

INTERNAL LINKING

IS “LINK JUICE” STILL IMPORTANT?

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- Internal linking has always been seen as one of the key steps to success in search engine optimization. To paraphrase Ray Liotta in Field of Dreams: if you build your links, you will rank.
- As such, it is understandable that linking strategy is often an important focus for many search engine optimizers. If you search online, you will probably find hundreds of guides touting the best internal and external strategy for success. They all follow more or less the same idea, but we’ll get to that in a bit.

IS “LINK JUICE” STILL IMPORTANT?

- A recent tweet made by Google Webmaster Trends Analyst John Mueller has had many webmasters questioning what they know about link building and how effective touted strategies really are for making pages rank.
- On 29 July, a Twitter user asked Mueller a question regarding passing link juice from a site’s homepage to other pages and how the placement of links affected this.

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SO, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR INTERNAL LINKING AND LINK BUILDING?

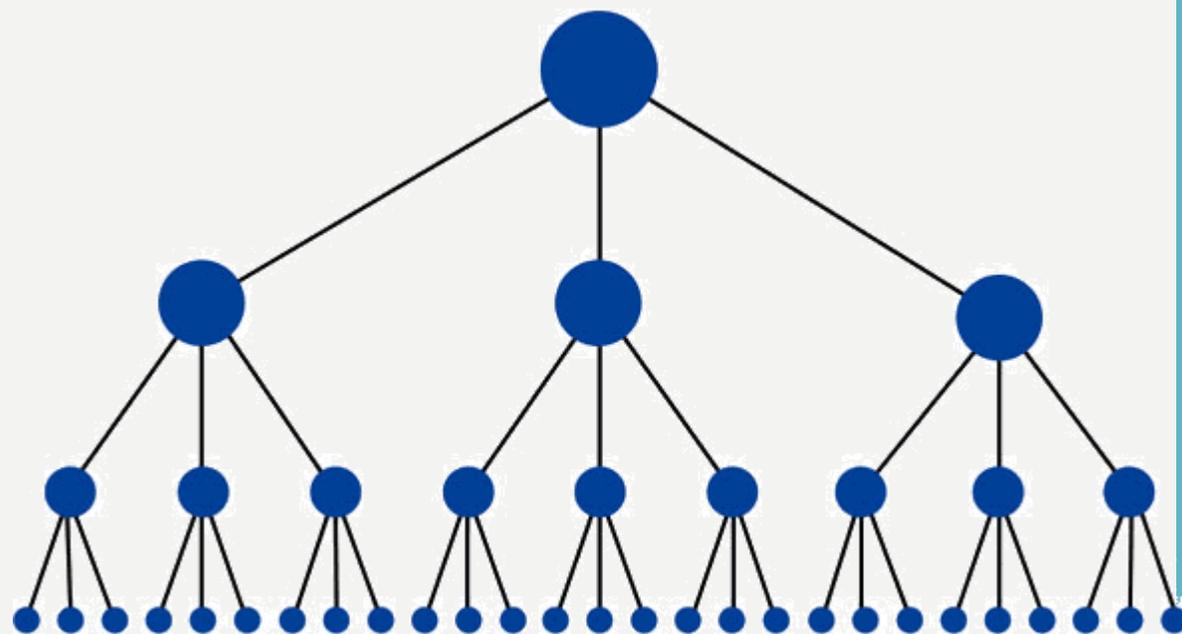
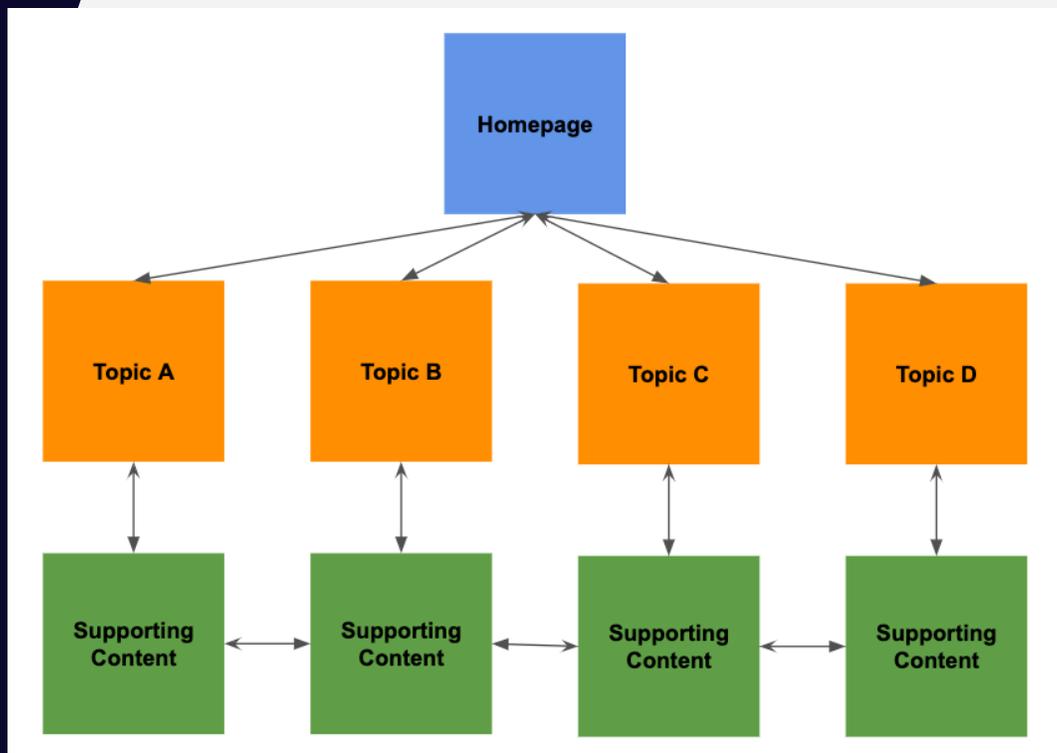
- Well, let's dissect by first having a look at the traditional approach to SEO internal linking and then analyze this in relation to Mueller's statement.



