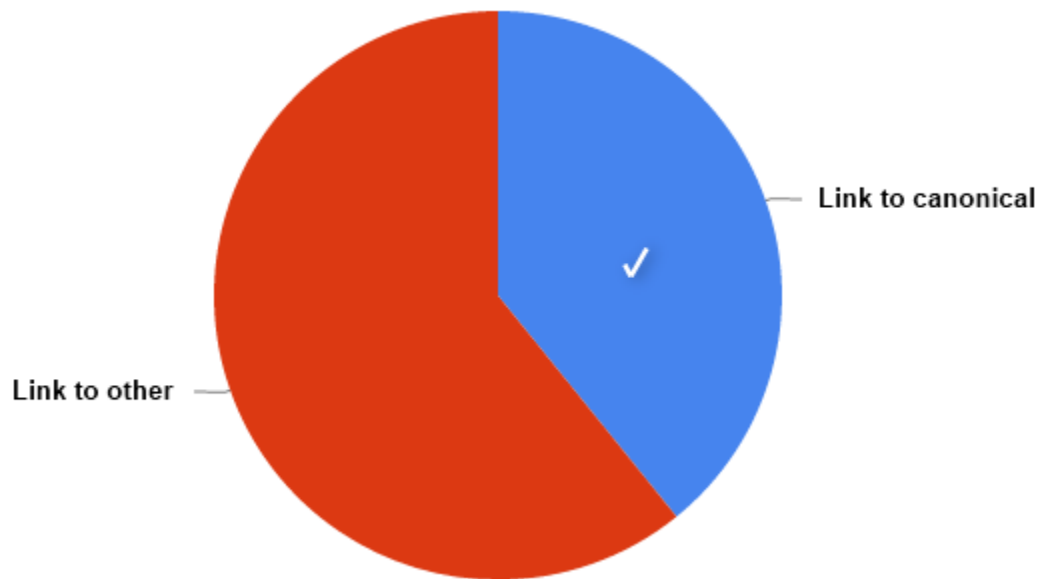
**26 / 61** with: `<h1>` tag

Nice! - These pages use `<h1>` tags, with most using at least the product's name in the tag.

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## Logo image link destination

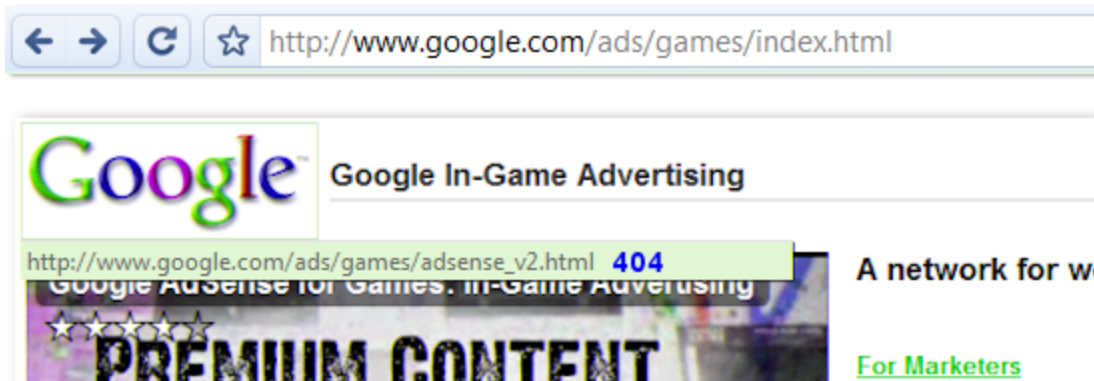
Logo images on our products' pages play an important role in both users and search engines' navigation of our sites (most logos link to the main page). Making sure these link to the main page's canonical URL can improve the flow of internal reputation and prevent 404s for users.



