Whitepaper

SEO Ranking Factors – Rank Correlation 2013

Bing USA

Executive summary:
This white paper deals with the definition and evaluation of factors that have high rank correlation coefficients with top organic search results and aims at providing a more in-depth analysis of search engine algorithms. The data collection and its evaluation refers to Ranking Factors and Rank Correlations for Bing.com in 2013. For the purpose of comparison, the data is often analyzed against the background of the respective Google data.

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SEO RANKING FACTORS BING RANK CORRELATION 2013

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Contents

List of Figures

Findings Overview and Structure

Abstract

On-page factors such as the technical site structure and good content are basic requirements for ranking well. This is not much different for Bing and Google. For Google, the on-page keywords actually seem to be more important. In any case, the proportion of pages to keywords in the description/title/H1/etc. is usually higher among the Top 30 for Bing.

In terms of the presence of the keyword in the address bar, the trend is very similar to Google. In other words, there are comparatively few domains with a keyword in the domain name. Although domains with the keyword in the URL appear 5% more frequently on Bing, they are very rarely present in the top 30.

In contrast, the number and quality of backlinks are probably also very important for Bing. Even though "natural link profiles" and diversity is becoming more important for Google, Bing seems to rank domains that have more "monotonous" backlink profiles.

Like Google, social signals have a clear positive correlation to higher rankings. Google+ signals even have the highest correlation here.

Furthermore, Bing still seems to have problems distinguishing brands from non-brands. This is can be seen with the broader "peak" with regards to the characteristics of factors in the top search result positions, as well as the fact that Bing seems to be much worse than Google at identifying so-called "brand links", and separating them from pure "keyword links".

Structure of the white paper

The study has two focuses. On the one side, it focuses on the steps involved in building a website in practice, and on the other side, it focuses on the relevance of influencing factors, which has increased over time.

The study first examines the on-page area, broken down into two thematically different blocks, *coding* and *content.* This is followed by an analysis of the off-page area in the form of *backlinks* and *social signals.* The white paper concludes with an analysis of two factors that play a special role in this study and therefore have to be examined separately. The final summary of the findings of the study follows the relevant chapter on brand factor.

The chapters first presents an overview of all factors influencing the area in question. At the core of every chapter are the remarks and conclusions about these individual factors, followed by a summary at the end of each chapter.

Definitions, influencing factors, and the data pool

What is a Ranking Factor?

Search engines use algorithms to rank websites by subject and relevance. All the websites in a search engine index are categorized based on this structure, which ultimately results in an optimal ranking for user's search queries. In general, the criteria for evaluating websites and performing this ranking are referred to as Ranking Factors.

The reasons for this are obvious: Due to the exponential rise in the number of documents on the Internet – and thus in the search index – it would be impossible to rank websites without automatic algorithms, despite the existence of human quality raters. While, on the one hand, these algorithms are trivial (order requires a pattern), they are also the best-kept secret in the Internet business, because it is essential for search engine operators to keep the underlying factors influencing these algorithms strictly confidential.

The reason for this is elementary rather than competition-related: If the definition and the degree of influence of factors needed for a good ranking were known, it would render them irrelevant, since they could then be manipulated.

At the beginning of the search engine era, search engines would rank websites on certain topics as relevant based on high keyword density related to these topics. However, webmasters used this knowledge to climb up the SERP ranking by using keyword-overloaded pages that resulted in irrelevant searches.[1]

This fact has not only triggered real competition amongst search engines and website operators, but it has also contributed to the mystery surrounding Ranking Factors. In order to develop a semantic search, a set of criteria was developed; these criteria were initially strictly technical (e.g. number of backlinks), but have since expanded to include less technical components as well (e.g. user signals).

This along with the search for optimal search results led to the evolution of ranking factors. As a result of the ongoing iterative update cycles, ranking factors are subject to constant optimizations that are aimed at producing the most relevant search results for user.

For website operators, this means that on the one hand there will be a steadily decreasing number of factors that can be negatively manipulated. On the other hand, it provides an opportunity – given the increasing efforts to combat spam –

[1] **S**earch **E**ngine **R**esults **P**ages

to achieve high search result rankings in the long term using a sustainable business strategy based on relevant quality factors, on the other.

Ranking Factors: Correlation ≠ causation

We are not Bing. The analysis and evaluation of Ranking Factors using this data not only has interpretational value but, in fact, represents a profound interpretation (and thus not a mere conjecture) on the basis of facts, namely the evaluation and categorization of website features that achieve high ranking in search results.

We at Searchmetrics aggregate billions of data points every month and naturally look for the answers to the key question: Which factors are relevant for a good ranking in search results?

To this end, we compare website characteristics with their Bing rankings and derive a structured list of Ranking Factors. For example, if several pages in the top positions of analyzed SERPs contain a keyword in the title tag, while fewer low ranking pages have that feature, then we have identified a high correlation with good rankings. On the basis of these correlations, we can then draw conclusions about the characteristics of websites that rank well.

However, it is necessary to point out that correlation is not synonymous with causation, and thus there is no guarantee that the relevant factors actually affect rankings or are even used by Bing as signals. For this reason, Searchmetrics conducts studies on a regular basis that analyze, for example, the impact of social signals under isolated conditions. As a result, the impact of social signals, among other factors, on rankings has already been proven.

Nonetheless, the data speaks for itself. Unlike the definitive Ranking Factors and their degree of influence, this data is not a secret. As a result, our analyses allow us not only to assess what factors will most likely be included in the ranking, but also their degree of influence. Many observations, which were previously not based on much more than a gut feeling, can now be confirmed with the help of the following data.

As already mentioned, there are purely technical or "hard", as well as less technical or "soft", Ranking Factors. In order to optimize the visual impact of our charts, we have grouped our factors – even if some areas partly overlap – into *social, backlinks, on-page coding* and *on-page content.*

Because the term "Ranking Factor" and its causal elements can lead to problematic interpretations, we prefer that this term is instead interpreted as a rank correlation coefficient in the context of our analysis and this white paper.

Influencing factors

The position and order of search results not only depend on the entered search queries (= keywords), but also on personal search history, which in turn is determined by the user's behavior. Position and order also depend on some of the following factors: Is the user logged into Bing? Does the user use Microsoft's own browser – Internet Explorer – to surf the Internet? Where is the user's IP located? Are cookies containing personal information stored on the user's computer, etc.? In addition, Bing itself is constantly changing the variations among these integration types.

Since the consideration of these many individual factors would make the analysis excessively complex, this white paper focuses on the variations of the integration types introduced by Bing itself, on a basis that is as neutral and national as possible.

Data freshness and Google data comparison

The data was collected and aggregated in July 2013. To improve understanding and reasoning, a comparison of the respective Google data is generally included. It must also be stated that the data we gathered cannot be compared on a perfectly common basis because the data retrieval was executed at different times. Nevertheless, Google data is often included to provide a general basis for the purpose of comparison.

Data pool

These analyses are based on search results for a very large keyword set of 10,000 search terms from Bing USA. We have largely excluded specific navigational keywords from the original data pool, which included the top 10,000 keywords according to search volume, because we did not want to distort the analysis. Search queries are considered to be navigational keywords if they return results that are largely irrelevant and only return one exact match (for example: "Facebook Login").

The first three pages of organic search results were always used as a data pool. The data pool at Searchmetrics is always kept up-to-date. Therefore, new and relevant keywords are used in current studies, such as "Samsung Galaxy S4" or "iPhone 5", for example.

The data pool is based on the same keyword set as our equivalent study for Google, which is already available for download.

Market share of search engines in the US

Google is the search engine with by far the largest market share, and that's not only the case in the U.S., but worldwide. Based on the U.S. market, it is apparent that Google has just two noteworthy competitors, even if they are trailing relatively far behind: Bing and Yahoo.

It should be noted here that, since the establishment of a cooperative agreement in 2009, Yahoo also displays Bing search results, but these are supplemented with its own additional data.

Given the immensely high – and rising by the second – number of search queries to search engines, this partnership yields a crucially large market share for Bing (and Yahoo).

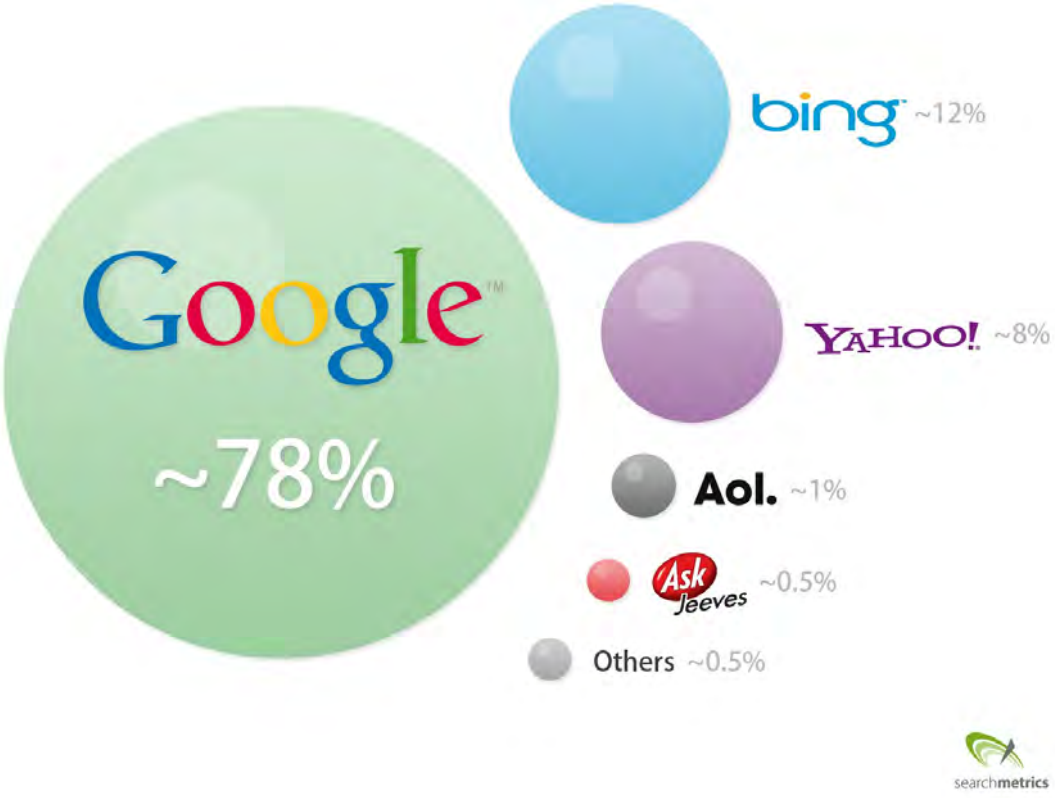

Figure 1: Market share US search engines – July 2013 (source: statcounter.com)

Overall ranking differences between Bing and Google

Since this white paper recurrently examines differences between the two search engines Bing and Google, it seems interesting to know how big the overall impact of the differing correlations and their values really is.

This raises the question of how the specific rankings actually differ. In other words, does Bing rank the same URLs as Google for a specific keyword? Do they rank at exactly the same position? If not, how much do the rankings actually differ? Furthermore, what about domain level? If Bing does not rank exactly the same URLs, does it rank URLs from the same domains as Google?

This examination is based on even more than 10,000 keywords, but is focused on the top ten rankings of both search engines. The results of the URL-based as well as the domain-based analysis are presented here:

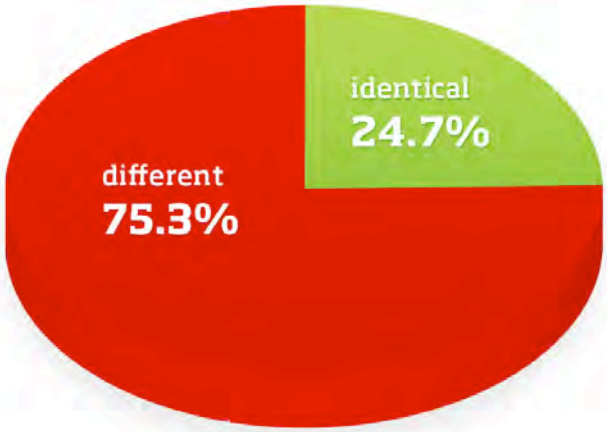

Figure 2: Differences Bing vs Google SERPs – URL-based

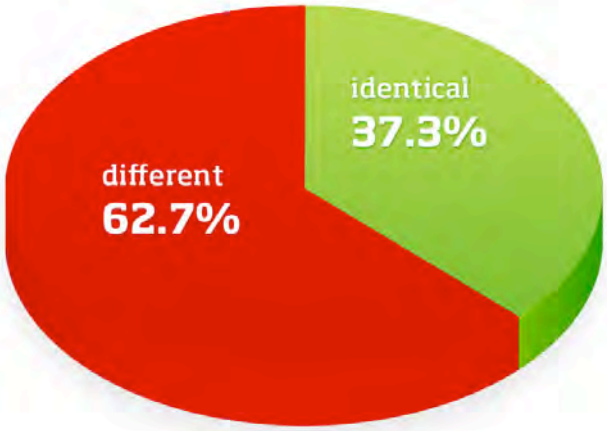

Figure 3: Differences Bing vs Google SERPs – Domain-based

Already at first glance, we see that the overlap is lower than 50%. Only about a quarter of the URLs ranking on Bing and Google are identical, whereas both search engines rank about 37% of URLs from the same domains.

The correlation coefficients at a glance

The presentation of the correlation between Bing's search results and the various influencing factors in this white paper is based on Spearman correlation. The most important factors are shown in the following bar chart, while further factors will be discussed in the respective chapters. The cluster color-coding introduced in the study about Google is used here again:

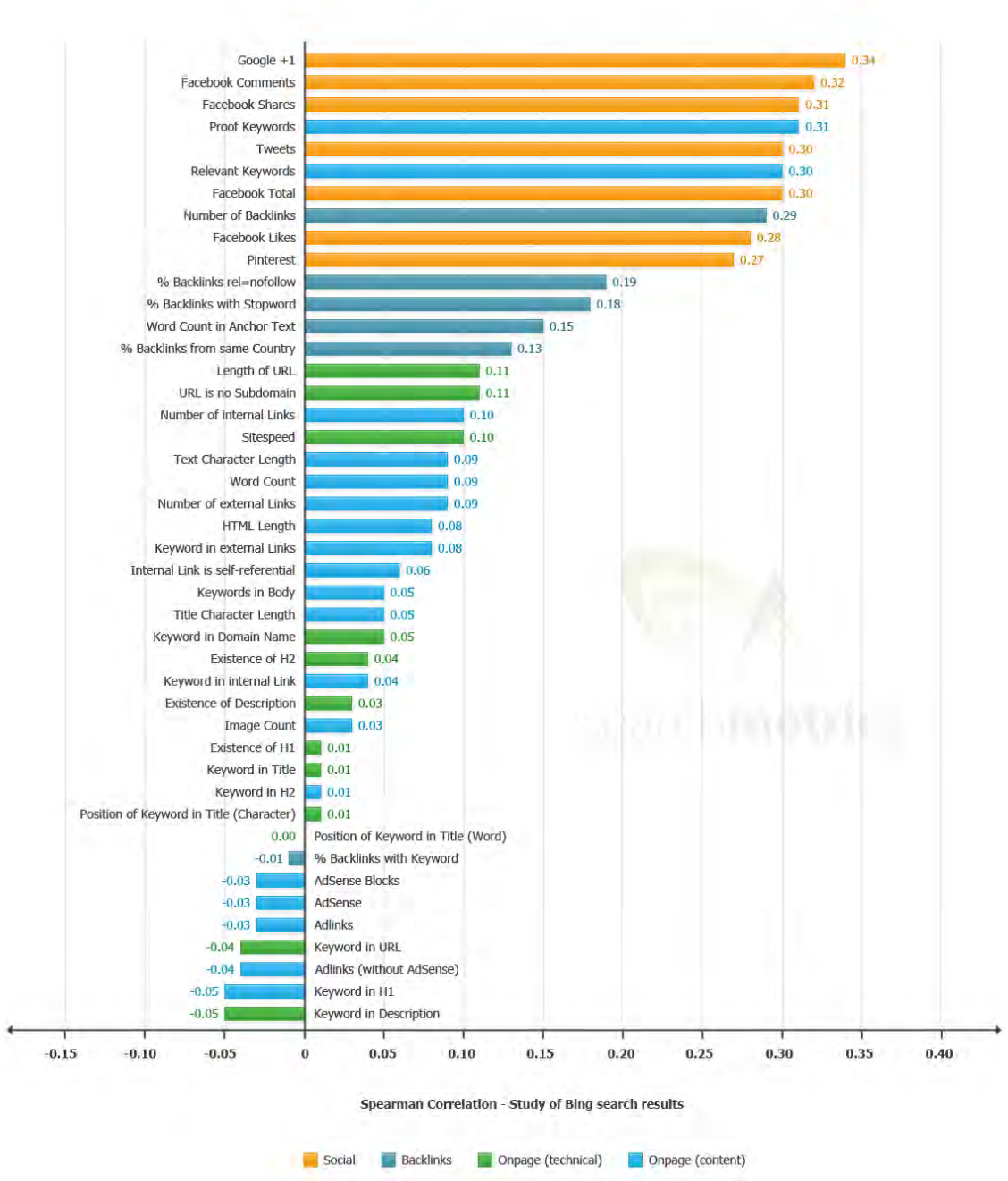

Figure 4: Searchmetrics – US Bing SEO Ranking Factors – Rank Correlation 2013

Legend: The correlation coefficient is plotted on the x-axis, which measures its size. The longer or shorter the length of the bar is on the positive part of the x-axis, the higher or lower the correlation between that particular factor and a good Bing ranking is. Our analysis has shown that factors with a correlation factor of zero do not have any measurable correlation with Bing's results. Values in the negative range can be positively interpreted with the opposite statement.

