

17

SEO  
MYTHS  
YOU SHOULD



LEAVE BEHIND IN 2013

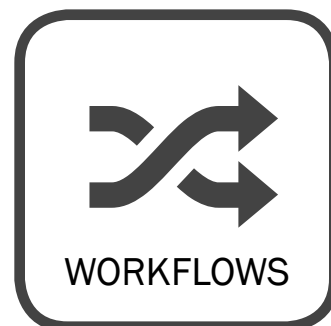
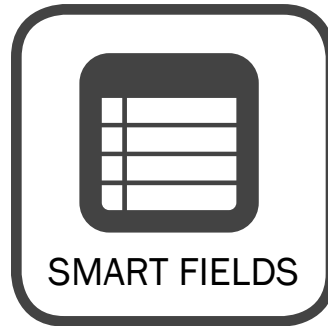
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# 17 SEO MYTHS THAT YOU SHOULD LEAVE BEHIND IN 2013

By Rebecca Churt

Rebecca Churt is the SEO Marketing Manager at HubSpot. Over the last 10 years, Rebecca has successfully developed and implemented online marketing, SEO, and conversion campaigns for 350+ businesses of all sizes, from the Fortune 500, to startups, to non-profits. Through creative internet marketing campaigns, she has helped companies improve their brand awareness, customer loyalty, retention rates, drive more traffic and leads, reduce overhead, and improve overall return on investment.



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# INTRODUCTION

To say SEO has “changed a lot” would be the understatement of the decade. Just take a look at how Google’s Panda and Penguin algorithm updates shook the world of SEO professionals – marketers and SEO agencies world-wide halted their link-building and keyword-obsessed ways, and swapped it for a long overdue focus on quality content.

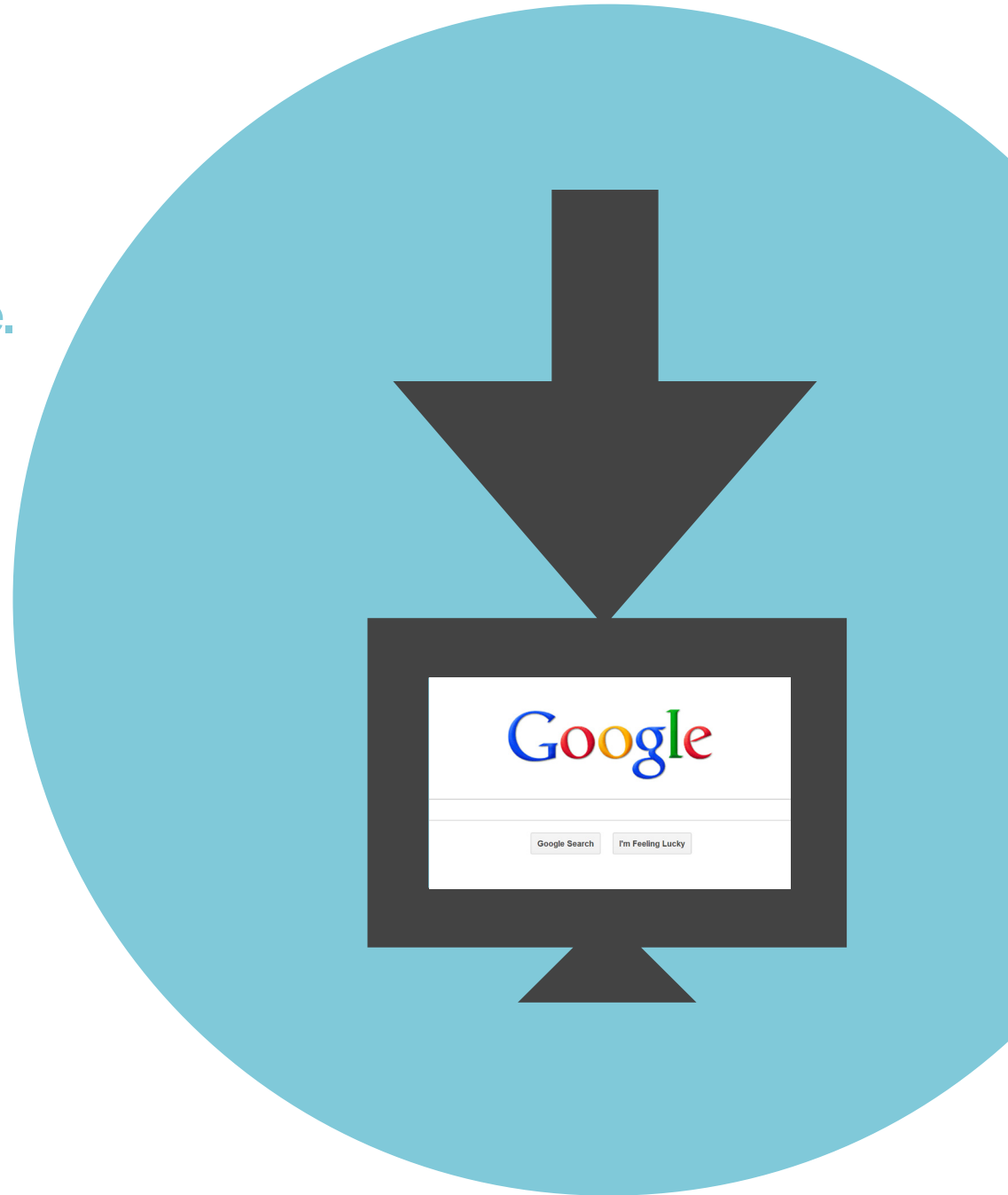
But does that mean an SEO’s job is just to pump out high quality, keyword-optimized content? Far from it. In fact, SEO has changed so much in the past several years that many marketers aren’t sure what’s outdated, what’s important, what will actually move the needle, and what’s simply wasted effort.