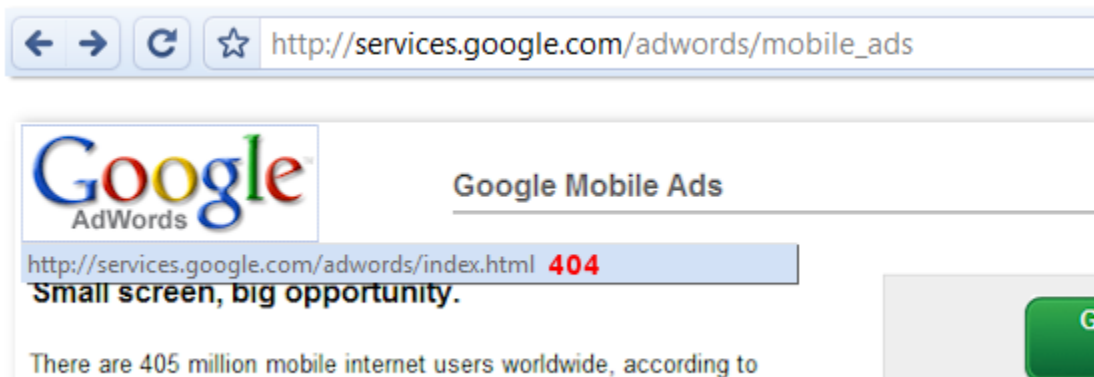
**59 / 97\*** that: don't link to the main page canonical URL

\* excludes iGoogle and Google Sky, which don't leave the main page. Deeper pages looked at if the logo isn't a link on the main page

Logo image link leads to a nonexistent legacy URL for Google AdSense for Games, Sept. 2009



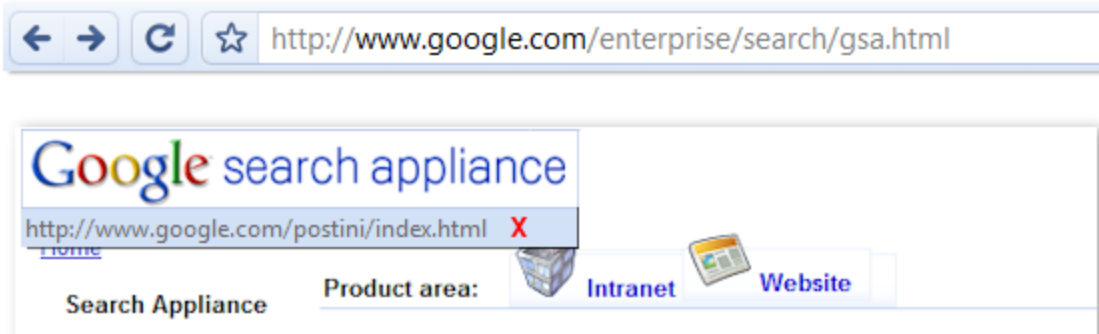
Logo image link leads to a nonexistent legacy URL for Google AdWords, Sept. 2009



**Link to the canonical to prevent 404s** - The worst case scenario is that a visitor clicks on your logo, intending to return to the main page, and instead receives a 404 (which happens in the examples above). 404s easily irritate visitors and may dissuade them from visiting the site again. Using a simple URL as the main page canonical URL and then referencing that version everywhere on the site is best.

**Consolidate reputation** - If all of the "home" or "main page" links on a site point to [product.google.com/index.html](http://product.google.com/index.html), but the intended main page canonical URL is [product.google.com/](http://product.google.com/), a lot of internal reputation is being sent to the wrong URL. Making sure that linked logo images point to the intended main page canonical URL ensures that internal reputation isn't split between multiple URLs. Also, proactively consolidating non-canonical versions of URLs with 301 redirects can help as well, especially since external links are probably pointing to these versions.