1. ON-PAGE CODING

Like with Google, the entire on-page area on Bing, solely belongs to the basics. This especially holds true with respect to the technical parameters of a website and the factors affecting a good search engine ranking. It has been the case for some time now that fulfilling certain on-page criteria no longer has a positive effect on the website's ranking. On the other hand, if a website does *not* meet these criteria, this will turn out to be very bad for its ranking.

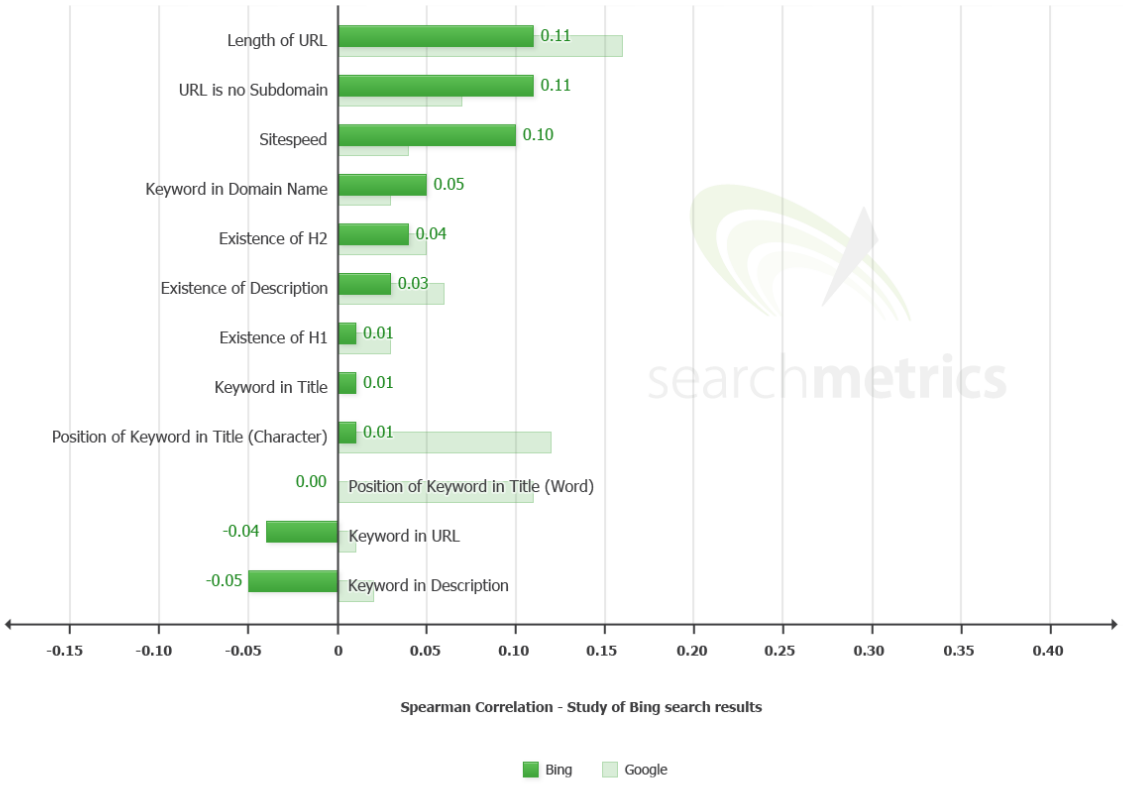

Figure 5: On-page coding – Rank Correlation 2013

Nearly all websites that ranked among the top 30 are compatible with the components mentioned later in this chapter. Particularly, in the case of binary features, it is hardly imaginable for them to have a positive influence in the presence of factors, or a negative influence in the absence of factors, when the share of elements lacking the analyzed features is so low within the group of examined elements. That is to say, if almost all analyzed websites meet a specific criterion, a high, positive rank correlation coefficient cannot be logically calculated.

Instead, it appears that on-page coding factors particulary represent in many ways the basic prerequisite for a high search result ranking. The average proportion of websites ranking in the Top 30 that positively fulfill these features is even higher for Bing than for Google.

The two newly introduced factors, however, clearly show a certain level of triviality: "URL length" and "URL is not a subdomain". In principle, these two features, which are very closely linked, tell us that shorter URLs and domains tend to rank higher on Google. This can be logically explained by the fact that, on average across all rankings, the homepage of a domain performs better than individual subdomains or other subpages of this domain. Interestingly, Bing also seems to prefer ranking shorter URLs in lower positions. For its part, Google ranks over 5% more domains (homepages) in position 1 than Bing; in turn, however, Bing ranks about the same percentage more homepages in positions 2-6.

1.1 Keyword domains are not a Ranking Factor for Bing

In the Google Ranking Factors 2013 study, keyword domains (exact match domains) constituted the biggest loser in the yearly comparison – as well as the "keyword in URL" factor. Even though no yearlong trend analysis for the Bing factors are presented, the correlations and average absolute values speak for themselves:

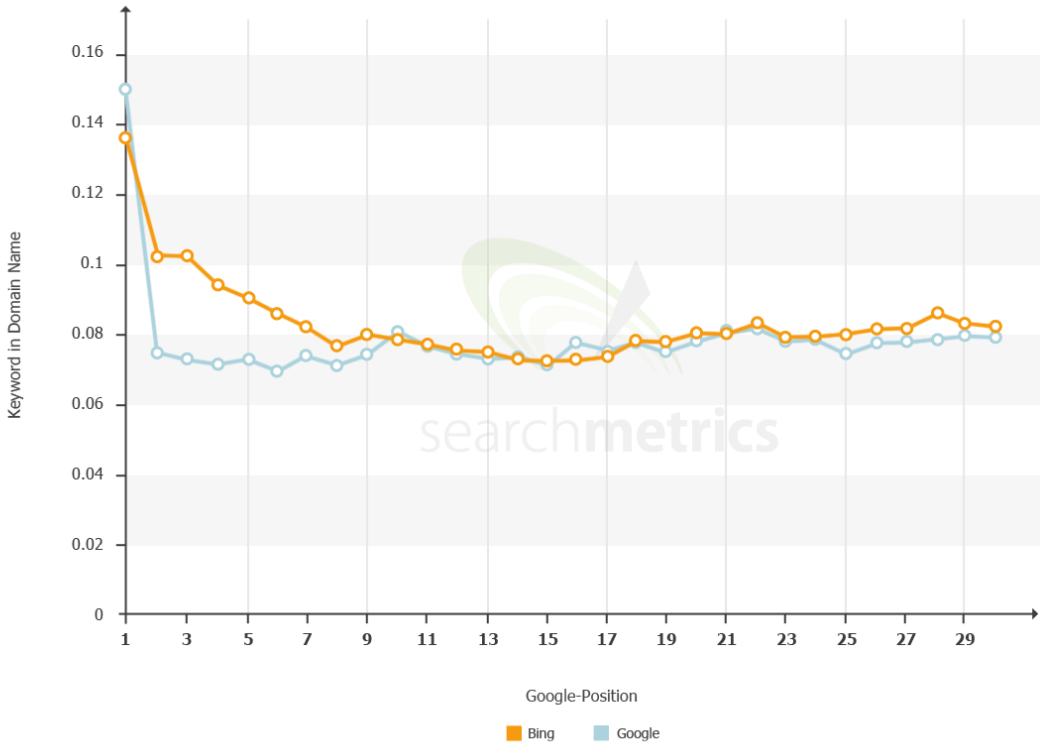

Figure 6: Average by ranking – Keyword in domain

The quality of the keyword in the URL/domain as a Ranking Factor is not relevant for Bing, but there are slightly more EMDs ranking on SERP 1 on average than with Google. The following chart clearly shows the low correlations for these two factors again – the correlations are compared to Google:

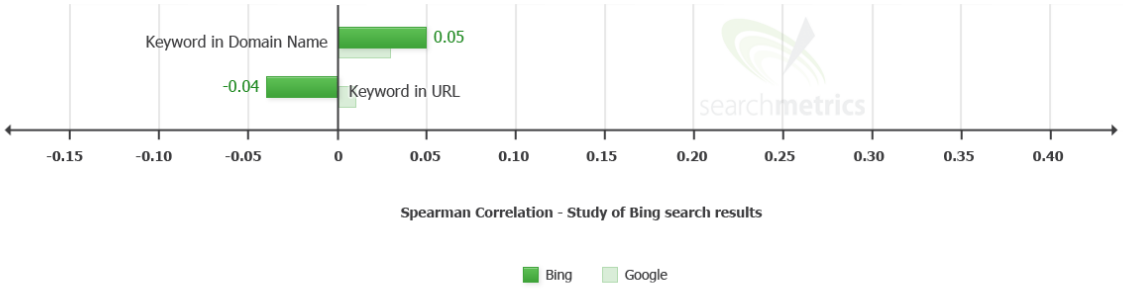

Figure 7: Correlation – Keyword in domain / URL

As you can see, the correlation for "keyword in domain" is slightly higher with Bing, whereas the correlation for "keyword in url" is considerably negative. But if we look at the correlation chart in detail, it becomes obvious that Bing in fact ranks about 8% more pages, on average, with a keyword in the URL.

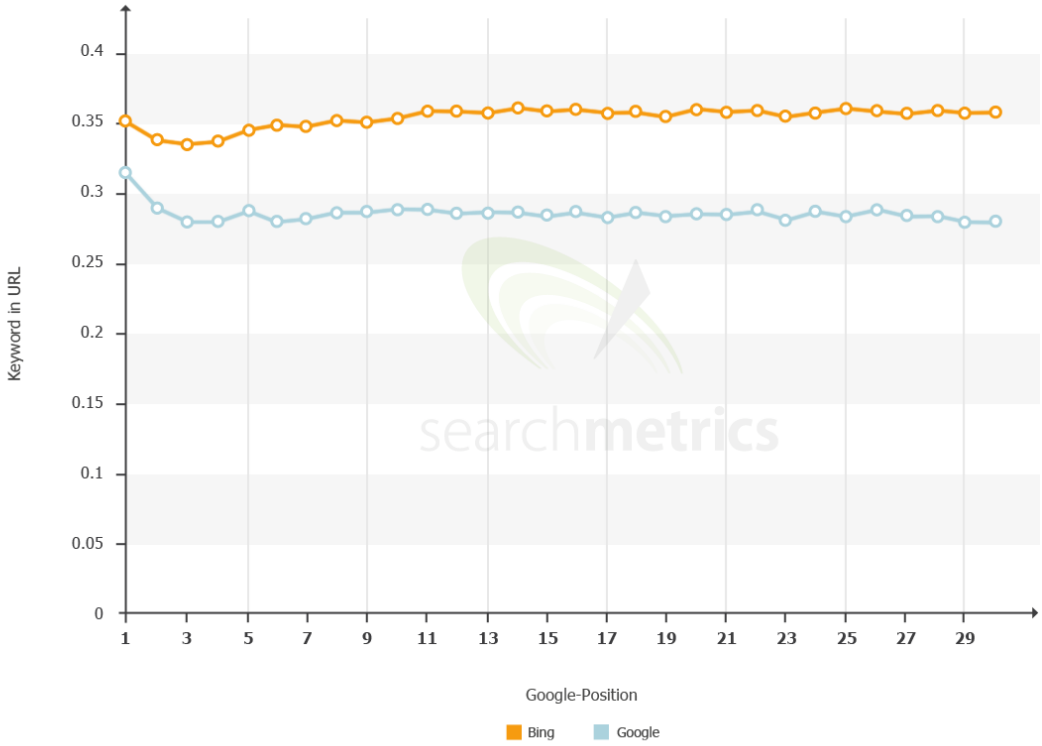

Figure 8: Average by ranking – Keyword in URL

Nevertheless, the top ten ranking pages for Bing display a keyword in the URL less often, on average, than the pages in positions 11 to 30. Therefore, a slight negative correlation is calculated for this factor.

However, one question still remains: Why is the correlation for the factor "keyword in domain" still positive? Here, the answer is not too far off – and it's the same as for Google: brands.

The special role of brands in search engine rankings already stood out in the Google study. Search engines do not seem to apply the same standards to brands – and their websites – as they do to other domains. This is also true for Bing, even if the brand factor does not seem to be as strong as is the case with Google.

When it comes to Google, there is a sharp drop in the share of EMDs when comparing the ranks one and two, amounting to approximately 50%. In contrast, the Bing curve drops considerably less.

Because of this significant difference in the curve, we can cautiously conclude that Google already seems to be much better at distinguishing real brands (which, in part, also have the keyword in the domain name, while in some cases the brand itself has become the keyword, such as Amazon or Facebook), from other EMDs and ranking them in position one, as well as reducing the number of EMDs ranked for a keyword on the most relevant domain(s) and filtering out the wrong irrelevant results. For Bing, on the other hand, the density of EMDs on the first SERP is much higher, which is reflected in the slightly higher correlation for this factor.

This is also reflected in a direct comparison of the results for a sample keyword.

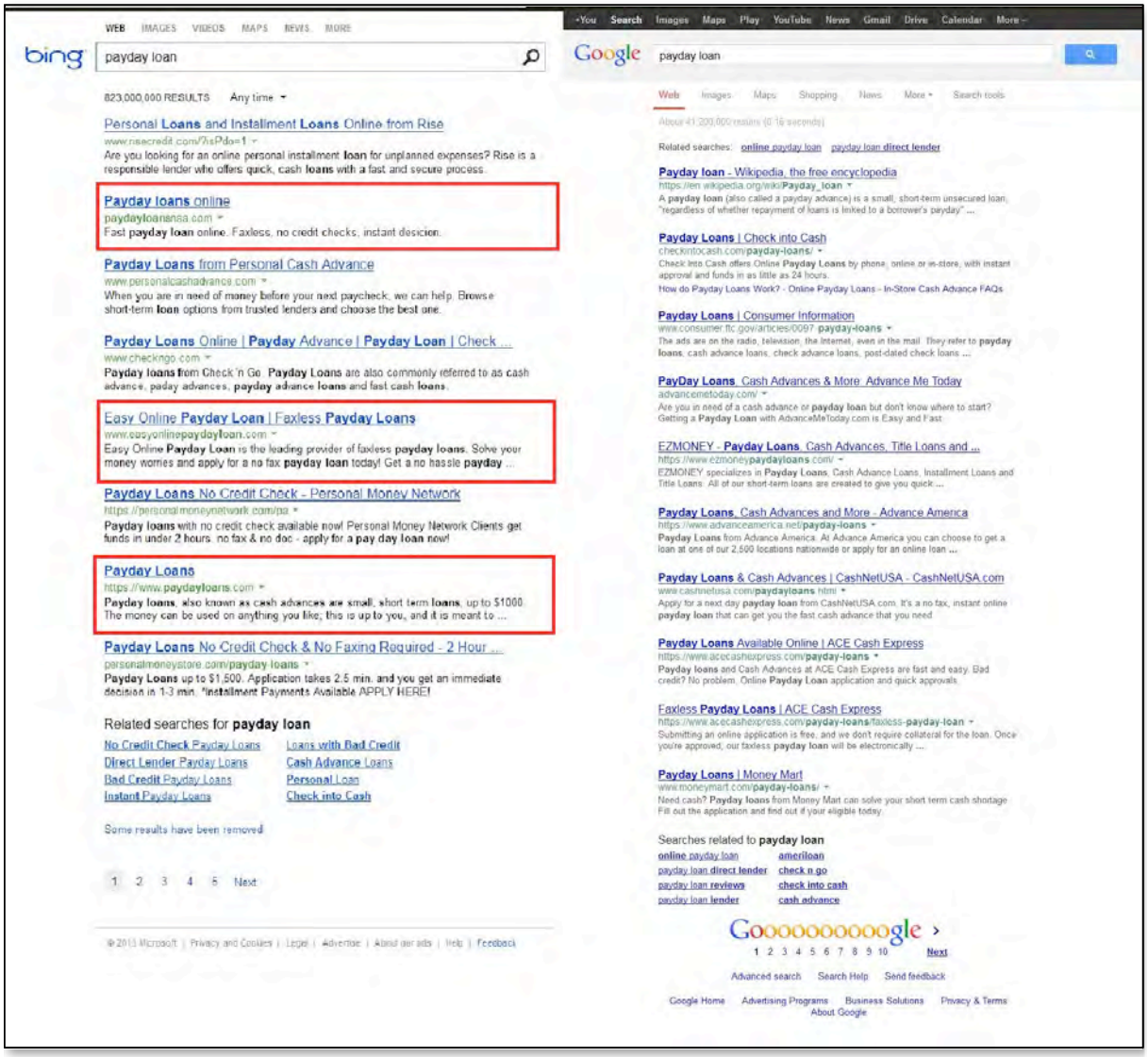

Figure 9: Screenshot of SERP 1 for Keyword 'payday loan' – Bing vs Google (edited)

As can be seen here, 3 domains with the keyword in the domain name rank on SERP 1 with Bing.com when searching the keywords "payday loan". Meanwhile, there are none on Google.com, but the results feature mostly larger brands.

The fact is that brands – or the related websites – are often quite naturally linked with the name of the brand in the link text alone. What is negative for non-brands is simply normal for brands. Google is aware of this and treats brands accordingly by not rating this factor as negative in the case of well-known brands, which then rank in the top positions. As a result, there are domains for which the feature "keyword in domain" appears to be positive based on rankings (although other factors, such as brand factors, play a key role here), which is the reason behind the still marginally positive correlation of these features.

The following section discusses several factors that could prove that it is not particularly easy for Bing to rank the field behind the brands, as the tried and tested on-page methods appear once again to play a more significant role here.

1.2 Presence of keywords in the description, title and H1 are even more important

Even though the "keyword" factor may have a considerable negative effect in the case of over-optimization on many levels, there are some on-page areas for which the presence of keywords does not show an above-average correlation with good rankings. This is only because almost all top 30 websites – except for a few brands – have these features. In terms of on-page optimization, keywords are very important.