This ebook is going to point out all of the most common myths and assumptions about how SEO works, and debunk them for you so you’re not wasting a single moment on things that simply don’t matter for SEO in 2013. Let’s get started.

## MYTH #1

### I must submit my site to Google.

The idea that you need to submit your website to Google in order to appear in search results (or rank) is nonsense. While a brand new site can submit their URL to Google directly, a search engine like Google can still find your site without you submitting it. And remember, a submission does not guarantee anything. Crawlers will find your site and index it in due time, so don't worry about this idea of needing "tell" Google about your site.



## MYTH #2

### SEO is all about ranking.

While there's a strong [correlation between search results placement and clickthrough rates](#), ranking is not the all mighty end goal that it used to be. Now with search results being appended with rich text/snippets and author tags, results that appear below the top three sought after slots are getting much higher clickthrough rates. And even *before* all of that was applied, rankings did not guarantee success. You could theoretically rank quite well for a term and get tons of traffic, and not make a dime from it. Is that what you really want? I don't think so. So it's time to shift your goals, and rethink what SEO is all about, because "ranking" is not it.



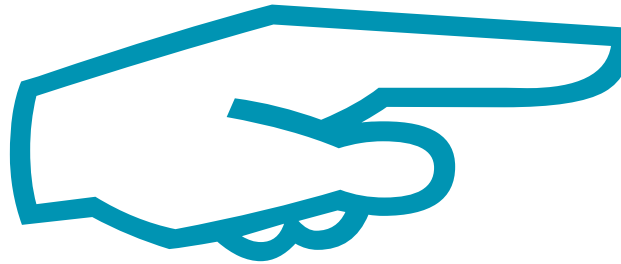
## MYTH #3

We must rank number one.



Studies of clickthrough rates and user behavior have shown that searchers favor the top search results – particularly the top 3 listings. However, it’s also been shown that on subsequent pages, being listed toward the top of the page shows similar click behavior. Now with search results also being appended with author profiles and rich snippets, clickthrough rates are proving to be higher on those listings even if they do not appear within the top results. The takeaway here is that relevant information and user-friendly listings are more valuable than just rank. So, no, you do not need to rank in first place anymore to see success.

## MYTH #4



### SEO is something I can hand off to IT.

There seems to be a perception that SEO requires some technical expertise (Right!), and since IT is technical, they can just do the work (Wrong!) SEO requires way more than just technical chops; I'd think hard before handing an entire project to IT or a web designer. While you may need some of those individuals to *assist* you during the course of optimizing your website, don't hand the entire thing off and expect best practices to be adhered to.

Note: For some, IT may cover a broader range of technical expertise, and yes, SEO does require technical work such as making sure your website is crawlable, setting up redirects, XML sitemap files, robots.txt etc. So don't discount IT entirely, but many IT personnel also work on things like setting up printers, which is – um – different.