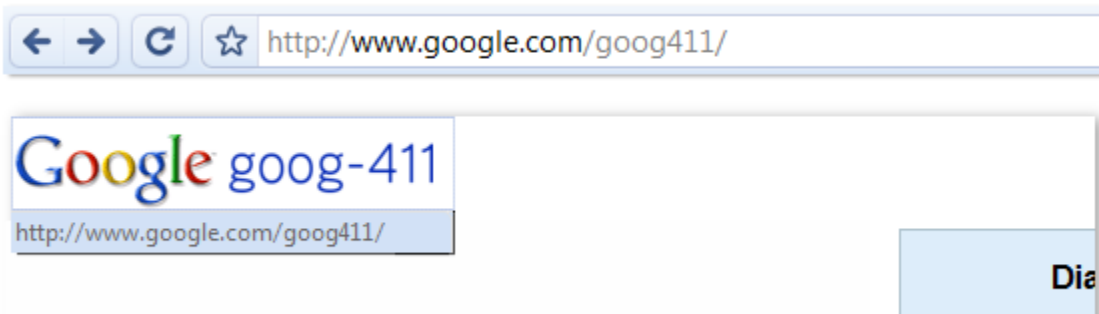
Logo image link leads to another product's URL for Google Search Appliance, Sept. 2009



**Oops!** - This is an oversight, but a confusing one for both users and search engines. Users are sent to a product that they didn't intend to go to and the search engine gets a fuzzier road-map of how this product's site is laid out.

## 38/97 that: link to the main page canonical URL

Logo image link leads to the canonical URL for Goog411, Sept. 2009

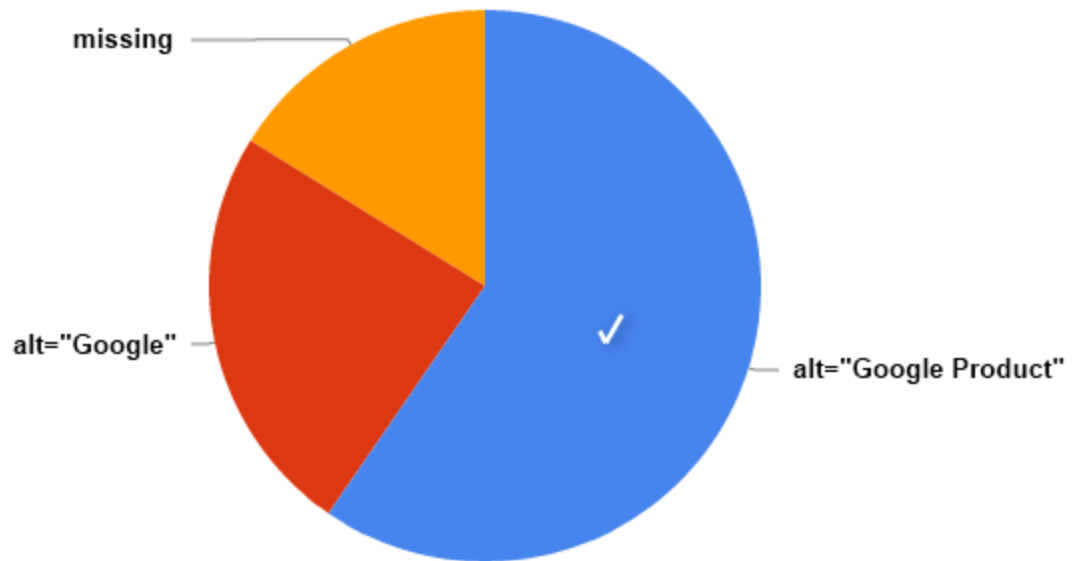


**Great!** - Making sure that the logo's link destination matches up with the canonical URL of the main page helps with the passing of internal reputation and creates a better experience for visitors.

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## Logo image alt text

Using brief and descriptive alt text for our linked logo images helps search engines know more about our products' homepages. Also, the search engine learns more about the image itself, as do users who don't load images due to accessibility or device reasons.



**57 / 99\*** with form: alt="Google Product"

\* excludes iGoogle, which displays the logo as a background image

*Logo image alt text with the product's name for Google Friend Connect, Sept. 2009*

```
alt="Google Friend Connect"></div>
```



**Awaken and strengthen your community**

Google Friend Connect instantly awakens and strengthens the community that visits your site by enriching it with social features.