The mere presence of a description, H1 and H2 is also important, irrespective of the keyword. These three factors do show an even lower correlation with better rankings than was the case with Google – but in absolute numbers, even more pages ranking in the Bing top thirty actually do feature these factors. The same is true for the "keyword in …" parameters.

For clarity purposes, the content factor discussed in the next chapter is included in the following chart, which focuses on these areas.

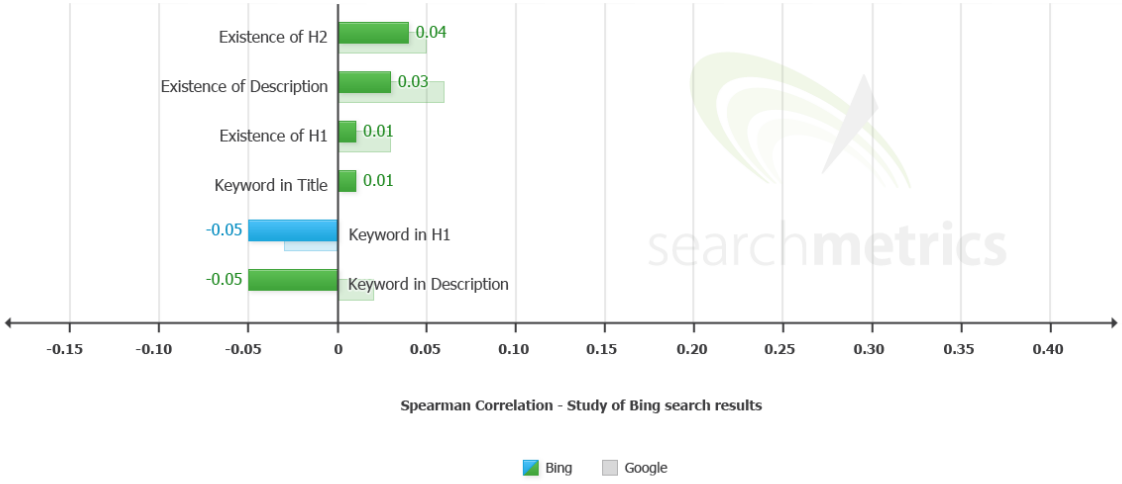

Figure 10: Correlations – Existence of on-page keywords / description, H1 and H2

One cannot deny this development's certain logic. Search engines are machines that categorize data based on their relevance to specific search queries. While Bing (and even more so Google) is well on its way to its ideal "semantic search", the process of analyzing content (i.e. words/text) according to semantics (i.e. meaning) probably represents the highest achievement in decoding.

The days of "keyword density" are clearly gone – but this seems to be more true for Google than for Bing, as we will see later. However, with the exception of the

brand factor (which once again has a role in this context), it is – and always has been – worthwhile to incorporate keywords on-page in the description, the title, and also in the H1 title. These factors are comparable with features of a book, for example. If the title and the description are not attractive, no one will read it. It is difficult to imagine a book without a description, chapters or headings.

The fact that the mere existence, but not the position of a keyword seems to play a role in these lateral areas (which is different from Google) will be discussed in the section after the digression on the relevance of the so-called WDF*P*IDF formula.

1.3 Content relevancy, proof keywords and TF*IDF

As already mentioned, "keyword density" as an isolated factor has lost its relevance. According to the findings of this study, this seems to be less true for Bing than for Google when comparing features and correlations. In recent times however, the influence of the so-called TF*IDF formula, which describes the principle of similarity of a query to the page content, has often been discussed.

This approach focuses on the correlation of two factors, namely the number of instances of a keyword in a document in relation to all other subjects, or "term-frequency" (=TF), and the number of instances of a keyword in all other relevant documents in the underlying database or "inverse-document-frequency" (in this case, the Google index) (=IDF).

In short, the relevance of a term to a document, and in the second stage, the relevance of a term to a search query using a keyword, should according to this approach be weighted with this term/keyword in the index, not only in relation to the individual website, but more importantly in relation to all other websites.

The correlation for this factor was also calculated using our data pool for the top 30. Only the content of the website has been taken into account in this case. On the y-axis of the following chart, the average similarity of keywords related to the document in the respective search result ranking is presented on a scale from 0 = "least similar" to 1 = "identical."

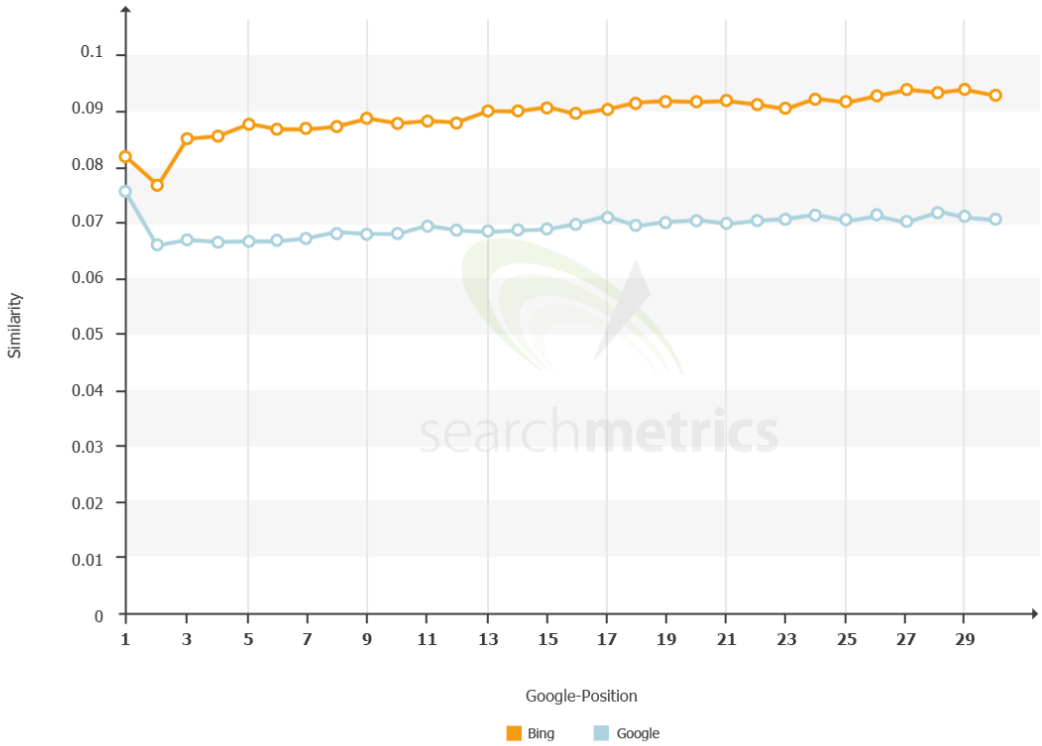

Figure 11: Average by ranking – Similarity

Like with Google, there is in fact a low (negative) correlation for this factor with Bing, and it is in fact nearly twice as high (Bing: -0.07 vs Google: -0.04); the average absolute similarity is about 0.09 (Google: 0.07). In contrast to Google, the results ranked in the first position seem to exhibit a smaller similarity to the search query on average. In fact, the similarity continually rises with worse rankings.

This result suggests that taking into account the TF*IDF formula for a term, for which an optimized website is already ranked, does not have a positive impact on the ranking. Even if the URLs are included in the search results, the ranking for that specific term will not be improved on that basis alone. Instead, the website will more likely improve its search engine performance thanks to the additional use of synonyms and subject-related, relevant terms by getting ranked for other keywords as well.

The relevance of a document in relation to the search query as well as the relevance of all other documents to this term, therefore, does not correlate positively with better rankings, because this factor also appears to be among the trivial prerequisites for a website to be ranked.

In addition to term frequency, keyword proximity and semantic indexing is more important for search engines.

This is why we at Searchmetrics tried to develop a different approach by analyzing the relevance of a piece of content (on a website) via clusters of related terms/keywords that come up on specific topics.

The background of this examination is the following idea: When considering a certain topic, there are always terms which are either more closely to one another or to the topic; on the other hand, there are also terms that instead describe a certain sub-topic or niche of the topic. The varying degrees of the different terms' closeness to the topic thus result in the specific shape of the respective cluster.

In terms of SEO, the concept of the "topic" can be seen as the main keyword. As a result, all the related terms are to be seen as subordinated keywords. These subordinated keywords can again be structured according to a certain hierarchy, which always depends on the focus of the main keyword.

First, there are "proof keywords" that have an obligatory character. These keywords are very closely related to the main keyword and are very likely, if not certain, to appear in a text that deals with the topic of the main keyword. Second, there are "supplementary keywords" that often appear together with the main keyword in documents dealing with the topic in question. These are keywords that describe a niche or a minor aspect of the main keyword. Third, there are keywords that are only somewhat likely to appear in the context of the main keyword. In turn, all these keywords can also be arranged into more or less frequent phrases.

In a second step, all these keywords can be structured according to their relevance – that is, the average appearance of the specific keyword in a document to the average appearance of this keyword in other documents dealing with the specific main keyword – against the average appearance of the keyword in all the texts existing in the given index.

To sum up, there are three factors to be taken into consideration: The hierarchy of keywords, their relevance and last but not least the existence (vs. non-existence) of these keywords in a document.

According to these structural entities, we have developed and analyzed two more rank correlations concerning the relevance of keywords and content in documents ranking in the top positions: First, we examined the correlation of the existence (vs. non-existence) of specific proof keywords that we determined for each of the 10,000 keywords. Second, we computed a correlation based on the relevance of the (proof) keywords existing in the document(s).

The results of these examinations show quite high correlation values:

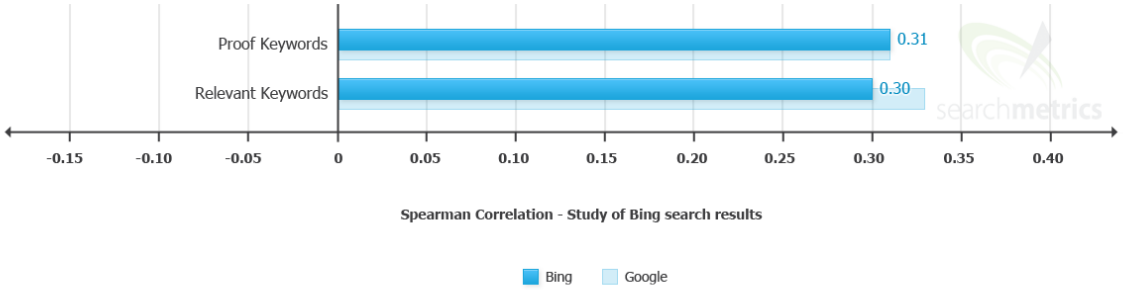

Figure 12: Correlations – Proof keywords / Relevant keywords

Consequently, there seems to be a relationship between the existence, as well as relevance, of certain keywords in a given document, and the ranking of this document's URL in a search engine. The differences between the Bing and Google values are quite low.

In absolute numbers, the graphs of these correlations look like this:

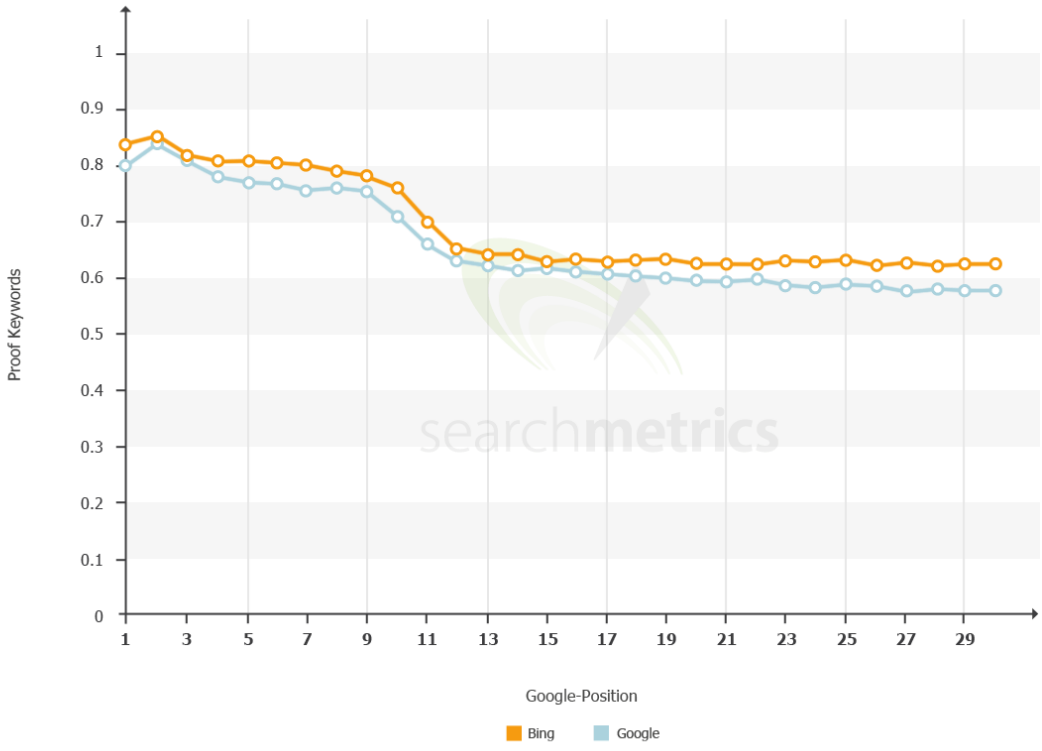

Figure 13: Average by ranking – Proof keywords

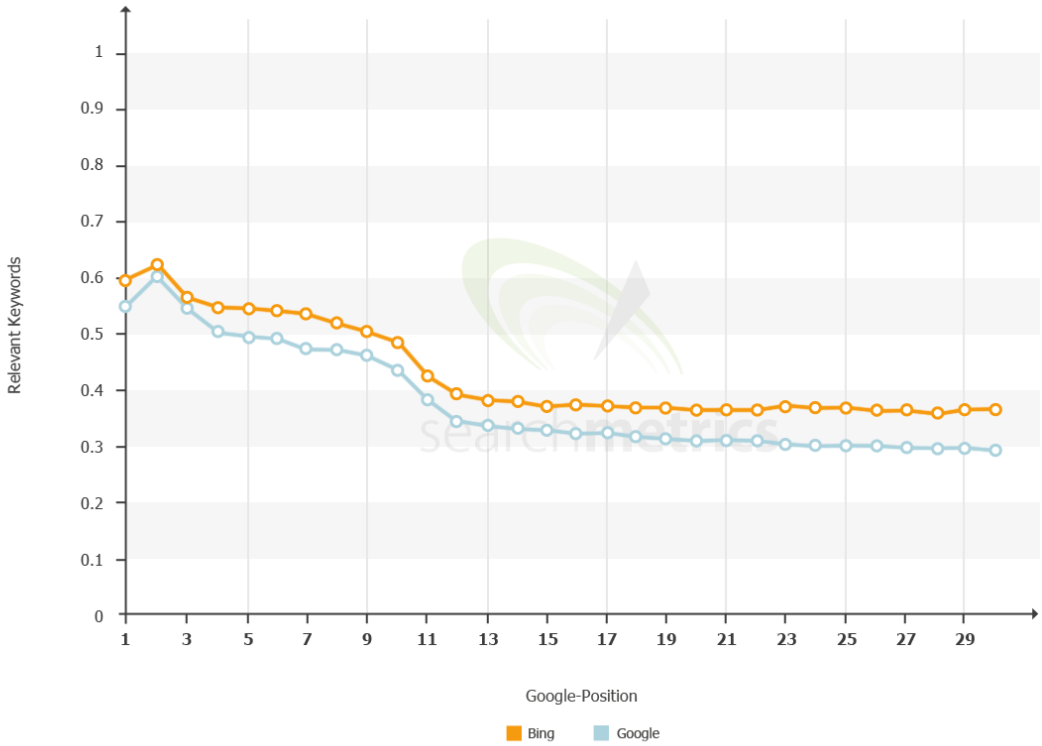

Figure 14: Average by ranking – Relevant keywords

Disregarding the brand factor, there are clear differences between better and worse rankings concerning these features. Documents ranking on SERP 1 exhibit more proof keywords as well as more relevant keywords on average, whereas these kinds of keywords appear comparatively infrequently in documents ranking in lower positions. Consequently, content relevance can be considered a crucial ranking factor.

1.4 There is no correlation for the position of keywords in the title

The fact that the presence of keywords in the website title as well as in the description have a coorelation has already been proven. The position of the keywords in the title itself, however, seems not to play a greater role in ranking. The respective correlations, at least, are close to zero.

The following chart shows the Spearman correlations for the value "position of the keyword" in relation to the position of the word, as well as the characters. According to the formula, positive values are to be interpreted as *the closer to the front, the better:*

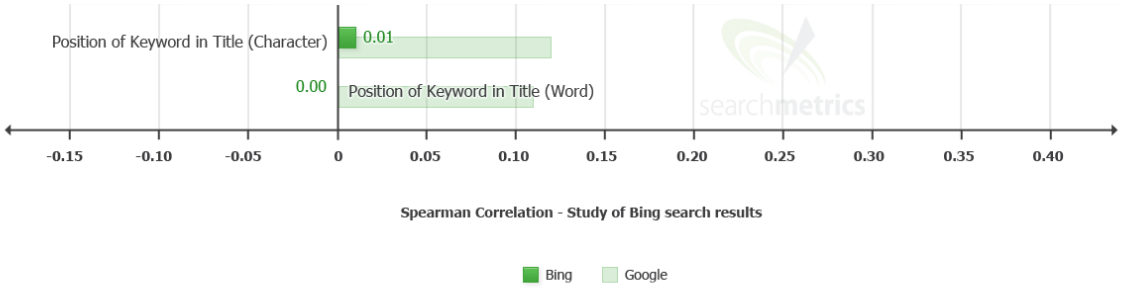

Figure 15: Correlations – Position of the keyword in the title

With respect to Google rankings, the positive value for both correlations, which are also closely related, has almost doubled since last year. Accordingly, many websites at the top of the search results have keywords placed as close to the front of the title as possible. This is different with Bing.

