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Optimizing Pages with JavaScript and Style Sheets for Search Engines

By Dale Goetsch

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Background

Search Engines use a number of criteria to decide what a given web page is all about. These criteria, which can be different from Search Engine to Search Engine, and which may even change over time, all aim at deciding how "relevant" a page is to a given user's search. The Search Engine wants to return the results most relevant to a user's search.

While the particulars may change over time, there are some criteria which remain constant. One of these is where the keywords are located on the page. Typically words that are located closer to the beginning of a page are considered more important than words that occur further down the page. This stands to reason: think of a newspaper article, where the headline and the first paragraph usually have more "meat" than the rest of the story.

Another measure of relevance is "keyword density". This is roughly the ratio of keywords on a page to the total number of words on a page. Having a higher ratio of keywords to total words will make a page more relevant for a search on those keywords.

When a Search Engine sends its robot out to look at your page, you want to make sure that it finds important information near the top of the web page, and that the page has a high keyword density. Sometimes there are complications, even when you have a lot of keyword-rich text early in the visible portion of your page. Two of these complications, extensive JavaScript code and extensive Cascading Style Sheet code, can be easily remedied.

JavaScript problem

Large amounts of JavaScript code can get in the way. Typically the largest amount of JavaScript code in a web page is found in the HEAD section. This is usually where variables and functions are defined, and so forth.

Unfortunately, having a large amount of JavaScript code in a page can be detrimental to a page's ranking in the Search Engines.

Since Search Engines tend to pay more attention to text at the beginning of a web page than they do to text further from the beginning, it stands to reason that if you have several dozen lines of JavaScript code at the top of the page, your real content is going to be further from the beginning of the page. Further down the page means less important to the Search Engine.

Keyword density is also important. Here again, if you have several hundred words of JavaScript code in a page, the keyword density—the ratio of your keywords to all the words in the whole page, both text and code—is going to be much lower. That means that some Search Engines will decide that your page is less relevant.

JavaScript solution

So how do you maintain JavaScript functionality, but make your page as Search Engine-friendly as possible? You put the JavaScript code into a separate file, and link it back to the web page.

The original page, "mypage.html", may look something like this.

My Title

```
function helloWorld(){  
  alert("Hello, World!");  
  return;  
}
```

...body of page...

Example 1—mypage.html with JavaScript code

We replace the JavaScript code with an instruction for the browser to go and grab the code from a separate file. The new page will look like this.

My Title

...body of page...

Example 2—mypage.html with JavaScript code offloaded

Note the addition of the "src" attribute to the SCRIPT tag. The value assigned to that attribute is the name of the external file that contains the JavaScript code. Typically, these external files will be given the filename extension ".js" to indicate that they contain JavaScript code. Note also that there are both and tags here, even though there is nothing between those tags.

A new page is then created that holds the code that was formerly held in the SCRIPT tags. We will call

it "codepage.js", and it looks like this.

```
function helloWorld(){
alert("Hello, World!");
return;
}
```

Example 3—codepage.js includes only JavaScript code

This new file doesn't need any kind of HTML markup. It contains only the code that was originally held between the SCRIPT tags.

Style Sheet problem

In addition to JavaScript code, Style Sheet code can cause complications for Search Engines when it is put into a web page. For the same reasons as JavaScript—moving the important content further down the page, and diluting the keyword density—it is important to move Style Sheet code off of the page as well.

Style Sheet solution

The thought behind removing Style Sheet information from a page is very similar to that of offloading JavaScript; the syntax to do so is different.

The original page, "mypage.html", may look something like this.

My Title

```
body{
background:white;
color:red;
}
```

...body of page...

Example 4—mypage.html with style sheet code

We want to move this code into a separate file, so we remove it from the original page, and add a link to point to the separate file that now holds the Style Sheet code.

My Title

...body of page...

Example 5--mypage.html with Style Sheet code offloaded

Note the addition of the LINK tag. This contains three types of information that the browser will need to reconstruct the page when a visitor looks at it. The "rel='stylesheet'" attribute/value pair indicates that we are looking at a Style Sheet file here. The "href='style.css'" attribute/value pair points to the external file that contains the Style Sheet information. Typically these external files will be given the filename extension ".css" to indicate that they contain Cascading Style Sheet code. You will replace the filename "style.css" with the name of the actual file into which you place your stylesheet code. Finally, we have to specify the MIME type of the file, in the "type='text/css'" attribute/value pair.

A new page is then created that holds the code that was formerly held in the STYLE tags. We will call it "style.css", and it looks like this.

```
body{  
background:white;  
color:red;  
}
```

Example 6--style.css includes only Style Sheet code

This new file doesn't need any kind of HTML markup. It contains only the code that was originally held between the STYLE tags.

Conclusion

By following these two procedures, you have now made your web page more friendly to the Search Engines. This means that the next time your page is spidered by the Search Engine robots, the important content on your page will be closer to the top of the page, and you will have a better keyword density. This will result in your page appearing higher in the Search Engine listings, and will probably bring more traffic to your website.

When you are ready to put your website to work for you, it's time to contact us.

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Does Javascript Affect Ranking?

By Jon Ricerca

Almost all SEO's agree that using too much javascript can harm your rankings and might confuse the search engines. Is it true? We decided to answer this extremely simple question for the two leading search engines using a simple statistical analysis.

The methodology: I gathered the results of the queries that were naturally performed last month by myself and three associates using the two leading search engines and analyzed them. I had to visit each page and check the HTML source code to see if javascript was being used. I counted the number of pages found that utilized javascript for the first 8 rankings. The results for each of the two leading search engines were kept separate so that we could discover any differences between the two leading search engines for this factor.

The resulting graphs show the number of pages utilizing javascript for each ranking. The Y-axis shows the number of pages found utilizing javascript, while the X-axis shows rankings 1 through 8. Here are the graphs for each of the two leading search engines:

The result is very conclusive and very surprising. Both leading search engines rank pages that utilize javascript higher than pages that do not utilize javascript. This is another example of how the guesses of the SEO community are often just that... guesses... They have a 50% chance of being correct on any particular factor. In this case, the majority of the SEO community guessed wrong.

Notes:

1. There was no exercise to attempt to isolate different keywords. I merely took a random sampling of the queries performed by myself and three associates during the month.

Conclusion:

Pages which utilize javascript rank higher than pages that do not utilize javascript on both of the leading search engines.

This is merely a correlation study, so it cannot be determined from this study whether the leading search engines purposefully entertain this factor or not. The actual factors used may be far distant from the factor we studied, but the end result is that these search engines do, in fact, rank pages with javascript higher than pages without javascript in the study.

Jon Ricerca is one of the leading researchers and authors of the Search Engine Ranking Factor (SERF) reports at SearchEngineGeek.com. For access to the other SERF reports, please visit:

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Optimizing Your Website's Design For Search Engines

Optimizing Your Web Site for the Search Engines Using CSS and Javascript
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How Search Engines Work

Hitting the Search Engines

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