HOW TO BUILD INTERNAL LINKS (THE TRADITIONAL WAY)

- For the longest time, there has always been one rather traditional approach to internal linking in SEO. You look on any self-proclaimed “best guide” touting the “best practice” and you’re going to see a tree chart, which basically maps the site’s structure or the content silo.
- Your site starts with the homepage, and then the homepage has babies (or supporting content), and then those babies have babies. And the next thing you know you have a site with a lot of content discussing a range of related topics in significant depth.
- The idea with the tree structure is that supporting content is meant to link to each other so as to help Google’s algorithm understand that it exists. There are many different ideas in how exactly to go about linking supporting content.

EXAMPLE TREES



HOW TO BUILD INTERNAL LINKS (THE TRADITIONAL WAY)

- Some people suggest that you need to link the homepage to the first level of supporting content below it. And then, you link the supporting page to any supporting pages that it may have. This may sound a bit confusing, so here's an example:
 - Homepage – Shoes – Sneakers
 - Homepage – Shoes – Heels
- In this example, the “Shoes” page would have a link to the “Sneakers” and “Heels” pages and those two pages would link back. “Sneakers” and “Heels” fall under the same category, so they would also link to each other.
- However, if there is another level 2 category, for instance, Homepage – Underwear, you wouldn't link either “Shoes” or “Heels” to it because these are unrelated concepts.

HOW TO BUILD INTERNAL LINKS (THE TRADITIONAL WAY)

- As for Homepage and Contact Us links, it is recommended by [SEO experts such as Neil Patel](#) that you don't link to these pages in content. The recommendation really is that you shouldn't link to any pages that are already available in your main nav in your content.



WHY IS INTERNAL LINKING TRADITIONALLY REGARDED AS IMPORTANT?

- It was already mentioned that internal linking aids Google in understanding how a page first in to a website and just simply saying that it exists. This is very important because this is how you help your overall site build authority and distribute it across the entire site.
- So, continuing with the above example, the idea is that if your “Shoes” page ranks, linking to supporting pages, such as “Sneakers” and “Heels” will perhaps aid in getting those pages to rank too. The idea is that you are passing on authority to those pages via the “Shoes” page.
- By attributing authority to a page, you are supposedly satisfying Google’s PageRank algorithm, which has always been seen by webmasters as one of the top three most important ranking factors for the search engine.

WHY IS INTERNAL LINKING TRADITIONALLY REGARDED AS IMPORTANT?

- When you give a page authority, you give it importance, which means Google is more likely to want to recommend you to web users.
- However, internal linking also has a few other purposes. Firstly, it makes your website easier to navigate as finding related pages becomes a whole lot easier. This works in creating a better user experience, which also impacts the ranking system.
- Secondly, it helps define the structure of your website. So, creating new content that may answer more of the questions your targeted market becomes easier. I.e. defining an overall content strategy is no longer an issue.

IS THE TRADITIONAL WAY STILL BEST PRACTICE?

- Well, if you take Mueller's tweet at face value, it probably isn't the best idea to follow traditional "best practices". But one should never take anything at face value without properly considering it.
- Firstly, people have been arguing how important the PageRank algorithm for decades now. Webmasters have been arguing whether it is still a relevant ranking factor since [as far back as 2005](#). Google has been saying for years that it isn't as important as many people make it out to be and the last public update came out in 2016.
- Perhaps, the most important thing to note about PageRank is that the patent expired towards the end of 2019. And, this begs more questions as to how much links still are an active ranking factor. After all, no multi-billion dollar company would willing let go of company patents so willingly (just look at Disney and why the DMCA exists in the first place), especially if it could so drastically affect your product.

IS THE TRADITIONAL WAY STILL BEST PRACTICE?

- Still, it is very hard to say that you shouldn't pay attention to PageRank. After all, what the Google Search algorithm is and what Google wants it to be probably don't always align.
- Secondly, Mueller's statement focuses more on telling people to build a better user experience than it does say actively remove links to pages. So, the real takeaway should be to build a user-friendly site that helps people get to where they need to be quite easily. Most suggested link strategies should already help you do that in the first place.

FOCUS ON USER EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN “LINK JUICE”

- Carrying on from the last statement in the previous heading, while a linking strategy could help make your site appear to be more user-friendly, it is not the only way to improve user experience.
- Sometimes, what your users may want from you may conflict with your overall linking strategy. In such cases, you shouldn't let your linking strategy get in the way of your approach. After all, recommended products are based on user habits rather than site structure, and they would probably hit fewer sales if it were the other way around.
- So, don't be afraid to break the rules a little even if it goes against past teaching. Because there isn't a set rulebook about this stuff anyway.

SOURCES

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