A look at the averages of the absolute numbers reveals that the Bing algorithm seems to handle these features differently:

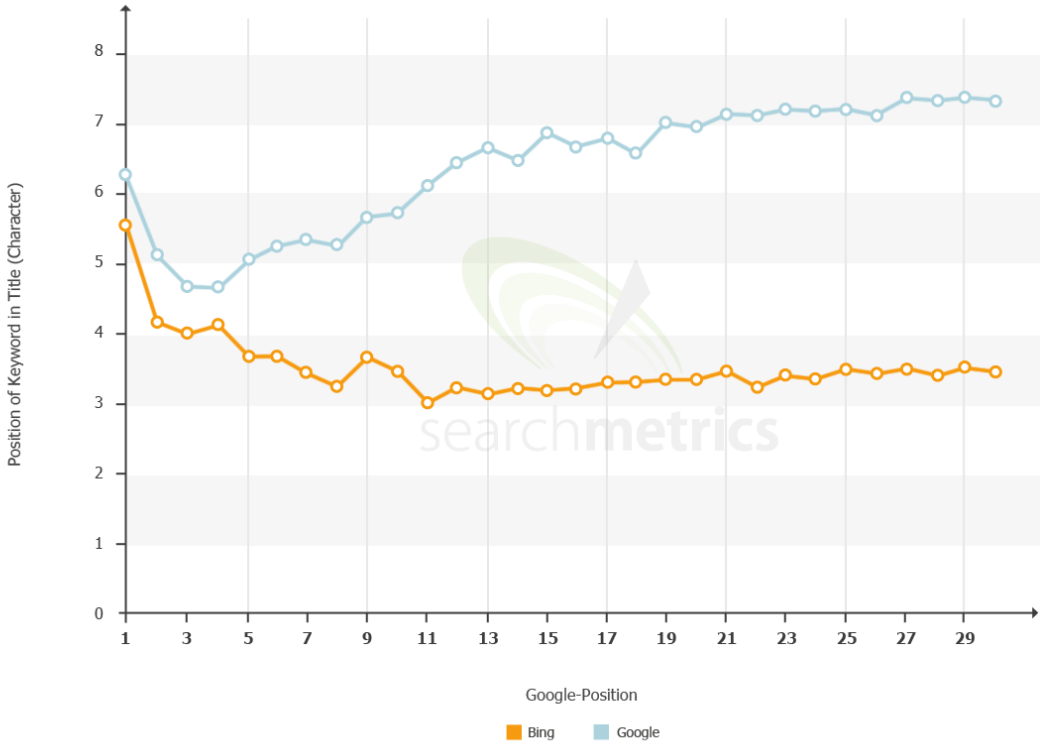

Figure 16: Average by ranking – Position of the keyword in the title (character)

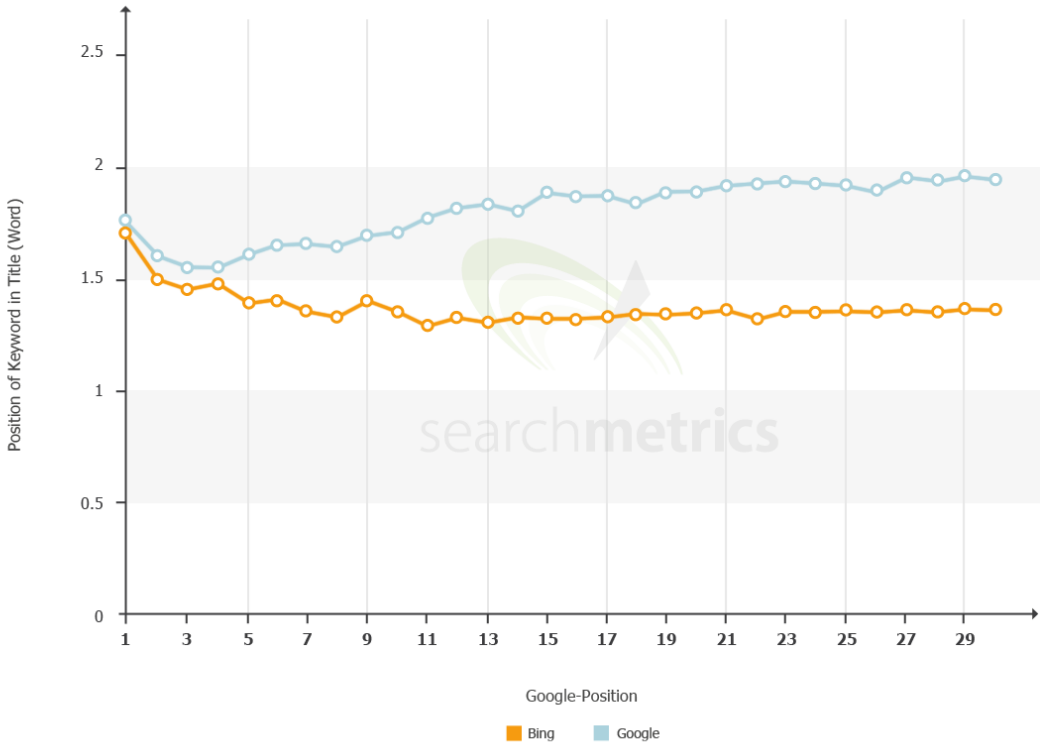

Figure 17: Average by ranking – Position of the keyword in the title (wordwise)

At first glance, it is clear that the curves in the first sections (roughly positions 1-5) of these two graphs resemble each other, with the Bing curve running slightly below the Google curve. Therefore, the two search engines do not seem to interpret features too differently for the first five positions of SERP 1. On average, Bing and Google rank pages that have the keyword in their title at position 1.7 (wordwise) and position 6 (character), respectively.

However, in the second part of SERP 1, the curves start to look completely different; what results in a significantly positive correlation on Google, has a near-zero correlation for Bing. This is because, unlike Google, Bing tends to rank pages lower, on average, when the keyword appears further forward in their title, as compared to the higher ranking results. With respect to Bing, it seems that these two features would include so-called trivial factors, in which the only exceptions seem to be related to the brand factor.

1.5 Page load times as an important performance factor

"Site speed" is a highly technical feature that was also included in this year's Google analysis. This factor was included in the pool of correlation factors for 2013 in the expectation that it would show a very positive correlation. However, as the summary chart shows, the correlation is only marginally positive.

This may be related to the fact that fast page load times appear to be an utterly trivial precondition of achieving decent rankings on Bing, similar to the on-page phenomenon mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

The fact of the matter is that Bing measures site speed both directly – when crawling websites – and indirectly via user signals such as CTR[2] and bounce rates. Therefore, it is also highly likely to be a ranking criterion for Bing.

The detailed view clearly shows that all the top 30 websites have, in fact, very fast load times and the websites that rank in the first positions load by up to one-tenth of a second faster on average.

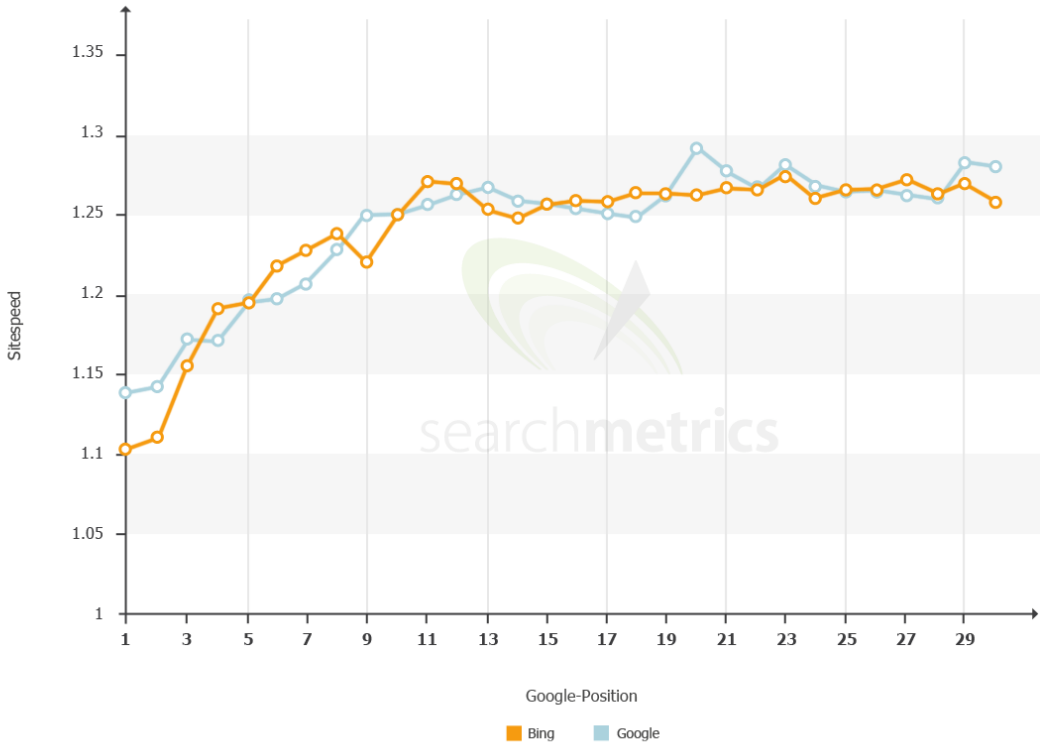

Figure 18: Average by ranking – Page load time

It is amazing that the curves for Bing and Google regarding this feature are - with slight variations – very nearly identical, even though Bing still shows a slightly higher correlation. This is likely a result of the steeper curve for the first eight values of the Bing rankings, while for Google, the curve is flatter for the same positions. Starting at position 10, the average curves run almost identically.

2 **C**lick **T**hrough **R**ate

In this context, it should be noted that the factor "site speed" only exhibits a marginally positive correlation with good rankings. This is likely due to the fact that the top 30 websites tend to have comparably fast page load times.

1.8 Summary

The implementation of on-page coding factors is largely trivial and is thus largely a basic prerequisite of achieving top rankings on Bing as well as on Google. A well-coded website structure and performance are part of the absolute SEO basics.

Much like Google, Bing no longer seems to consider the factor "keyword in domain", and thus keyword domains, as ranking factors, although there do seem to be some more EMDs among the Top 5. The on-page presence of the keyword in the title and the description, however, continues to be even more important, as well as the presence of description, H1 and H2. In addition, fast page load times, as well as the relevance of a document for a keyword in relation to all other documents in the index that are relevant for this keyword, are among the basic requirements for good rankings.

2. ON-PAGE CONTENT

Similar to the coding of their own websites, webmasters can influence the content area as well. However, these two areas differ in the case of search engines to the extent that technical factors are naturally much easier to crawl and categorize for the Google algorithm.[3]

Content features, however, are often complex and move within a scale that should determine – from search engine's perspective – what value range should be classified as "good" or relevant. After all, when returning a search result, it is the content and not the technical implementation that search engines want to evaluate and rate according to quality and relevance.

3 This is partly due to the fact that most of the factors are binary (presence: yes/no).

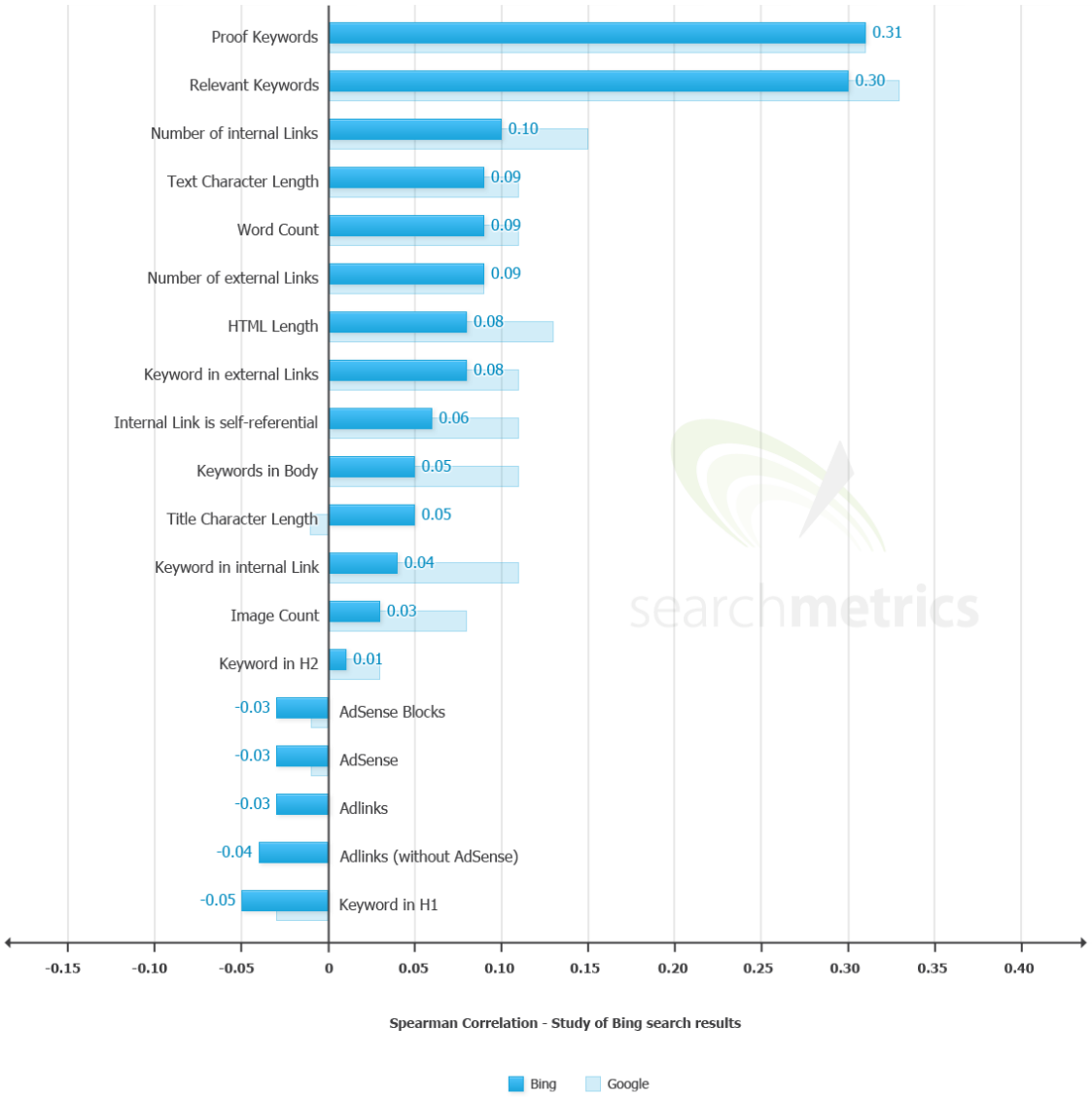

Figure 19: On-page content – Rank Correlation 2013

In principle, the content factors can be broken down into three groups: content quality, linking and advertising.

Except for one value (disregarding advertisement features) from these areas, all content factors correlate positively with good rankings. Later on, we will see that this negative correlation for the feature "keyword in title" seems once again to be due to the brand factor.

2.1 Bing rankings feature even more words in the text than Google

Even though in 2012, the feature "word count in text" still correlated negatively with good Google rankings, this has changed considerably in 2013 and the correlation is now positive. Bing rankings also correlate with the number of words in the text.

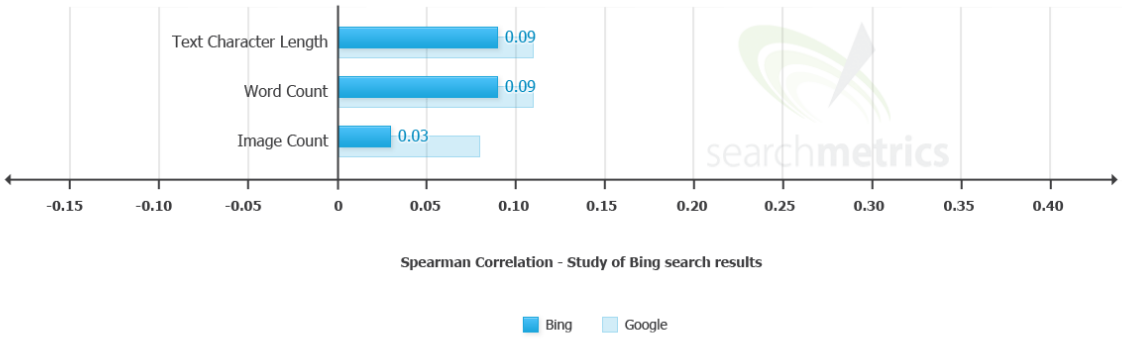

Figure 20: Correlations – Content quality

As you can see, the Bing correlations for the features "word count" and "text length" are only slightly lower than the respective Google values – the average absolute values, however, are even higher with Bing.

The detailed chart shows that pages that rank on the second half of SERP 1 have a higher word count than websites positioned at the lower end of SERPs or at the front of SERP 1 respectively. The y-axis shows the average word count for websites for the respective ranks on Bing/Google (x-axis).