## MYTH #5

### More links are better than more content.

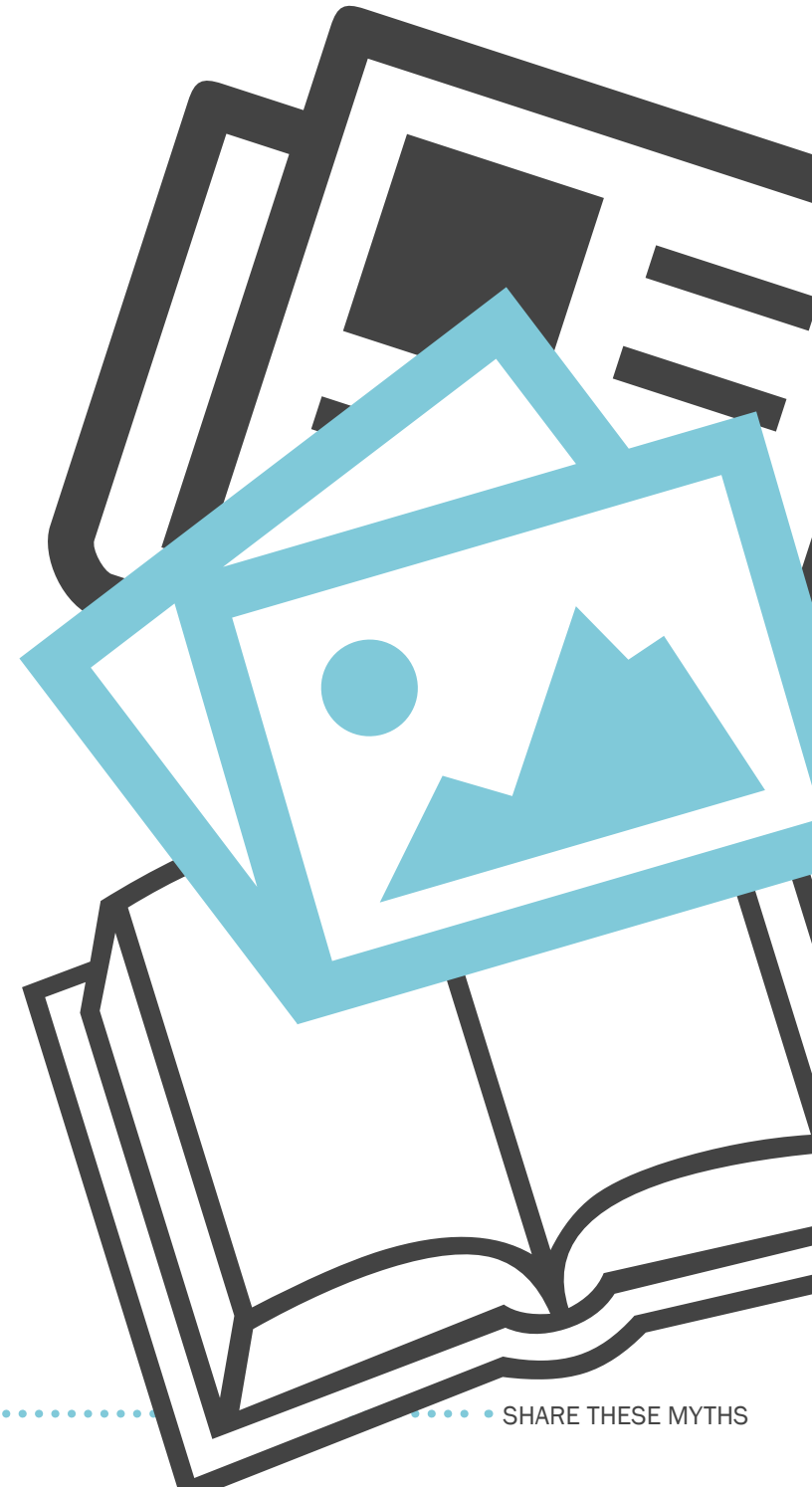
This is something that often comes along with the question “Which should I invest in, link building or content generation?” Links are an important part of your website’s authority (even with the changing link landscape), however, if you have budget to invest in your website, I would say “hire someone to write for you.”

Too often, when businesses hire someone to do link building, they focus on quantity rather than quality of links – but linking is not a numbers game anymore. Focus on having relevant and diverse sources that link to relevant pages. When you invest in content, it can be used as website pages, blog posts, lead generation offers, and guest posts on other sites – all things that will bring more links with it over time.

## MYTH #6

### Content trumps SEO.

Are you among the group of people who think that as long as they have a good blog or good content, then their SEO is secure? I wouldn't go that far. Don't get me wrong, good content will take you a long way, but it can't be the only tool in your SEO toolchest. Years ago, when HubSpot first started teaching people about search engine optimization, one rule was essential: Above all else, create good, useful content. But now you need to ask yourself more of the following: Are you writing with a purpose? Who is your target audience? Have you analyzed your traffic sources and top performing posts? What keywords are you targeting? If all of these sound foreign to you, then you're missing the mark and content alone will only get you so far.



## MYTH #7

### Social media and SEO aren't related at all.

The intersection of SEO and social media is referred to as “social search.” Social Search is very much a real thing –an increasingly formal relationship between search and social has been evolving for years and Google is working hard to prove this with [Google+ and Author profiles](#). It's a natural extension of what has always been true: Content that's relevant and can be trusted as authoritative will continue to drive both your search and social media marketing. In social search, content that has a social connection to you in some way is prioritized, which could mean someone you are linked to via Facebook, Twitter, or any other major social network. Alternately, some forms of social search prioritize content that has been shared by social media influencers, even if those experts aren't directly tied to you. The lesson, folks, is to make sure you have a social media strategy and think of it as part of your search optimization efforts – the two should not be working as silos.



