The Practical SEMrush

Guide to Anchor Text

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Anchor text is an important part of any practical SEO strategy. Most marketers know link building is critical for boosting your search engine rankings in the eyes of Google.

However, the words you choose for linking out and into your site matter too.

You can use this cheat sheet to learn about the basics of anchor text and prevent overoptimization to avoid Google penalties.

Let's get to it!

What Is Anchor Text?

- Anchor text is the front-facing copy of each hyperlink.
- SEMrush
  - "SEMrush" would be the anchor text.
- It usually looks like this but varies depending on a website's CSS.

Why Does It Matter?

- Readers use anchor words to understand what's on the other side of each link before they click.
- Google uses anchor text to understand the content of webpages for keyword rankings
- Google also uses anchor text to identify spam and manipulative SEO behavior.

10 Types of Anchor Text

1. Generic Anchors

- Generic words that don't relate to the website's content and often include a call-to-action.
- **Examples:**
  - Click here
  - Read this
  - More information

2. Branded Anchors

- Link text that include the name of a company.
- Branded anchors may also include
  - Company-specific products or services
  - Mottos or taglines
  - Public figures at a company like CEOs, journalists, or influencers
- **Examples:**
  - SEMrush
  - SEMrush.com

3. Exact Match Anchors

- Anchors that include the keyword the page behind the link is targeting.
- Google will penalize a link for too many exact match anchors pointing at it.
- **Examples (assuming each is the target keyword):**
  - Link building
  - Keyword research
  - Content marketing

4. Partial Match Anchors

- Partial match anchors include the keyword along with some other words to break it up
- **Examples (using above keyword examples):**
  - Ultimate link building guide
  - Comprehensive keyword research tools
  - Content marketing tips

5. Related Anchors

- Link text that includes variations of the keyword or semantic keywords.
- **Examples (using keyword examples from point 3):**
  - Backlink analysis
  - Keywords for SEO
  - content strategy

6. Random Anchors

- Anchors that don't quite relate to the keyword but aren't generic.

7. Naked Link Anchors

- A clickable version of the link's raw URL.
- Might double as a branded anchor.
- **Examples:**
  - https://www.semrush.com/
  - www.semrush.com/
  - semrush.com/dashboard/

8. Brand + Keyword Anchors

- Link text that includes the brand's name AND the page's target keyword.
- A little safer for Google than exact match anchors.
- **Examples:**
  - SEMrush for keyword research
  - SEMrush backlink analysis tool
  - Topic research with SEMrush

9. Image Anchors

- When an image contains a link, the ALT text doubles as the anchor text.
- ALT text should be descriptive and directly relate to the image.
- Should always include the target keyword along with more contextual information.

10. Long-Tail Anchors

- Link text using several words including the keyword.
- Often include subheadings, headings, or full titles as link text.

How Does Anchor Text Affect SEO?

- Anchor text has always been important for Google to understand what links are about so it can determine search engine rankings.
- Google uses anchor text to learn about content it can't crawl.
    - Documents
    - PDF files
    - Databases
- Google links anchor text because it considers it more objective than the meta data you create for your own site.
- Marketers previously used anchor text to manipulate search engine rankings through exact match anchors.
    - Google's first Penguin update cracked down on deceptive anchor text practices.
- A broad range of anchors with a heavy lean towards branded anchors is ideal for SEO.

How to Optimize Anchor Text for SEO

Don't Link to or Earn Links from Toxic Sites

- Always check a website's Alexa ranking before linking to it.
- Don't try to acquire backlinks from shady or low-quality sources.

Make Sure Anchor Words are Relevant

- Anchor words should always describe what's on the other side of the link.
- A link is a promise to readers.
- Google needs the information to determine the link's content.

Avoid Using Keyword-Rich Anchors for Internal Links

- Google knows you can't control what other site's choose as anchor links.
    - But it DOES know you can choose your own internal anchor links.
- Choosing exact match anchors for your own site is a big red flag for spam in the eyes of Google.

Distribute Different Types of Anchor Text Wisely

- Aim for a random selection of anchor text.

- Branded and naked anchors are safest.
- Exact match anchors are the biggest risk for penalties.

Pay Attention to Surrounding Text

- Google doesn't read anchor text in a vacuum.
  - Include semantic keywords in your sentences and paragraph around the anchor.
- Context also helps readers decide whether they want to click the link.

Don't Neglect Your Image ALT Tags

- ALT tags are important for telling Google what your images are about.
- Google reads your ALT tags as anchor text.

Keep Guest Blogging

- Don't keyword stuff your guest blogs or bio.
- Avoid exact match keywords.
- Choose branded keywords or related keywords for guest blogging.
- Only guest blog on reputable and relevant sites.