Logo image alt text with the product's name for Google Code, Sept. 2009

```
alt="Google Code"
```

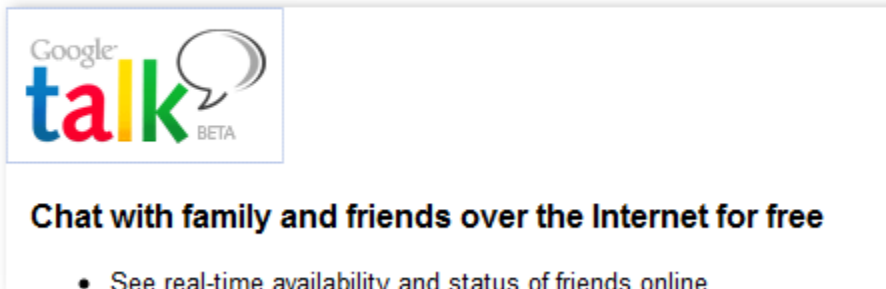


**Good!** - These product main pages have logo images with alt text that includes the product's name. Since many of our logos are used as home/main page links, the alt text of these images is basically treated as anchor text by search engines.

## 24/99 with form: alt="Google" or other non-descriptive text

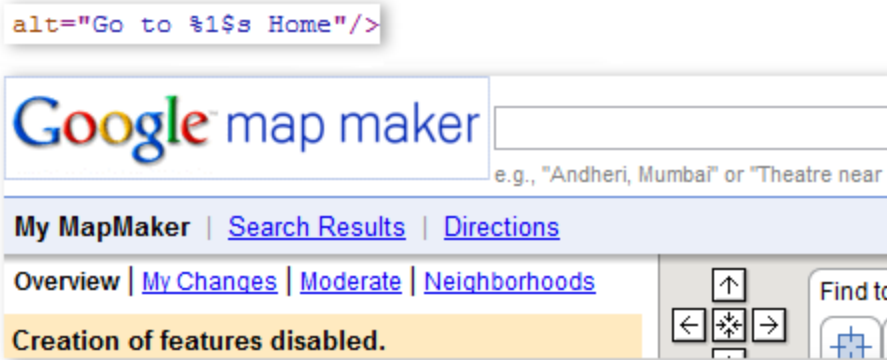
Logo image alt text that lacks the product's name for Google Talk, Sept. 2009

```
alt="Google">
```



**Be descriptive** - Like many optimizations in this document, using brief, descriptive text in the alt attribute—which is treated like anchor text for linked images—is best. Above, it's good that "Google" is present, but this doesn't tell the search engine which Google product is being linked to.

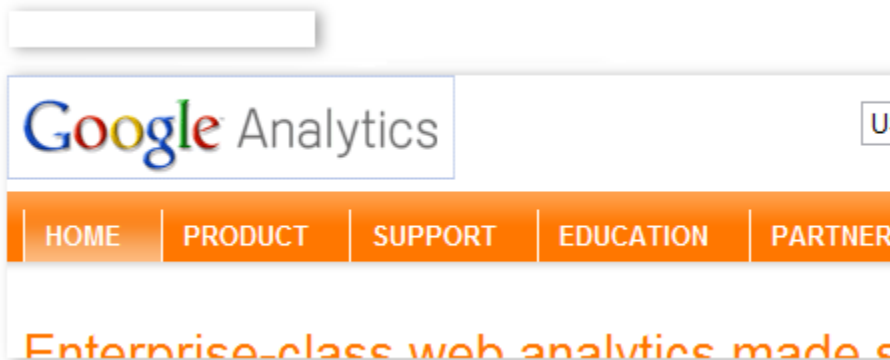
Logo image alt text with generic words for Google Map Maker, Sept. 2009



Oops! - This doesn't tell the search engine much about the destination page.