## MYTH #8

### On-page SEO is all I need to rank.

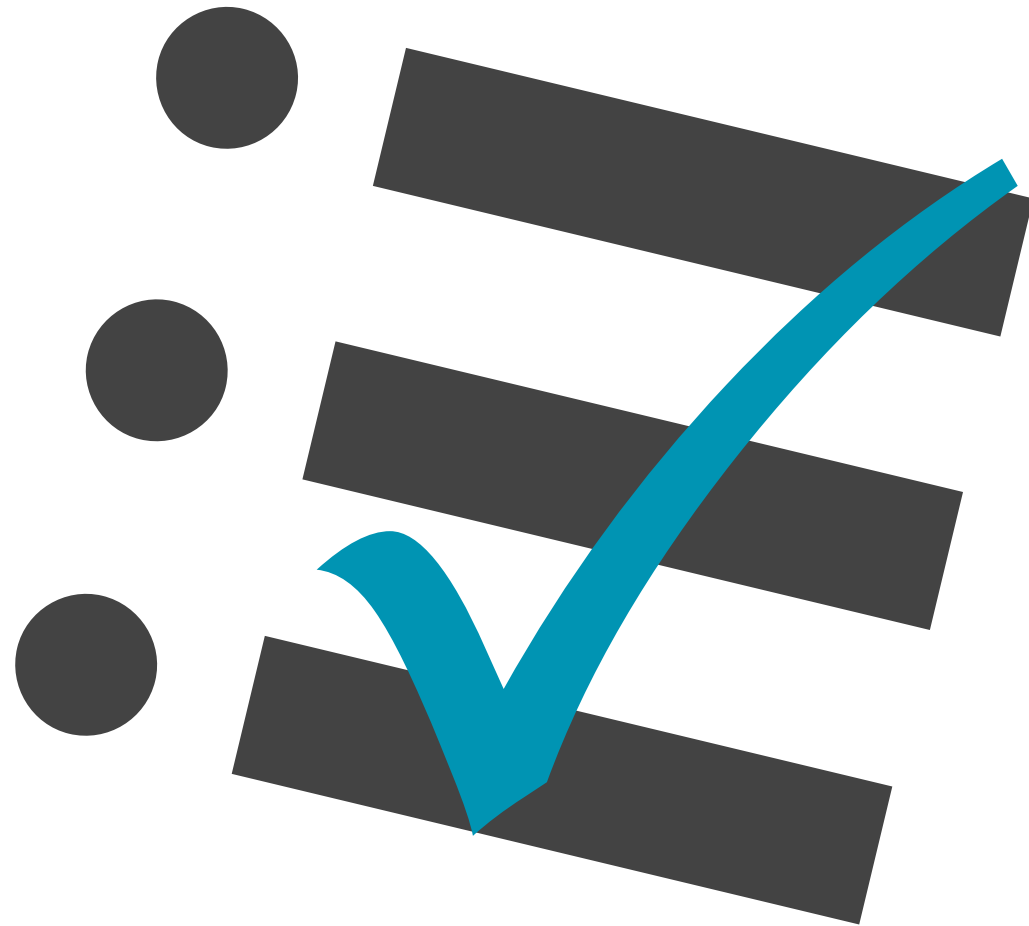
Putting keywords on a page isn't a magic bullet. You can have flawless on-page SEO, but that only equals one part of the entire SEO equation. Your SEO efforts should be a holistic composite that focuses on quality throughout on-page optimization, off-page optimization, user experience, and conversions. So be prepared to do more than just on-page SEO!



## MYTH #9

### Keywords need to be an exact match.

Keywords do not need to be repeated verbatim through a piece of content. In a title in particular, you want to use a keyword or keywords the way that it makes the most sense. Write a stellar headline (somewhere between 4-9 words) that focuses on clearly explaining what a piece of content is about. Nothing is more of a buzz kill than having a headline that's awkwardly framed around one keyword phrase or, worse, forcibly repeats a keyword phrase. Note: This rule applies to both headlines and content on the page, too.



## MYTH #10

### There's an ideal keyword density for my page.

There is no magic number. This myth is like a pesky little cockroach that just comes back to life no matter how many times you swat it. So for everyone who still clings to this one – there is no ideal number of times that you should repeat a keyword on a page. You should, however, have your keyword(s) included in your page title; how else will people know what your page is about? The keyword (or a variation of it) should also be included in a headline on the page, ideally in the URL, and at least once throughout the content. Again, the goal is to make your content clear and to meet the expectations of the searcher; that's why they clicked through to your page, so don't assault them with over-optimized content.



## MYTH #11

The H1 is the most important on-page element.