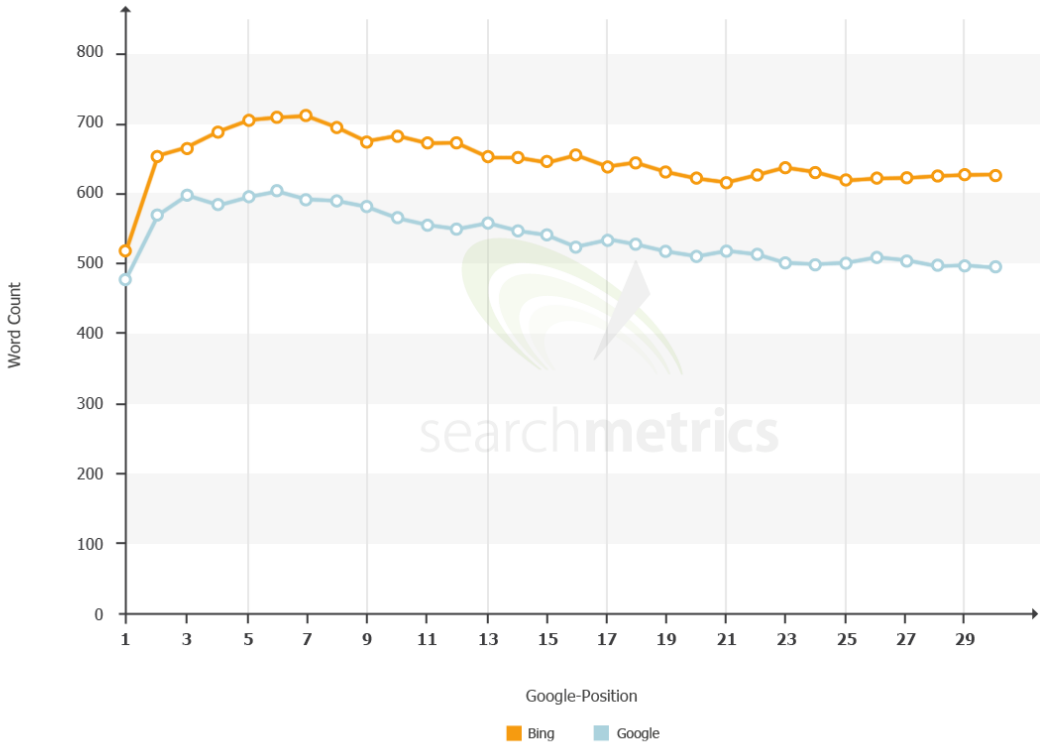

Figure 21: Average by ranking – Word count in text

The presence of something described in this study as "brand factor" is clearly noticeable in the first positions. The brand factor, which is present in virtually all rank correlation coefficients, will be subject to closer scrutiny in Chapter 5.

In a "normal case", one would expect a continuously falling curve from position 1 (highest value) down to position 30 (lowest value). However, this is not the case because of high ranking brand websites, which, as already mentioned, occupy a special position. Again, in the case of Bing, this phenomenon seems to cover not only the absolute top positions – as it does with Google – but also the complete first half the first SERP.

In any case, brand websites seem to have lower word counts on average than most of the search results on the first SERP. Consequently, with an average number of 476 words, pages ranked 1st have about 100 words less than pages ranked 3rd (599 words on average).

Moreover, one thing is clear: The Bing graph is considerably higher than the Google graph. This means that on average, pages ranking in the top 30 Bing results feature about 100 more words than URLs ranking in the corresponding Google spheres (except for position 1).

Furthermore, there seems to be a certain limit concerning the number of words on a website. Up to a certain amount, it seems to be helpful to feature more

words in a text, but at about 700 words (on average) of content, the effect does not in fact become negative, but is also no longer positive. We can find this phenomenon as well in relation to the factor "html length".

2.2 HTML length is important but only to a certain extent

While the length of the HTML code of a website is a technical factor in some respects, the factor "length" in this context depends to a large extent on the type of content, and it will therefore be examined in more detail again in this section.

The majority of websites ranked among the top 30 SERPs tend to have a certain – (minimum) HTML length code. On average, the analysis of 300,000 HTML documents has resulted in the following correlation of HTML length and ranking (y-axis: average length of HTML code in characters):

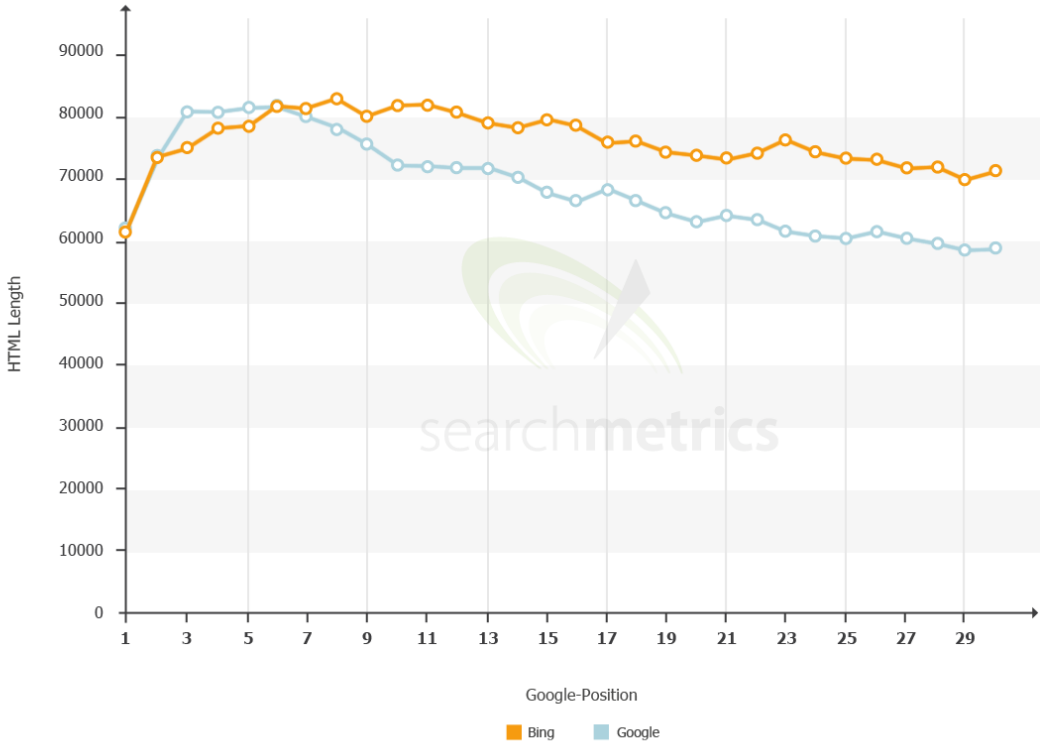

Figure 22: Average by ranking – HTML code length in characters

Again, the brand factor figures in the top ranks – for Bing, this again covers more positions than for Google, whose graph is again sharper. We can observe the curve starting to turn at the end of SERP 1, which suggests that documents ranked on the first half of SERP 1 usually have a shorter HTML code than pages positioned at the end of SERP 1 and the first two thirds of SERP 2. This is

completely different from Google, for which we can observe a much more significantly rising and dropping graph.

Looking at the two previous charts, it could be assumed that – disregarding the brand factor – the more characters the HTML code has (that is, the more words in the text), the better the ranking. However, this is not the case – at least not without limitation. It should be noted that the optimal amount is exceeded once a certain limit of approximately 80,000 characters has been reached. This is true both for Bing and for Google. While the effect of a higher number is not necessarily negative, the factor will not improve the ranking results from this point onwards.

2.3 Text length is relevant only up to a certain point

The curve of the coefficient "text length" is nearly identical to the detailed chart of the factor "HTML length". This is logical, because the units are directly interlinked.

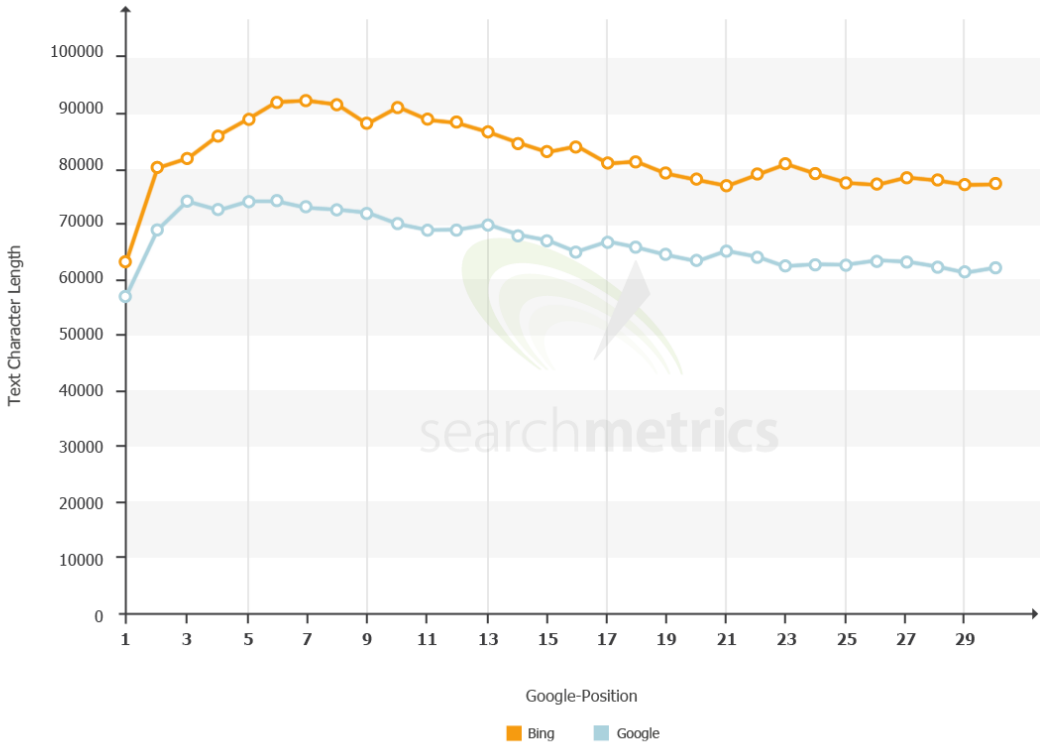

Figure 23: Average by ranking – Text length in characters

Accordingly, the text length is also "capped" with respect to its positive correlation to good rankings. Up to this limit, and excluding the brand factor, one can say that websites with more text achieve a better ranking.

We can again observe, as has already been the case with "word count", that the average values representing the Bing graph are higher than the respective Google values. The average difference amounts to approximately 2,000 characters. Consequently, URLs ranking at Bing feature more words and a longer text, but not necessarily a longer HTML code – at least, not homogenously among the top thirty.

2.4 Using media to enrich content seems trivial

Images and videos seem to not only make the text more attractive for users, but also for Bing and Google. As shown in detail in the bar chart at the beginning of this chapter, the correlation for the number of images on the website (the more, the better) is positive for Google rankings. Bing seems to handle this factor somewhat differently, because the correlation is only marginally positive.

This becomes even clearer when looking at the comparison between the average absolute values for both search engines throughout the top 30. The following chart shows the entire data pool for image files, that is, all files on the website with an image tag.

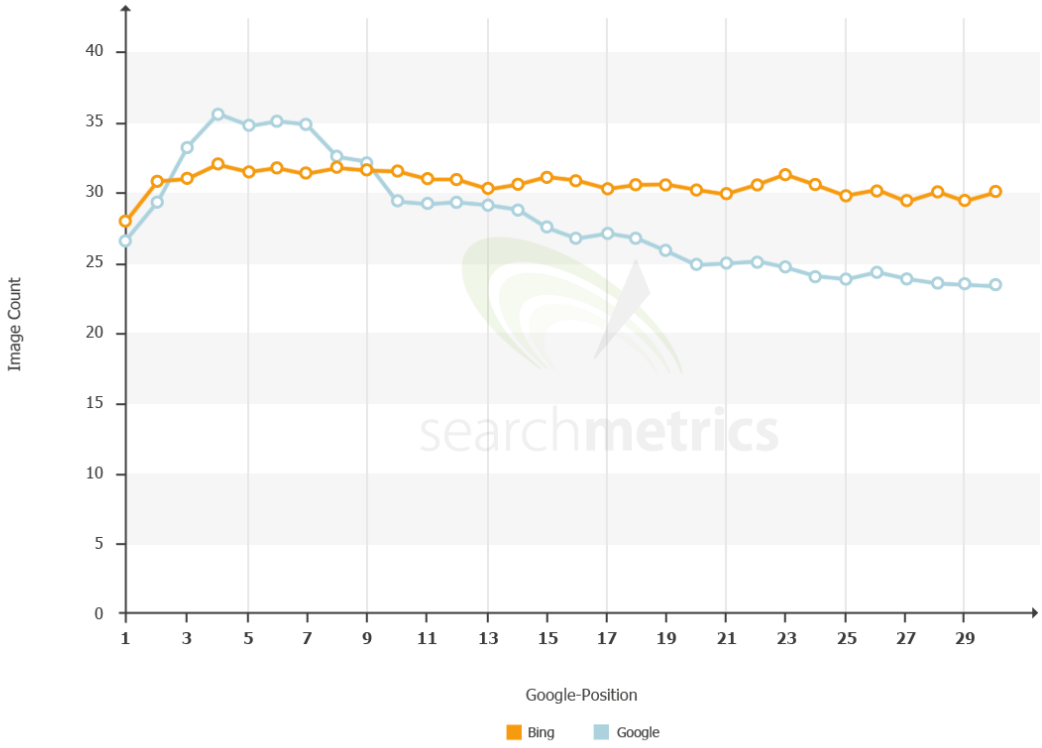

Figure 24: Average by ranking – Image count

Concerning the feature "image count", there is a noticeable difference between Google and Bing.

With respect to Google, it is clear that the higher the number of images on a website, the better the ranking (exception: brand factor). For Bing, in contrast, there seems to be hardly any difference among the top thirty; the graph runs almost straight horizontally. That is why there is only a low correlation concerning this feature for Bing.

It should be noted in this context that this calculation is not limited to images directly embedded in the content. In other words, images in the content as well as image files on the website in general seem to correlate well with a good website ranking.

2.5 Internal links: Moderate differences between number, structure and the text of links among top thirty

The internal link structure of a domain name is believed to be an important driver behind the search engine performance of the domain. Factors such as the "number of links" and "link text" are crucial for the optimal distribution of so-called *link juice.*[4] However, not only does the number of links pointing to the ranked URL seem relevant, but also the link structure on the URL itself.

The number of internal links in the content of the analyzed websites is shown below:

[4] Every link has a value. This value can be optimally distributed according to the principle of inheritance using a good internal link structure according to the hierarchical structure of a domain. The term *link juice* is meant metaphorically here.

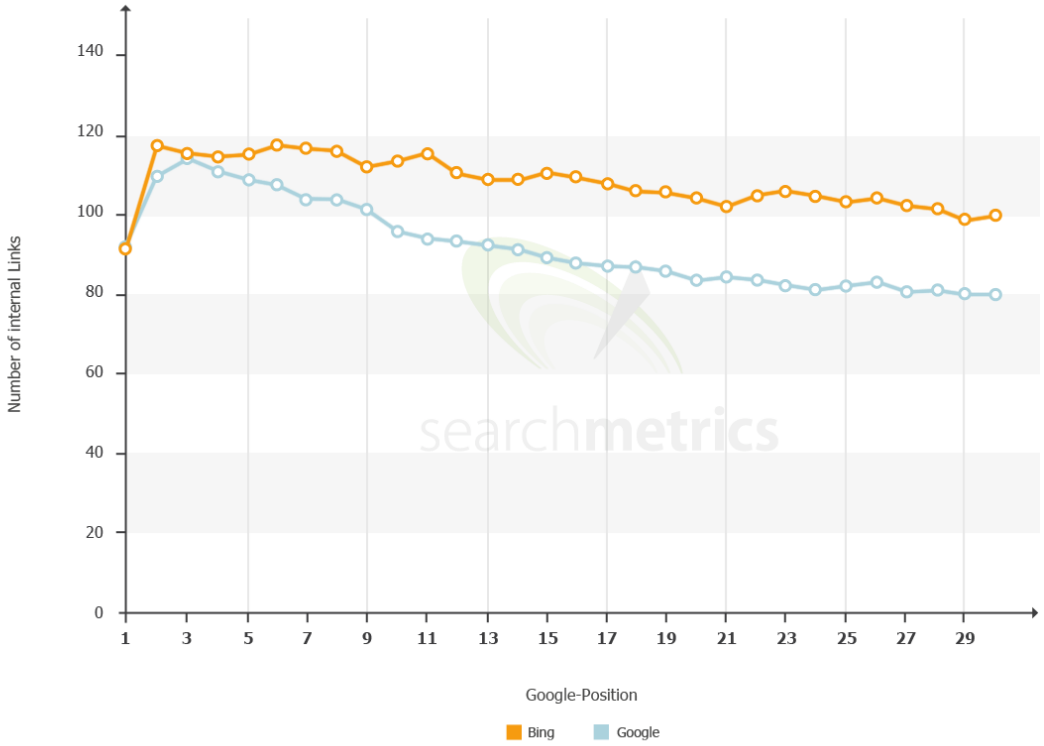

Figure 25: Average by ranking – Number of internal links

The chart clearly shows that the pages in the top search result positions for Google have a comparably greater number of internal links than pages that rank further back. The Bing graph drops much slower; nevertheless, top ranking pages have an average number of 20 internal links more than URLs ranking towards the end of SERP 3. For both search engines, it is noticeable that brand websites ranked at the very top have a lower number of links on average than websites ranked in the next positions.

The average number of links will naturally increase in the case of websites that have strong menu structures as well as internal links in the footer. However, not only the number of internal links but also internally linked keywords as a link text play a role in the optimal distribution of the link juice. The current rule of thumb suggests using "hard" links internally (= with keyword/s) and "soft" links externally (= generic / stop words / more words in the anchor, brand links, etc.).

This leads us to an interesting question: Does a well-ranked website contain internal links to another website for a keyword for which it is ranked? If this were the case, it would imply, that the website that receives the link would have to be more relevant for that keyword than the website from which the link originates. The ranked website would pass on its link juice, so to speak, and presumably lose its ranking sooner or later.