## 18/99 with: missing alt text

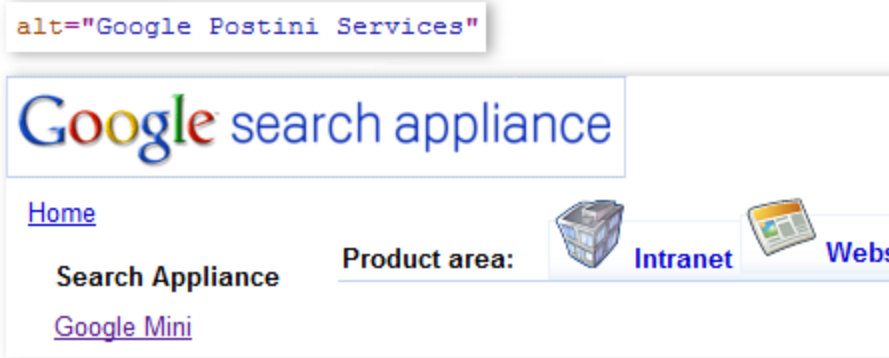
Logo image with missing alt text for Google Analytics, Sept. 2009



**Remember that alt text on an image link is essentially anchor text** - You wouldn't create a text link to Google Analytics with no anchor text (e.g. `<a href="http://www.google.com/analytics/"></a>`), so the same applies to image links.

## 1 / 99 with form: alt="unrelated Google Product"

Logo image alt text describing another product for Google Search Appliance, Sept. 2009

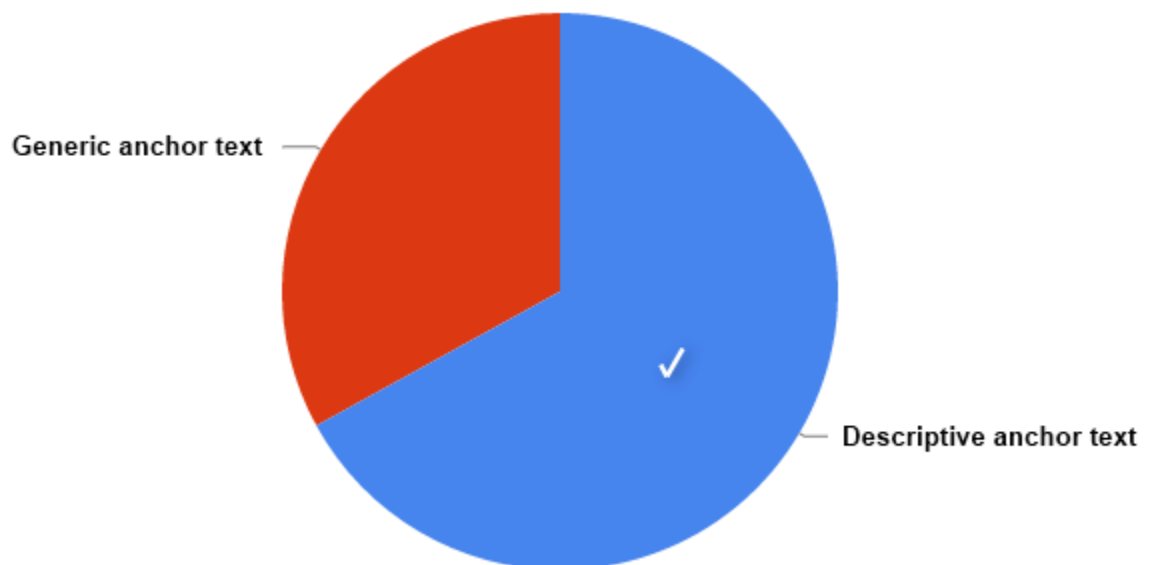


**Oops!** - This might make understanding the destination page harder for the search engine as well as users who don't load images.