### 1 LEVEL 1 HEADING

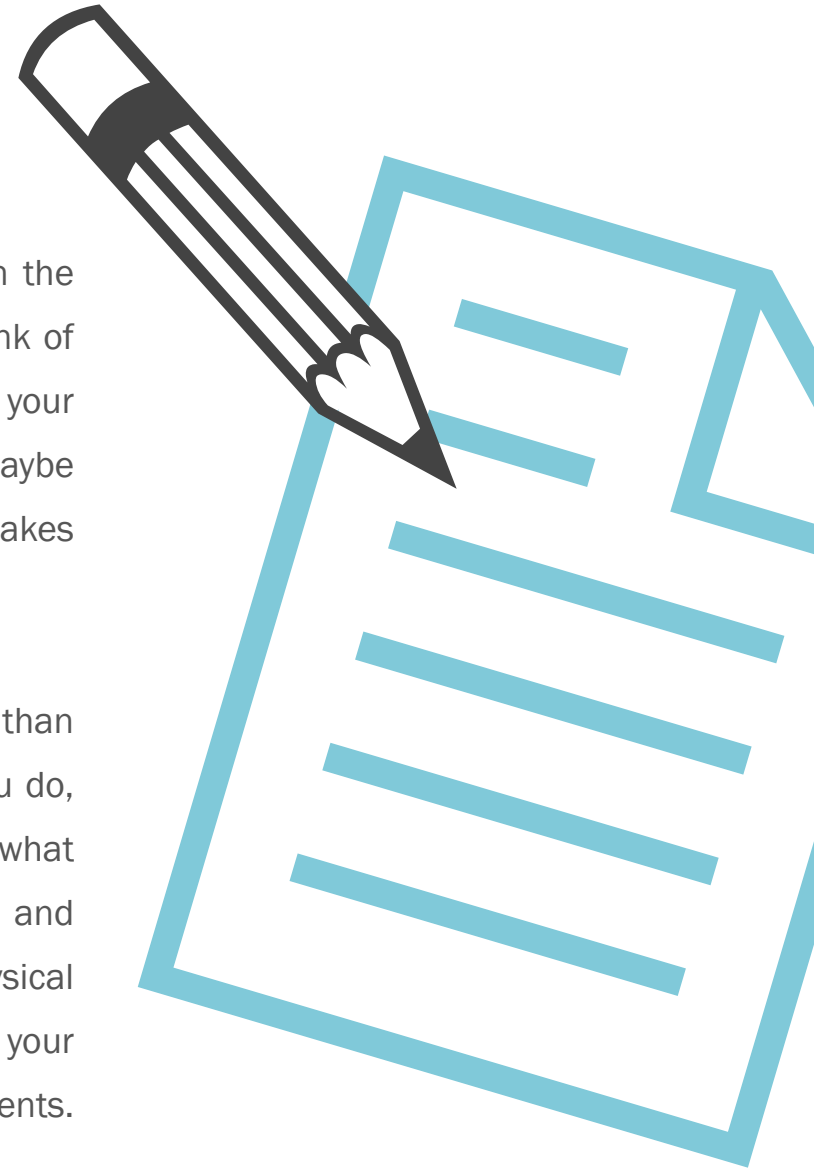
Think of the content structure on your website page as an outline. It's a tiered approach to presenting information to a user, and to search engines. What title tag your headline is wrapped in has **little to no influence** on your overall SEO -- that title tag (whether H1, H2, H3, etc.) is only used for styling purposes. The H1 is part of your CSS (custom style sheet) that a designer puts together to reference what font styling and size will be applied to a particular piece of content. This used to be something that was more important, but search engines are smarter these days, and unfortunately people spammed this to death. So really, it does not matter what header tag you use as long as you present your most important concepts up front and closer to the top of the page. Remember, you are optimizing your page for users first and foremost, which means that you want to tell them ASAP what your page is about through a clear headline.

## MYTH #12

### My home page needs a lot of content.

Have you ever come across a home page littered with copy? Or, on the opposite spectrum, a home page with barely any content at all? Think of your home page as the gateway to your business. Visualize it! This is your chance to make a first impression and convey what you're all about. Maybe your value proposition is simplicity – in that case, just a single login makes sense (if your name is Dropbox).

For most, however, there is a need for a bit more content and context than that. Your content should be enough to clarify who you are, what you do, where you're location (if you're local), your value proposition, and what to do next. Users should leave satisfied, not over- or underwhelmed, and certainly not confused. So in short, no, you don't have to have physical home page content for your website to do well and be associated with your targeted keywords. Remember: it's not just about the on-page components.





## MYTH #13

### The more indexed pages I have, the better.

Logically you would think that the larger the footprint of your website, the better you would do – but it's not true. First, not everything you publish gets indexed (rightfully so). Second, sometimes pages get indexed, but don't *remain* in the index. Third, just because you have pages indexed does not mean that they will drive qualified traffic and leads. Unfortunately, those who strive to have lots of pages on their website also tend to overlook the quality of that content; and realistically, it's difficult to strive for both. The aim should be to publish what is most relevant. Have your content be at its best.



## MYTH #14

For local SEO, I only need to worry about having city and state, or country on my pages.



Alright, this is kind of a half-truth. You definitely need city, state, and/or country on your pages if you're a geo-targeted business -- though remember if you're a US business, for instance, you wouldn't need USA on your pages if you're only targeting US cities.