Therefore, it is interesting to examine whether websites that perform well use the opposite principle and use the keyword to link to themselves. The answer to this question could be "yes" with respect to the Google data and the respective study. Again, this is the basis of the analytical approach presented in the following chart comparing the data of the two analyzed search engines:

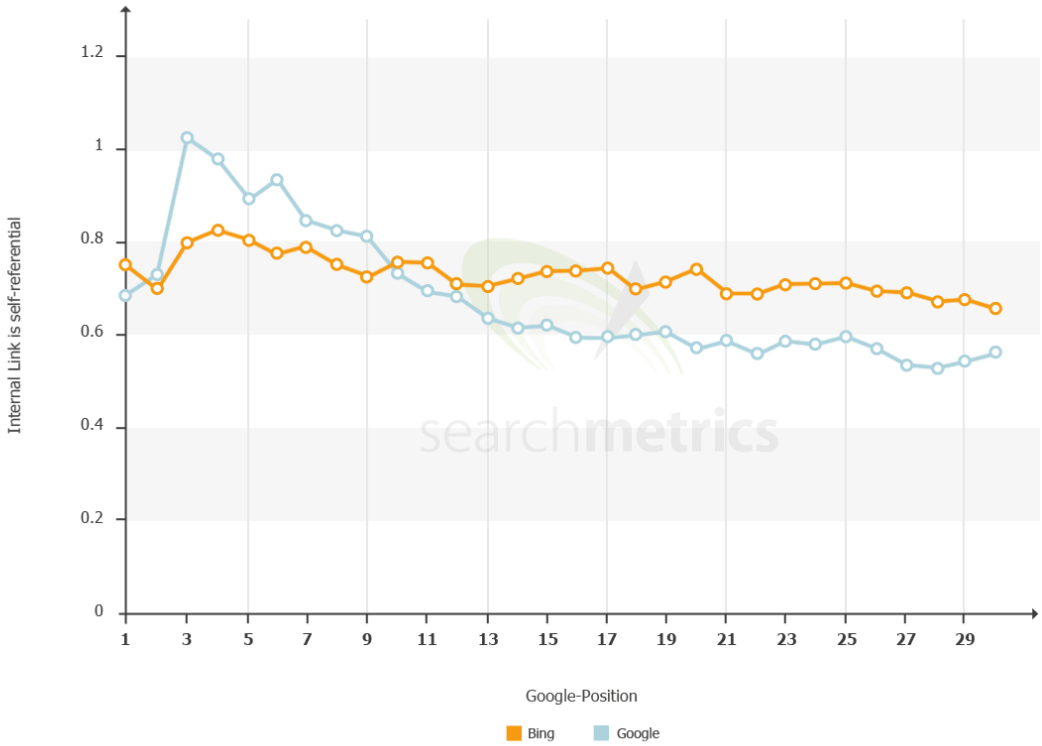

Figure 26: Average by ranking – Number of internal links pointing to the same website

This chart shows the correlation between the average number of self-referenced internal links (= links from page A to page A) on websites, which are plotted on the y-axis, to the respective search engine ranking, which is plotted on the x-axis.

From the pool of websites that have at least one internal link, websites that rank among the top thirty for Bing contain an average of 0.7 self-referenced links. In contrast to Google, where the average top thirty values concerning this feature range from 0.5 to more than 1, Bing values only vary from 0.7 to 0.8, representing only a slightly positive correlation.

This number is naturally influenced by several websites that have more than one self-referenced link, and this is true for both Bing and Google. In the case of some domains and associated URLs, this phenomenon is purely technical. One example of this is on Twitter, where each subpage links back to the profile itself with a tweet in the form of the user's permanently linked address (@profile name).

When examining the specific results, it becomes apparent that the top-ranking websites (including many shopping websites) that refer to themselves using a keyword tend to do this in the site-wide menu or breadcrumb link.

It should be noted that using a keyword for which one website is supposed to be ranked to establish a link to another website should be avoided. In the case of Google rankings, however, many websites that rank in the top positions feature another internal link to themselves using the keyword, mainly on a structurally technical basis. For Bing rankings, in contrast, there is only a small difference within this feature between good and worse rankings.

2.6 URLs ranking on Bing have an average amount of more Ads

The 2013 Google correlations for ad-features were slightly negative, remaining quite close to neutral. Roughly the same is true for Bing rankings, but the correlations for the Microsoft search engine are in fact somewhat more negative.

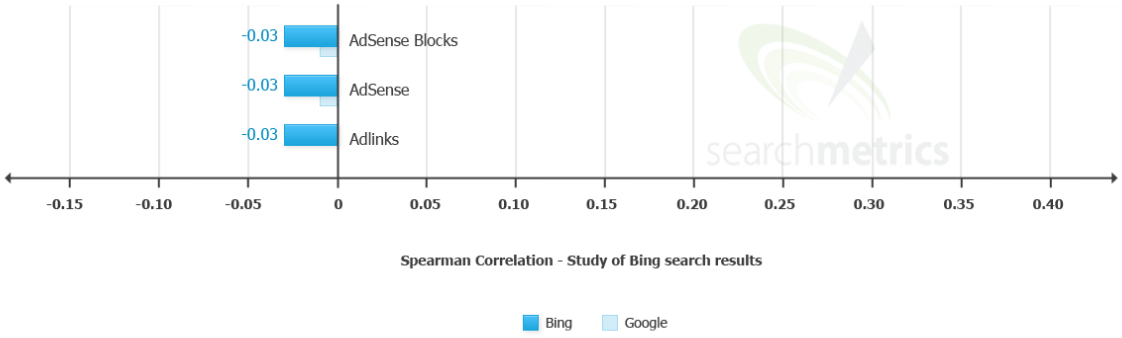

Figure 27: Correlations – Ad integration

This chart shows that there is not much difference concerning the correlations of ad-features between the two search engines. The following charts illustrate the average absolute values, and therefore the correlations, in greater detail.

Legend: The y-axis of the figures (26) and (27) is scaled from 0 to 1, and multiplied by 100 it returns the percentage of websites that rank in a particular position for which the respective factor applies (y-axis caption).

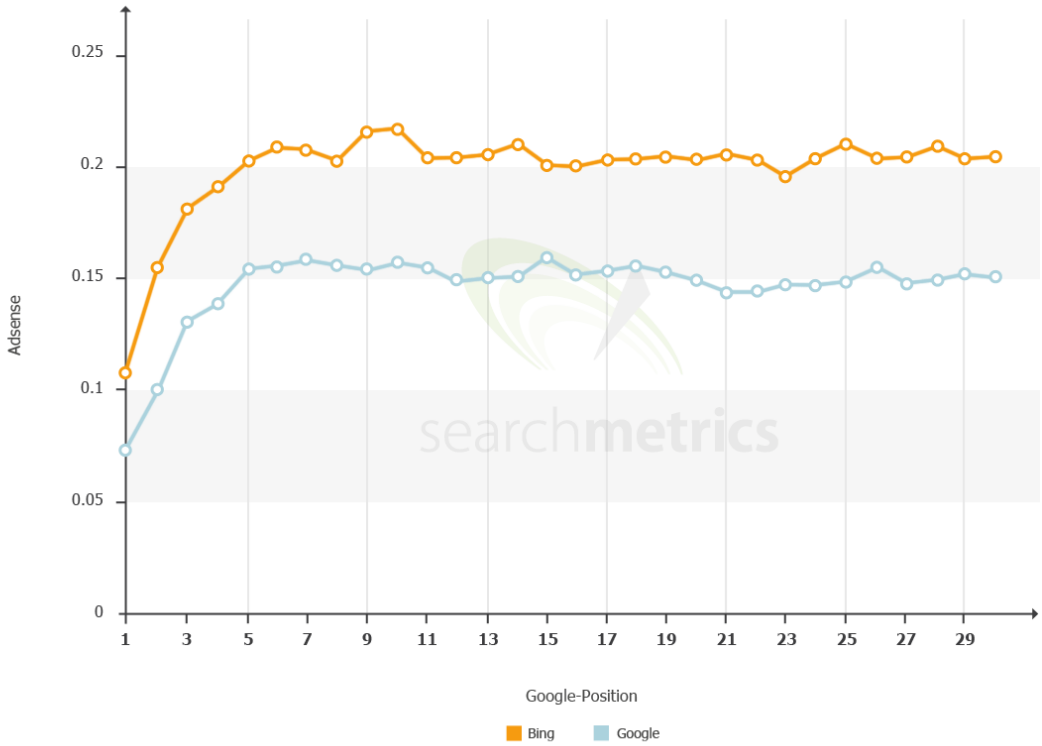

Figure 28: Average by ranking – AdSense

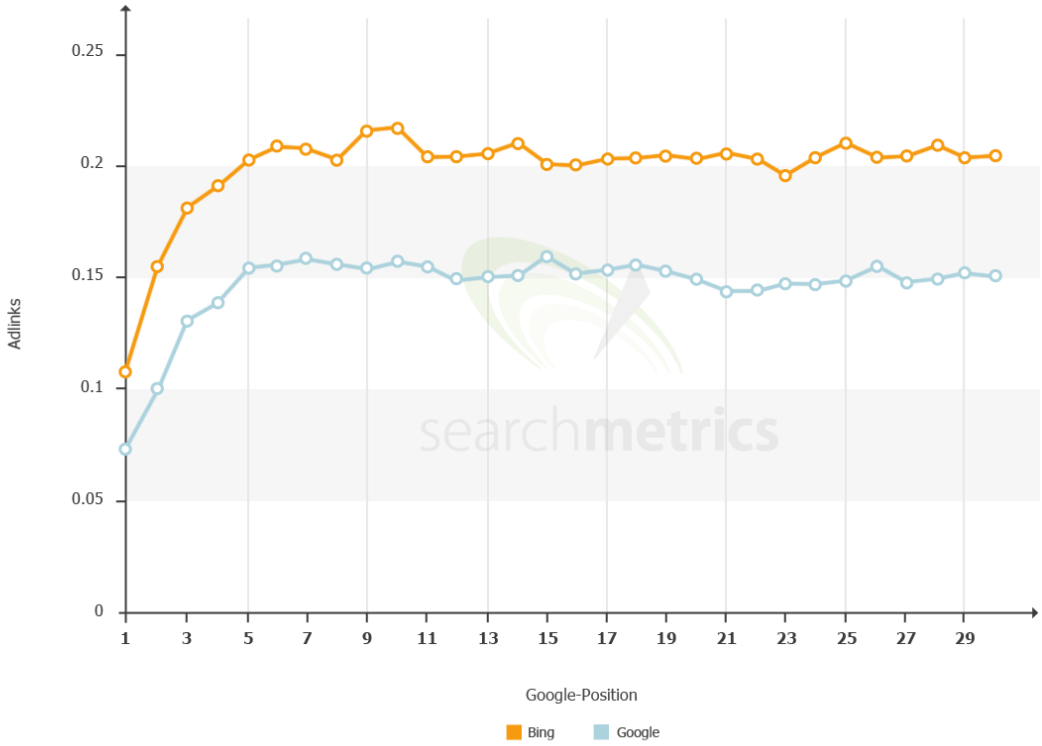

Figure 29: Average by ranking – Adlinks total (including AdSense)

The main message from these two charts is that in terms of search results of both search engines among the top 5 URLs, there are on average fewer pages with at least one ad integration (AdSense or another form of Adlinks) than is the case with URLs ranked in the following places. Lower rankings tend to have more advertising than the top 4.

The most obvious fact regarding the two previous charts – as well as the following one – is that URLs ranking for Bing seem to feature 25% more ads on average than pages ranking on Google.

Incidentally, the results for charts (26)/(27) are not identical. This is due to the fact that the vast majority of websites use AdSense rather than another form of Adlink. In this case, there seems to be absolutely no difference between Google and Bing. Thus, it seems that most of the top 30 websites use advertising integration from Google itself.

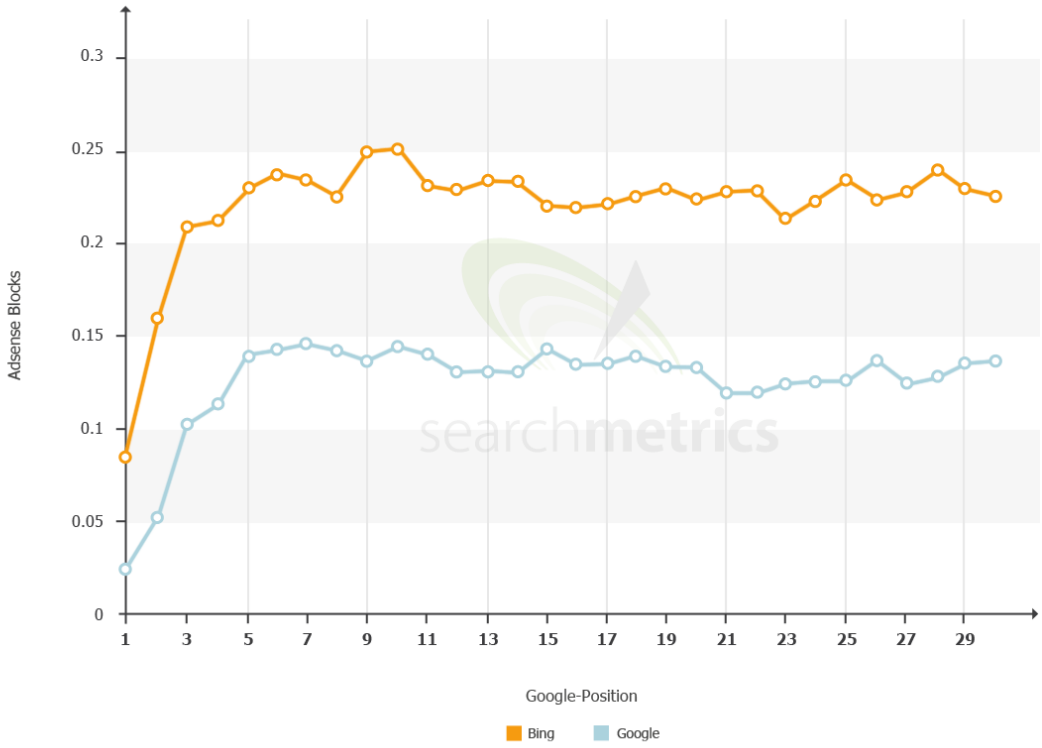

Figure 30: Average by ranking – Number of AdSense ads

Even in relation to the number of AdSense blocks, well-ranked websites are positioned below the rest of the top 30. The top five ranked URLs in terms of search results feature less advertising integration than URLs in the second half of the first SERP. From the second SERP onward, the number of AdSense integrations remain on average unchanged. Again, Bing ranked URLs have about a third more AdSense blocks on average than Google ranked URLs.

2.7 Summary

The Google algorithm seems to be a bit more elaborate than Bing with respect to the evaluation of content quality. On the basis of the majority of the specific correlation graphs, it becomes clear that Google rankings from Rank 1 to 30 are much more different than the specific rankings on Bing, which are generally fairly similar in terms of the occurrence of the respective features.

Nevertheless, content also seems to be very important for Bing. Well-ranked URLs tend to a certain extent to have more text and quite a lot more multimedia content. In fact, URLs ranking on Bing feature more words in the content than URLs ranking on Google. In addition, the moderate involvement of advertising – even outside of AdSense – does not seem to have an especially negative effect on rankings. While keywords in H1 or H2 titles do not seem to be crucial for rankings, they are almost trivial. Well-correlated feature combinations were not identified.

A good internal link structure is also an important quality factor. Unlike Google, there is not a significantly positive effect on Bing when a domain's most relevant URL for a particular keyword uses this keyword once again to create a link to itself. On average, the majority of top-ranking URLs contain 0.7 self-referenced links.

3. BACKLINKS

The quality factors in the area of backlinks are probably the most important SEO metrics on the off-page level. As a market leader, Google's success is not only based on the criterion of "PageRank", but on the metrics that have always been backlink-heavy. Links from other websites are therefore historically among the most important indications of relevance for search engines in general. These take the form of recommendations while taking the main subject of the website into account. Any possibilities of manipulation that existed in the past have been continually minimized by the aforementioned iterative algorithm changes performed by the search engines.

As the Google study revealed, the market leading search engine already did a very elaborate job of evaluating the "holistic" quality of link profiles. Over the course of one year, we have observed a declining proportion of backlinks with keywords on the one hand, and growing proportions of no-follow backlinks as well as backlinks with stopwords. The specific updates recently released by Google – the Penguin Update (including iterations) and the EMD Update – play an important role in these developments.[5]

As a result, the ranking of a website is determined (by now) not only by the number of backlinks, but also by the quality of the backlink structure, which, in turn, is subject to various factors. At least, this is true for Google – but what about Bing?