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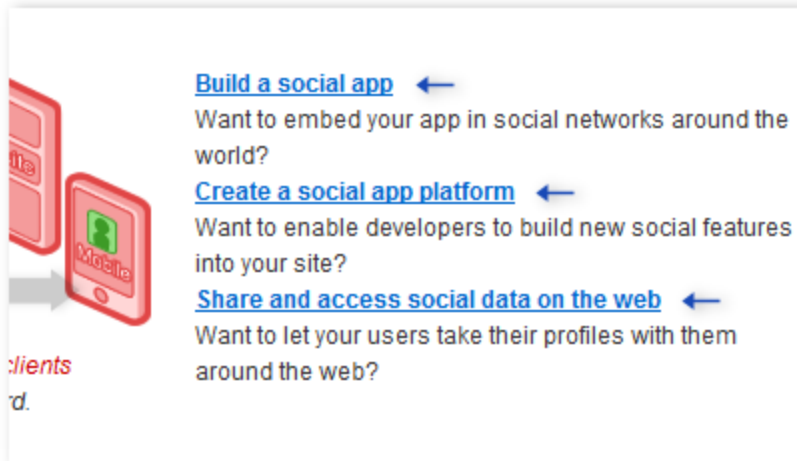
## Descriptive internal anchor text

Writing anchor text that accurately describes the content found at the destination of a link gives search engines and users more clues on what the page is about.



## 67 / 100 using: descriptive anchor text in content

*Descriptive anchor text phrases for Google OpenSocial, Sept. 2009*



Build a social app ←  
Want to embed your app in social networks around the world?

Create a social app platform ←  
Want to enable developers to build new social features into your site?

Share and access social data on the web ←  
Want to let your users take their profiles with them around the web?

clients  
d.

*Descriptive anchor text phrases for Google Enterprise, Sept. 2009*

**Search for your business or enterprise** ←

Use [Google Site Search](#) for enterprise-grade support and optional ads to improve customer retention and conversions on your site

Control branding and enhance results presentation via XML results

Provide quick indexing of your website via [On-Demand indexing](#) ←

---

**Great!** We want your feedback! [Product Ideas for Custom Search](#) is now open to you to share your ideas with the Custom Search team and vote on suggestions made by others.

**Great!** - The anchor text of the links within the content of these product main pages accurately describe the destination pages. Rich anchor text like "Build a social app," "Create a social app platform," "On-Demand indexing," and "Product Ideas for Custom Search" give the search engine more information to go on than generic text like "Click here" or "Learn more."

## 33 / 100 using: generic anchor text in content

Generic anchor text like "Learn more" and "video" used for Google Site Search, Sept. 2009

### Features

With Google Site Search, you can create a search engine for your own site in just a few minutes. Key features include:

#### New! On-Demand Indexing

On-Demand Indexing lets you get a select number of pages on your site. You can have the latest version of these pages included in your Google search results in a few hours. [Learn more](#) ←

How can you use the new feature? Watch this [video](#). ←

#### Enhanced Index Coverage

**Be descriptive** - As we did with title tags, let's imagine that anchor text is the only signal that a search engine has at its disposal (although again, this isn't true in reality). Does your anchor text do a good job of informing the search engine what's at the destination page? Anchor text like "Learn more" or "Click here" gives search engines no clues at all about what's at the destination. "Video" is a little better, but there are millions of videos on the Internet, so this anchor text could be much more specific. Anchor text shouldn't be a full sentence, but a concise, descriptive phrase works great.

Generic anchor text like "learn more" used for Google Talk, Sept. 2009



### Chat with family and friends over the Internet for free

- See real-time availability and status of friends online
- Send instant text messages
- Easily go from text to voice chat
- Chat right from your desktop or from Gmail

See more features and [learn more](#) ← about Google Talk

**Help visitors know what's at the destination page** - Specific anchor text helps visitors know what they're getting before they click on a link. In the example above, visitors don't know what type of content is at the destination of the "learn more" link. The word "features" is mentioned earlier in the sentence, but it's not included in the anchor text. Save visitors time by telling them exactly what's at the destination page by using descriptive anchor text.

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# Additional resources

[Google's SEO Starter Guide](#) - How to get started with search engine optimization

[Google Webmaster Central Blog](#) - Frequent posts on how to improve your site with optimizations and tools

[Google Webmaster Help Center](#) - Our technical recommendations and guidelines for webmasters

[Google Webmaster Help Forum](#) - Discussion of webmaster issues on crawling, indexing, ranking, and more

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