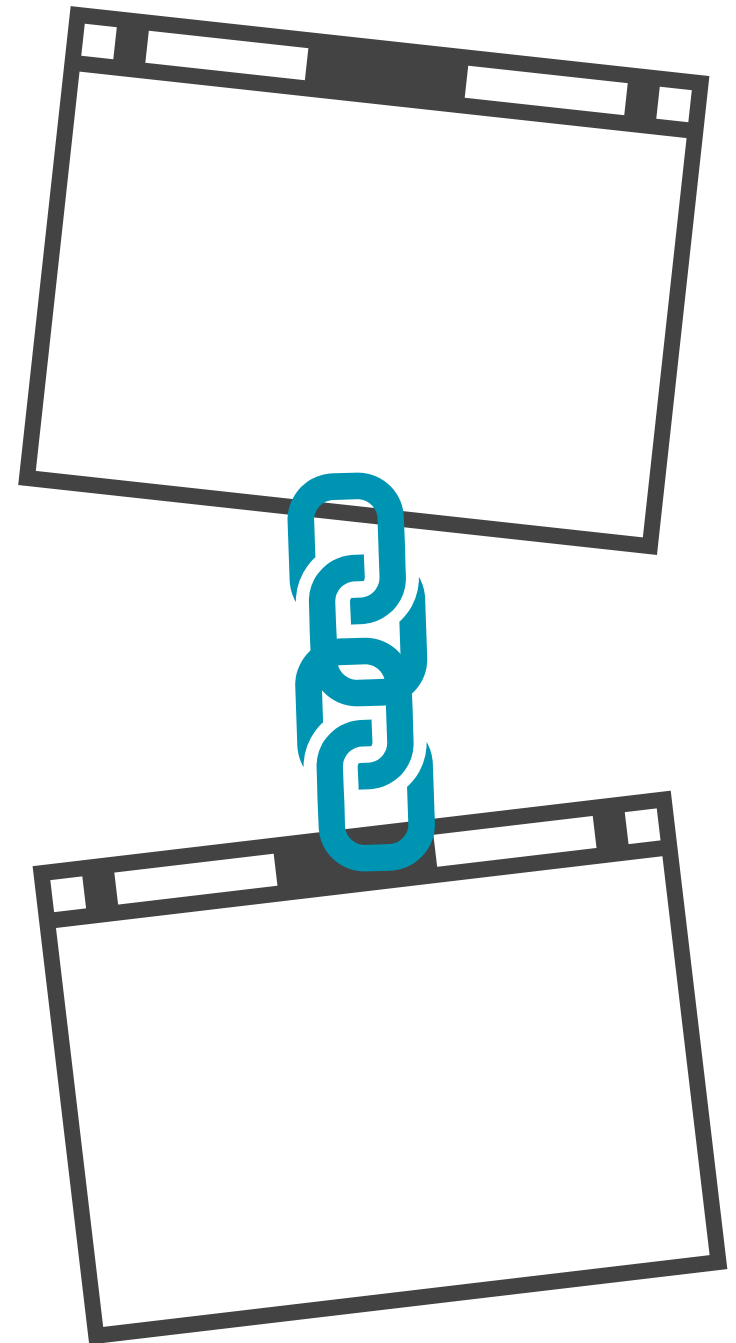
But remember that search engines know where users are located, and they make an effort to more prominently show results that are specific to their location. That said, title tags, links, reviews, on-page citations, and social media (particularly Google+ Local) should all still clearly state where you are located, and be included as part of your local SEO.

## MYTH #15

### Microsites and other domains I own that link or redirect back to my site will help my SEO.

The chances of this doing much for you are slim to none. It's like having an election in which you vote for yourself a thousand times – that still counts as one vote. Search engines are smart enough to know who the registrants are for a domain, and see that it's the same person as your primary domain. Note: If you are reading this and thinking, well, then I will just change my registration information, you are clearly thinking like a spammer ... don't be that person.