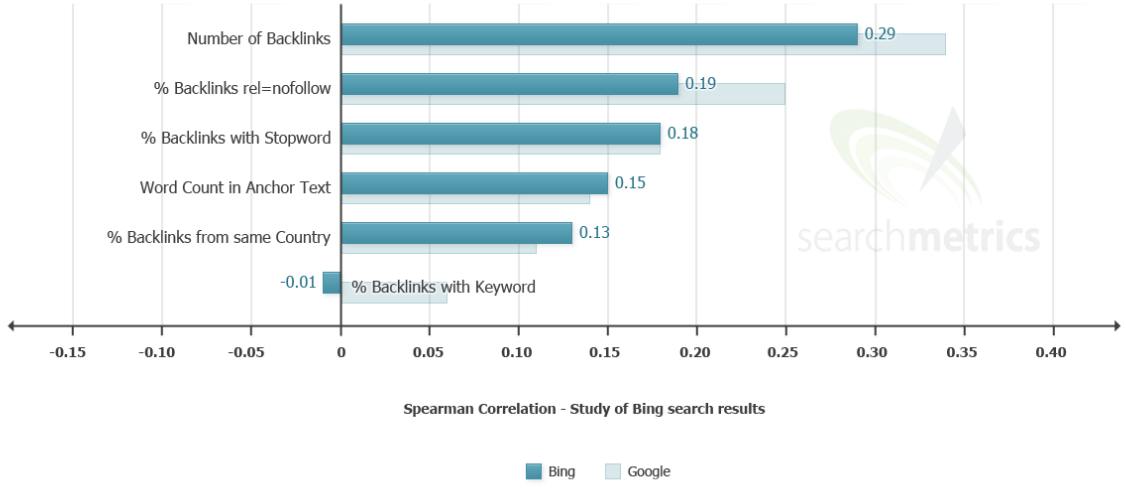

Figure 31: Backlinks – Rank Correlation 2013

5 For more Information see our Searchmetrics Google White Paper 2013

3.1 The number of backlinks is immensely important

The following chart shows in detail the substantial difference between websites ranked in the first place and further in the back:

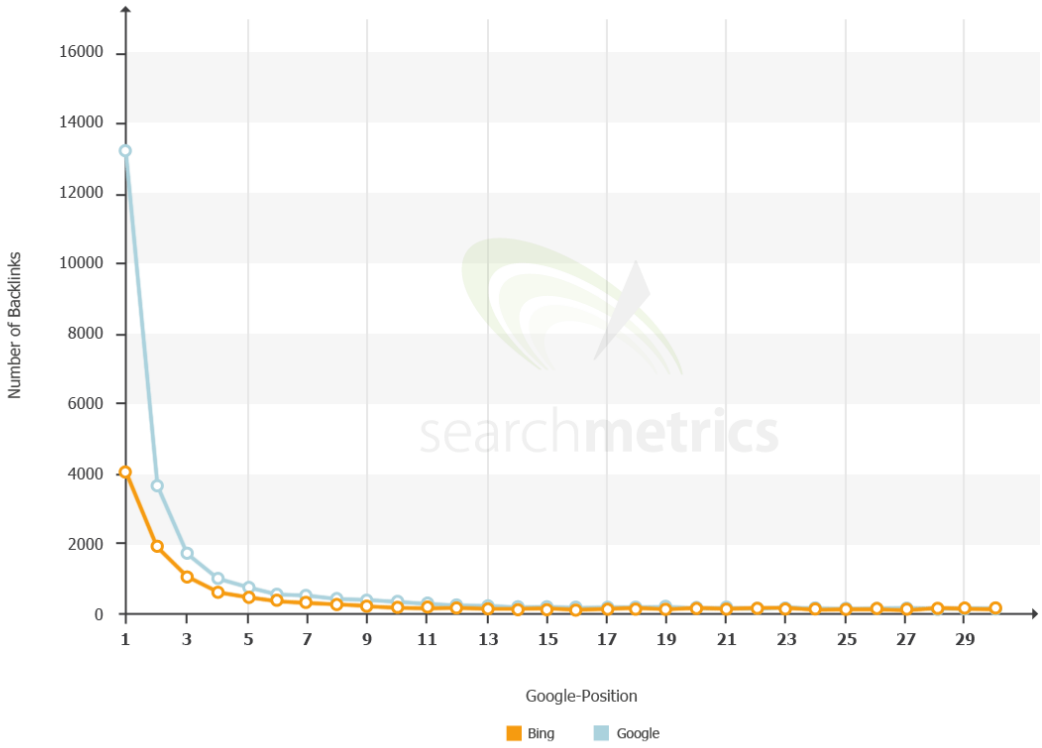

Figure 32: Average by ranking – Number of backlinks

This chart shows the number of links in relation to the ranking of the linked websites. The difference between Google and Bing seems huge, at least concerning rank one, but do note that when it comes to absolute numbers, we have slightly more backlink data for Google than for Bing results. This does not affect the correlations or average values (of most of the following factors); however, regarding the number of backlinks, the difference may in fact not be as substantial as it looks here. Nevertheless, the tendency is right.

While websites ranked 1st on Bing have around 4,216 backlinks on average (Google: 13,358), this figure drops for websites ranked 2nd, to 1,978 backlinks (Google: 3,693). Websites ranked in the 30th position have just under a mere 100 backlinks, on average (Google: 103).

The correlation for this feature is clearly positive and is by far the highest of all when disregarding social factors.

3.2 Link diversity is not as relevant for Bing as it is for Google

The positive trends with respect to link quality factors have been patently obvious regarding the Google Study. With respect to Google rankings, it became clear that a more differentiated link-building strategy is required in order to achieve the goal of optimized rankings.

Now, Bing seems to be at least one step behind with regards to the evaluation of link quality factors. The following charts show the differences between the two search engines.

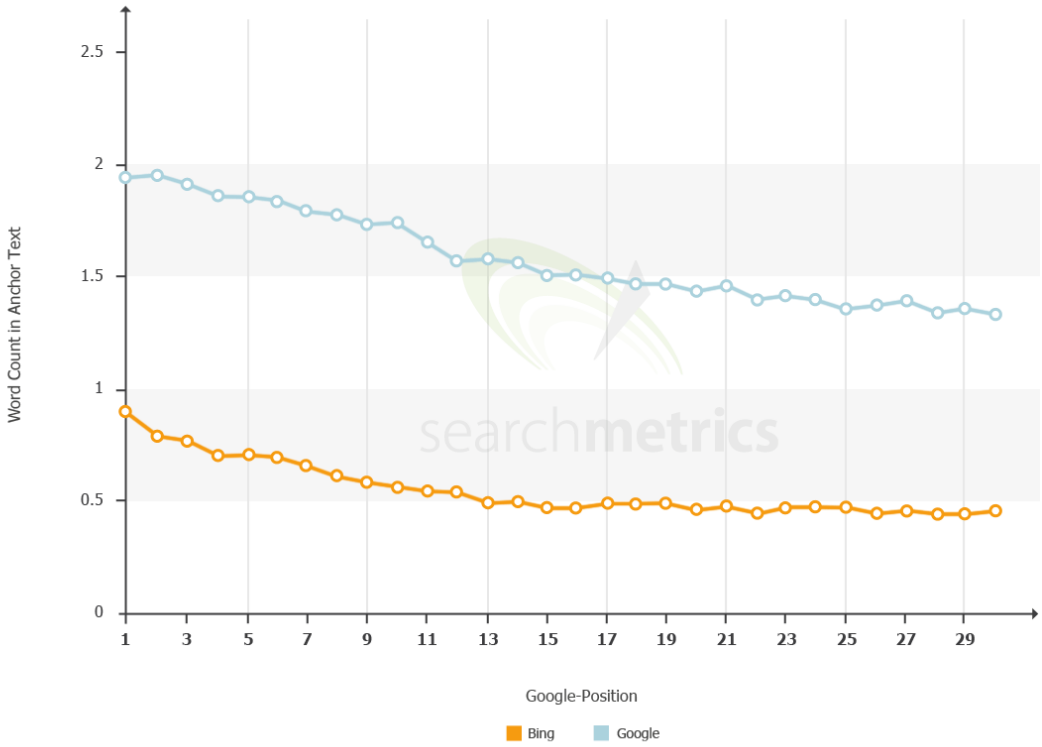

Figure 33: Average by ranking – number of words in anchor text

As we can see (and have already seen in the correlation bar charts), the differences between Bing and Google are in fact not that big when it comes to the value of the respective correlation, but – as we observe here and in the following charts – the averages of the absolute numbers vary significantly.

Nevertheless, the general tendencies are the same: The "soft" factors on the backlink level seem to be of importance in relevance for Bing too. Well-ranked websites not only have a significantly higher proportion of multi-word anchor texts in the backlink profile, but also feature "nofollow" links, which is demonstrated in the following chart (for the y-axis, the proportion in % is obtained by multiplying the result by 100):

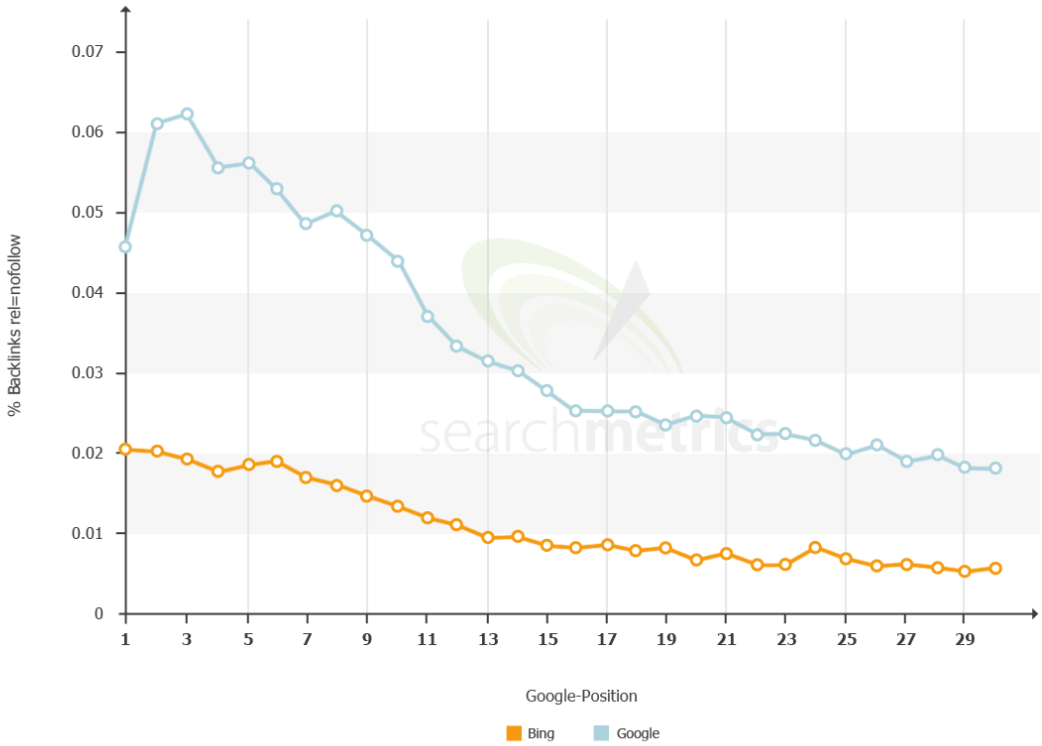

Figure 34: Average by ranking – Percentage of nofollow backlinks

However, it becomes apparent that the trends for Bing throughout the single graphs are not as prominent as the curves for Google. This is especially true for the previous chart, in which we do not even recognize an impact of the brand factor for Bing, which is, in contrast, clearly visible in the Google graph.

For now, pages ranking in the Bing SERPs only feature half as many words in the anchor texts, as well as a considerably lower proportion of nofollow backlinks in comparison to pages displayed in the Google SERPs.

Yet, the relevant correlations with link diversity are clearly pronounced, and the upward trend is expected to become more relevant for Bing as well. In conclusion, this means that the factor "keyword in anchor text" – or "keyword as anchor text" – has lost its relevance. Indeed, a look at the correlation of this factor shows a clear result.

3.3 "Hard" keyword anchor text with near zero correlation

The days of "hard" keyword links appear to be numbered. This conclusion was already reached regarding the Google results, although there has thus far still been quite a positive correlation. The detailed view shows quite clearly that this factor does not have a well-formed correlation for Bing either. In fact, the Bing correlation is near zero, and is actually a low negative one. The shape of the

curve shows that high-ranking URLs do actually feature a lower percentage of keyword links. In fact, pages ranking at position one do have the lowest proportion – which is different from Google, where we observed a certain peak at position one. We consider "brand links" – which are difficult to separate from keyword links because they likewise hold the keyword – to be responsible for this Google peak. This, again, may be a sign that Google is a step ahead in recognizing brands and, moreover, filtering the more valuable "brand links" out of the pool of "keyword links".

However, even in the case of this feature, the graphs are very similar to each other.

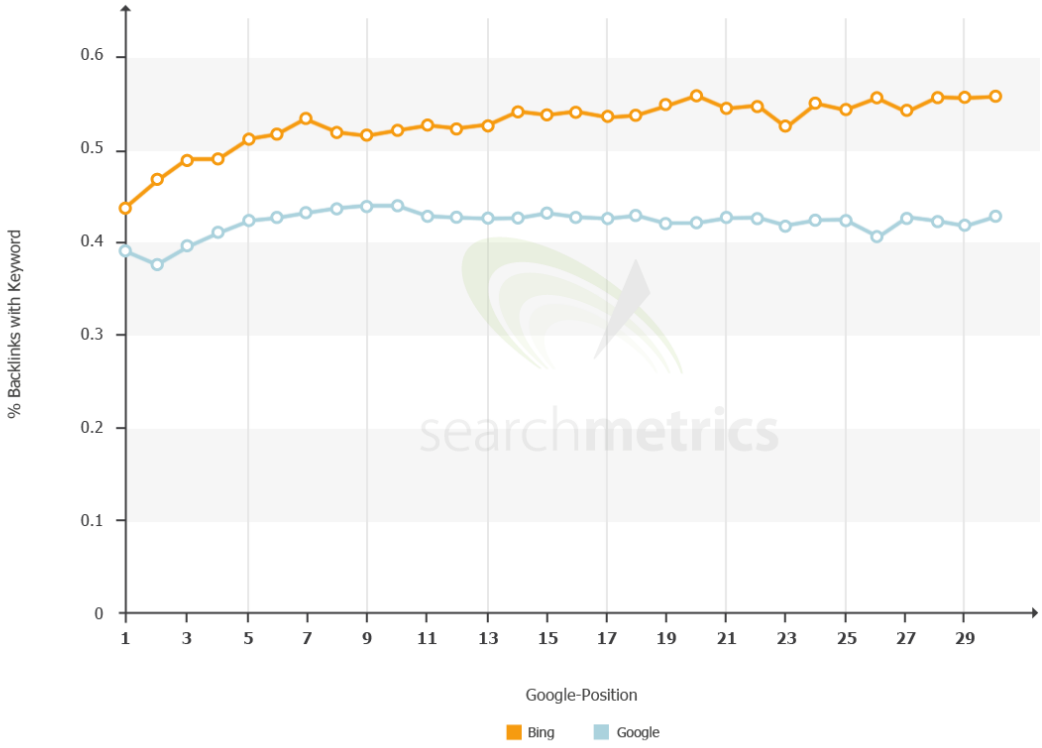

Figure 35: Average by ranking – percentage of backlinks with keyword

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in absolute terms, backlinks with a keyword clearly dominate the backlink portfolio of well-ranked websites (the proportion in % plotted on the y-axis is obtained by multiplying the results by 100). On average, 52-53 percent of backlinks of websites ranked among the Bing top 30 contain keywords in the anchor text (which is about 10% more than Google).

This is not surprising; after all, having keywords in the link text is part of a natural backlink profile, particularly in the form of brand links. Crucial in this context, however, is the distribution of individual link parameters within the backlink profile as well as the trend, which seems to be decreasing for Bing as well.

This is also noticeable with regard to the proportion of backlinks with stop words, which is actually not as high as Google in absolute average terms, nor significant for websites ranked at the top of the search results. Despite this, the curve shows a particularly strong correlation to Google (0.18):

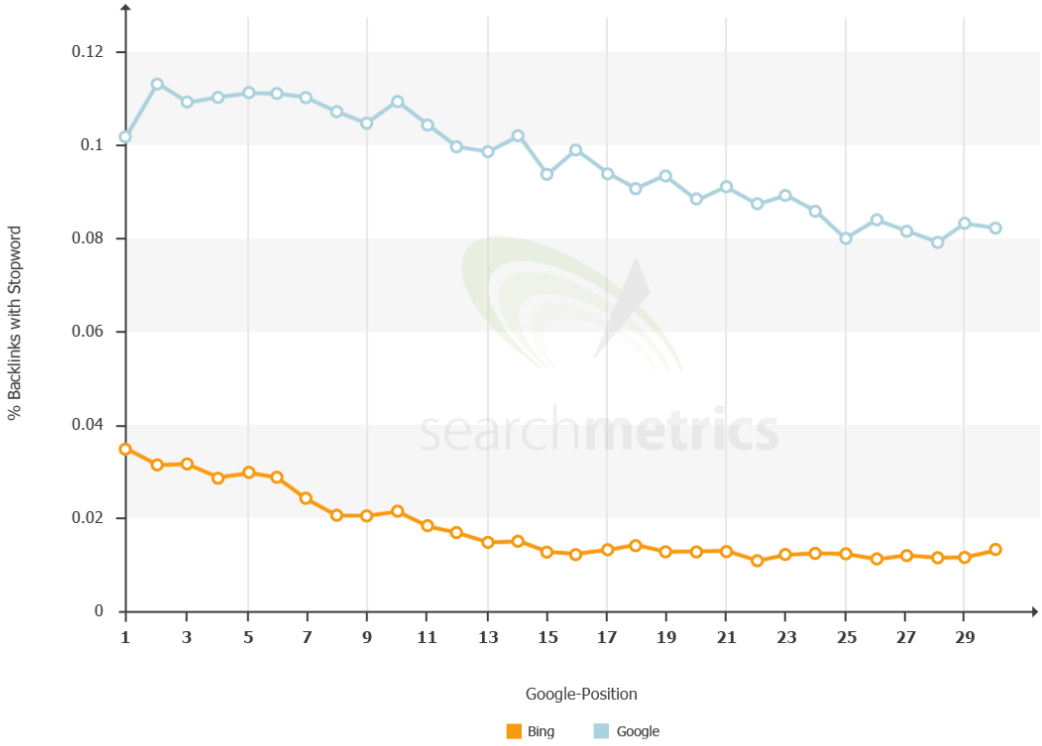

Figure 36: Average by ranking – Percentage of backlinks with stop word

The URLs in the first six places have a higher proportion of links with stop words than websites that rank below them. From the search engine's point of view, it simply seems "unnatural" when individual URLs are always linked with the same keyword or anchor text.

At the very least, it is highly unusual that a large number of different webmasters (authors, etc.) would independently link a website with exactly the same anchor text. In any case, quality search engines tend to suspect manipulation – and probably quite justifiably so – in the case of link profiles, where the proportion of hard keyword links exceeds a certain tolerance level.