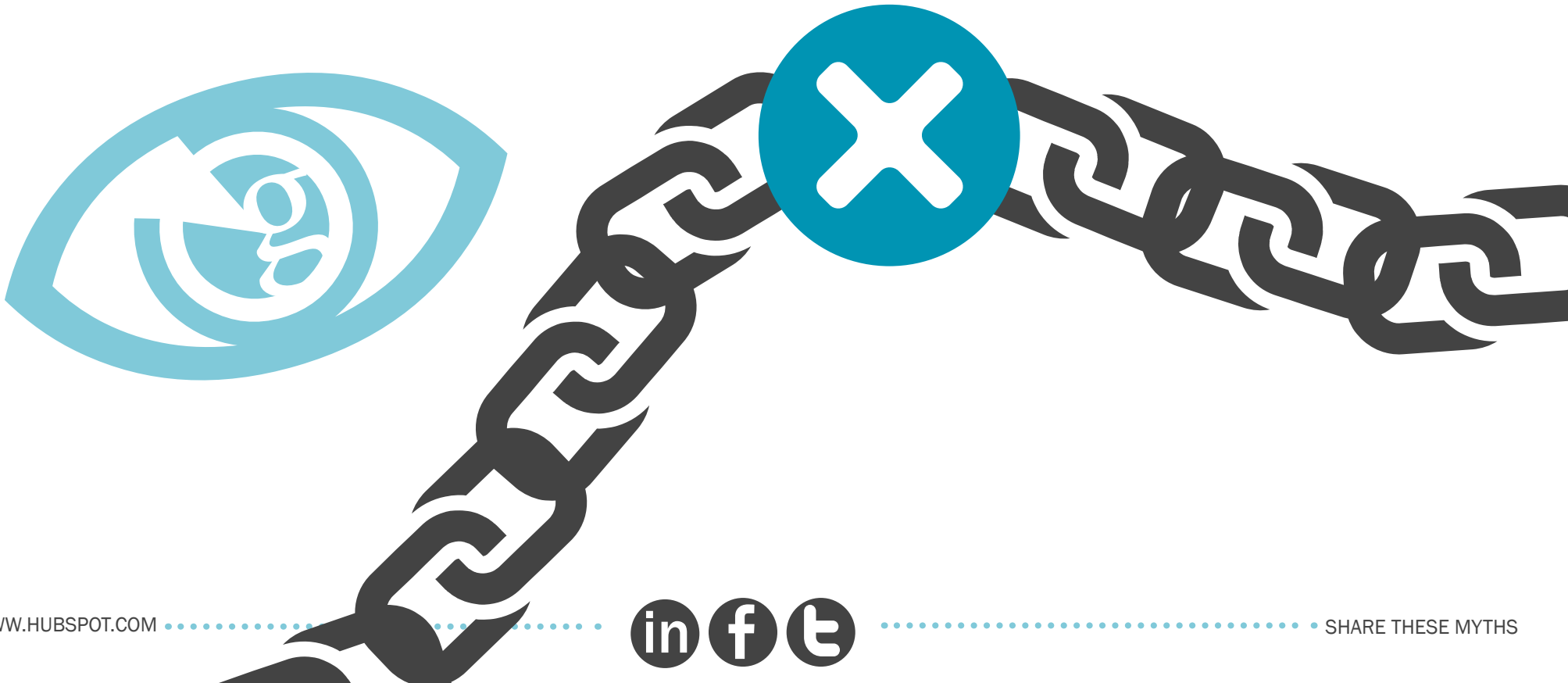
There is not much value in spreading your SEO thin, which is what you do by setting up domain after domain and optimizing each rather than putting all that love into your primary domain. Why not just add the content to your primary domain, or build a tool as an add-on to your website?



## MYTH #16

### Google will never know if I have bad sites linking to me.

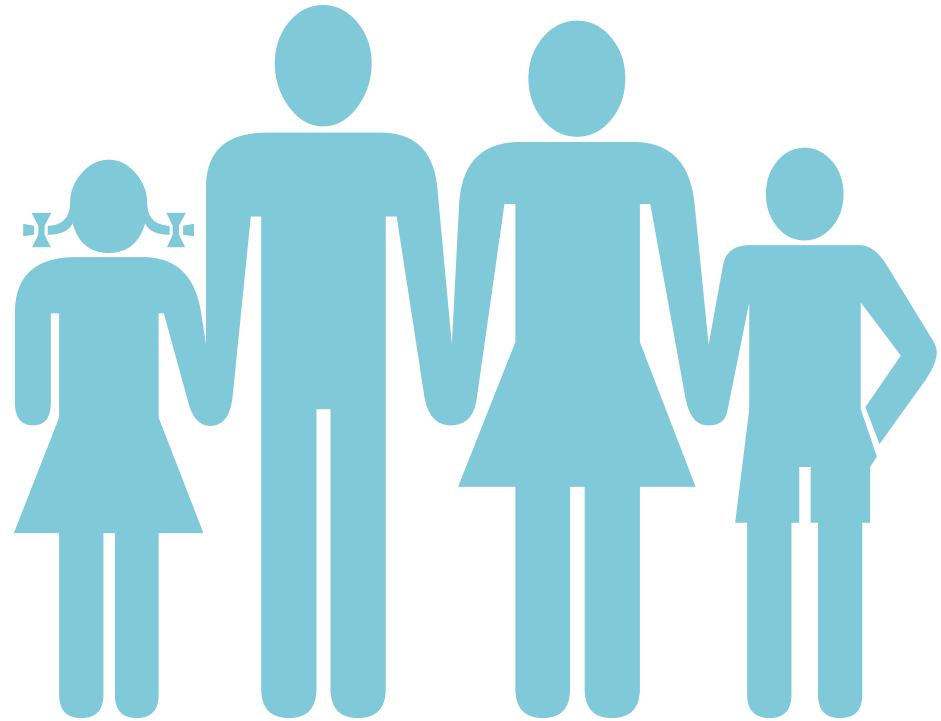
Yes, they will! Just like Santa Claus knows if you've been good or bad. Just like the Tooth Fairy knows when you've lost a tooth. Just like your parents can sense when you missed your curfew ... I digress. Point is, Google knows (everything). Don't try to fool them – [especially post-Panda and Penguun](#) – or you will be sent to your room. I mean penalized.



## MYTH #17

### SEO is not a usability issue.

SEO has evolved from simply getting found, to improving how users engage with your content. SEO, which stands for search engine optimization, is so much more than optimizing for search engines. You need to optimize for *users* first and foremost, so they actually click through your listing to your website, and once they click through, they stay there.

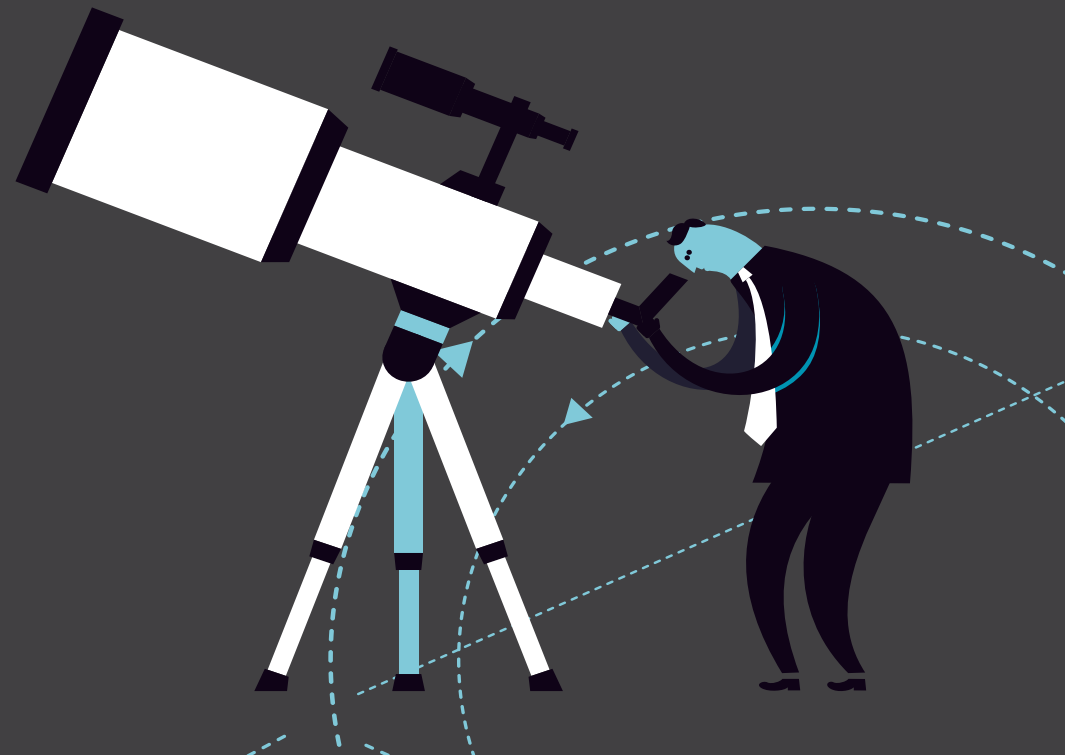


To keep visitors on your site, ensure you're publishing content that's personalized and relevant. You should also make your website intuitive, and easy to browse through (accessible by crawlers and users); don't make visitors look for what they need. Have clear calls-to-action, and you'll also convert those users. That's what SEO is all about – [Search Experience Optimization](#).

# CONCLUSION

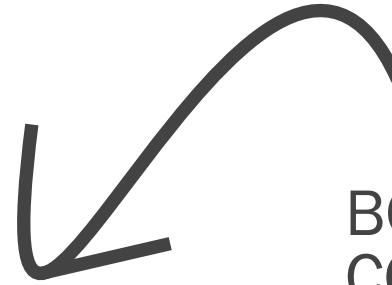
So – now that you know what the common SEO myths are, what are you doing that isn't moving the needle? Or worse, what are you doing that's making your SEO efforts *worse*? Debunking these SEO myths will make you both more effective, and more efficient with your organic search strategy.

If you can take one thing away from this ebook, it's this: more than anything else, SEO is about the overall experience for a searcher. That experience starts from the moment they enter a search query, to the moment they leave your website. The better their experience with you – from your SERP listing, to the quality and relevancy of the content on your site, to the ease with which they can move through your site – the better your SEO will be, too.



## OPTIMIZE FOR SEO

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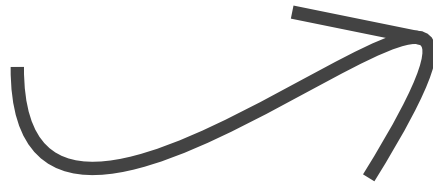


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