For this reason, Google has already started decreasing the impact of this factor. Bing, for its part, is on track to follow this development. The correlations concerning backlink features are already quite similar. Yet, the link profiles of well ranking pages is still significantly dominated by pages with both a higher proportion of keyword links and smaller proportions of nofollow links, as well as links with more words, specifically stop words.

Therefore, it is clearly more important to increase the number of links – in particular, brand links, links with stop words and “nofollow” links while at the same time decreasing the number of keyword links.

3.4 Summary

Backlinks continue to be one of the most critical SEO metrics. Over the years, very little has changed to diminish the importance of the factor "number of backlinks". Websites with more links rank higher in search engines. However, the factors related to this metric have evolved over time. As a result, it is no longer only the quantity of backlinks that is crucial, but also, increasingly, their quality.

Bing is on a similar track to Google in terms of discounting several keyword factors. Naturally, a certain proportion, of so called "hard" anchor text or "keyword links" is still considered to be "natural" to a certain extent. However, Bing still seems to have problems distinguishing brand links from keyword links. This is likely why we did not observe the brand factor regarding the backlink features for Bing. Nevertheless, the tendencies concerning the evaluation show a clear direction.

As a result, well-ranked sites feature a more balanced mix of “nofollow” links, multi-word anchor texts, link text with a stop word share and keyword links. The backlink profile is about to become a collection of very complex quality factors. In fact, this may be true for quality search engines in general.

4. SOCIAL SIGNALS

On average, social signals are the domains with the highest correlations. Because this is often misunderstood, we want to reiterate at the very beginning of this chapter that correlation is not synonymous with causation.

Consequently, the following fact concerning the analyses of this study remains completely disconnected from causal aspects: Websites that rank in the top positions on Bing usually have a large number of social signals. In other words, well-ranked URLs have many shares, likes, comments, plus ones and tweets.

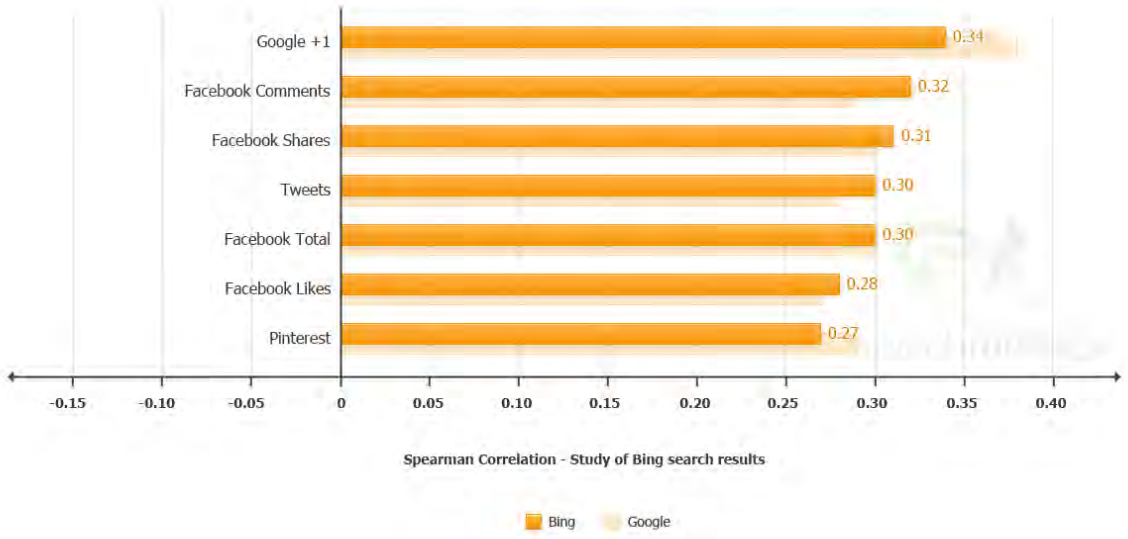

Figure 37: Social signals – Rank Correlation 2013

In addition, the strong correlation among the entire social sector is supported by the fact that the number of social signals seem to drop in line with the ranking of websites in SERPs – the worse the ranking, the lower the number of social signals. This is particularly evident in the detailed charts shown in the following subchapters.

4.1 Social signals show strong(est) correlation with good rankings

The correlation of social metrics with better rankings is impressively high. This is both the case with Google and Bing. Recommendations and related signals from the social chart have a strong correlation with good rankings on Bing.

The detailed charts for individual networks have distinct curve shapes, which are used to calculate the strong correlation.

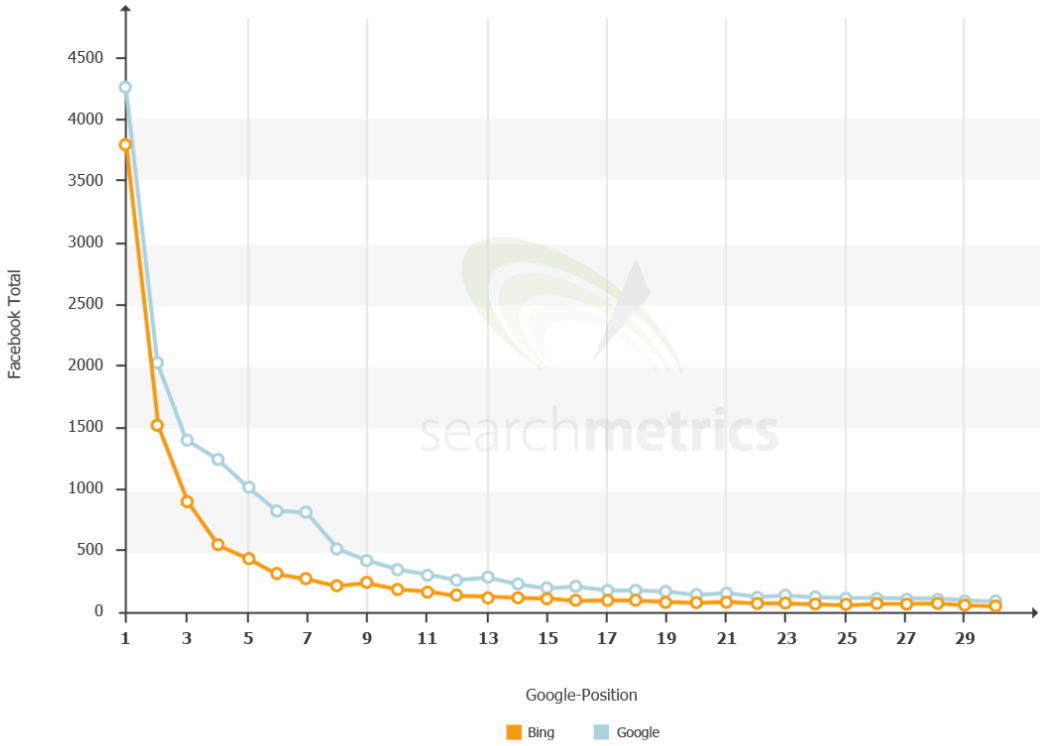

Figure 38: Average by ranking – Facebook signals in total

As an example, we show here a correlation of the summary of all Facebook metrics (shares, likes and comments) for the factor "Facebook total", which has by far the highest average result on the y-axis when compared to the Google rank (x-axis) within the social area.

A piece of background information that perhaps should not go unmentioned is that, since October 13, 2010, there has been a partnership between Facebook and Bing.

"Thus, user reviews from Facebook can be integrated in different ways into the search engine results. This functionality was initially only available to U.S. users, with it later being made available to the German-speaking sphere as well".[6]

In addition, Bing is involved as an extension of the Facebook Graph Search, whereby web searches within the network are redirected to Bing.

Of particular interest is the fact that the Twitter correlation for Bing belongs to the very few features whose value is higher than the respective Google value. The average number of tweets from the Twitter network, which is more of an information aggregator than a social network, is already well below the figures for Facebook's signals in relation to the Bing rank of the relevant URL. Even here, the correlation with rankings is clearly visible.

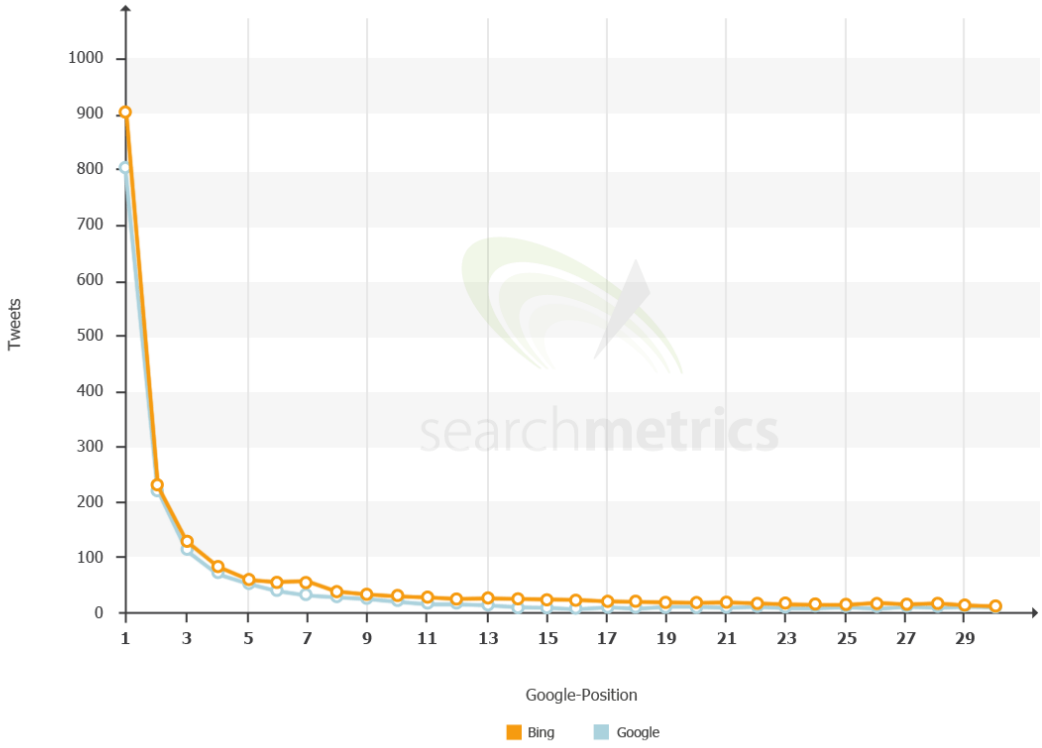

Figure 39: Average by ranking – Twitter signals

In summary, the following can be said about social media factors:

Typical for these curves is the e-function shape, which is characterized by a sharp drop between the ranks 1 to 2 followed by a much shallower slope as the curve slowly approaches the x-axis. This is true both for Bing and for Google

6 Source: Wikipedia

results. URLs that rank at the top of search results have by far the greatest number of social signals across all the analyzed networks.

4.2 Google+ with highest correlation

Clearly of particular interest for Bing in the analysis of Ranking Factors is the correlation of signals from the company's competitor Google+ social network, which has seen an enormous growth in users and activity over the past few months.

In the US, Google+ signals are now, on average, just behind tweets in absolute terms.

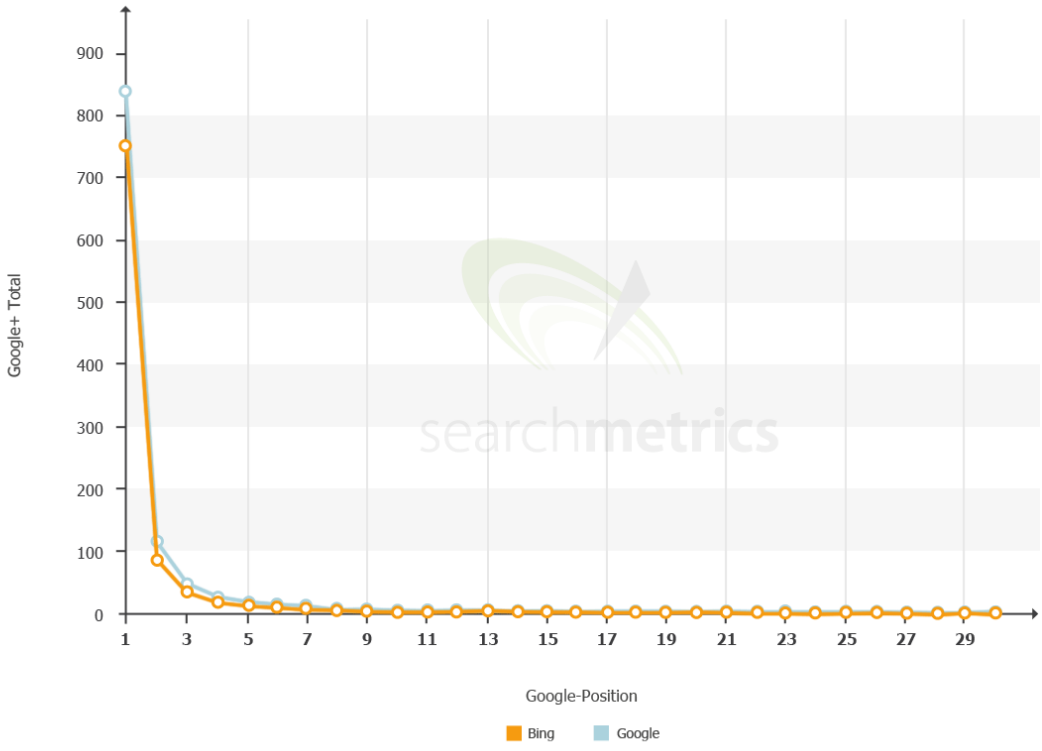

Figure 40: Average by ranking – Google+ signals

Even on a qualitative level, Google+ signals seem to correlate well with top search result rankings. In 2013, plus ones show the highest correlation to good rankings. This is due to the fact that URLs ranked at position one show an extraordinarily high level of Google+ signals on average compared to the pages on the following positions.

4.5 Summary

Of all the factors, social signals are the strongest in terms of having a correlation to better rankings. The short- to medium-term outlook is clearly positive. These positive results are spreading from Facebook, Google+, Twitter and Pinterest to all networks.

Nevertheless, the question remains to what extend do social signals directly affect rankings. As already mentioned, the analyses to date have mainly documented the fact that better ranking URLs have a greater number of social signals than those with a worse ranking. Nevertheless, there seems to be a difference between Bing and Google concerning causation – at least when it comes to the results of recent Searchmetrics test scenarios, which will be briefly mentioned in the overall summary.

5. THE BRAND FACTOR

A phenomenon that pervades the entire study, has had a strong impact on the results in nearly all correlations and detailed charts, and has already played a decisive role in the Google study is the brand factor.

Brands rank in the top positions even if they do not meet certain criteria, or do not meet them to a sufficient extent. We can thus conclude that from a search engine's perspective, brands have a special role and are strongly preferred by being ranked first in SERPs.

Even so, there seems to be a difference in the ability to identify brands between Google and Bing. At least the occurrence of the brand factor is somehow distinctive, and becomes clear when looking at the shape of the graphs of some analyzed factors in detail.

5.1 High impact of the brand factor on SERPs

To illustrate the "brand factor" phenomenon we again provide several meaningful example charts, which highlight any distinctive areas in the shape of the curve with respect to the top search result rankings.

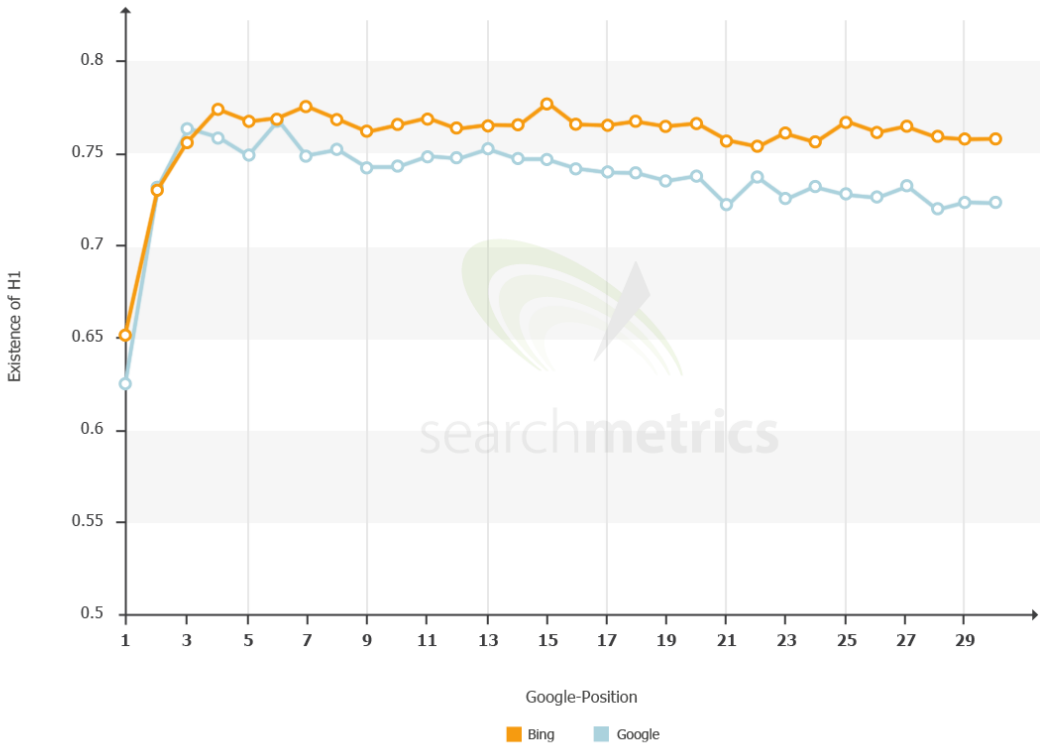

Figure 41: Average by ranking – H1 title tag

The special position of brands is particularly noticeable in on-page coding. It follows from chart (39) that it is much rarer for brand websites to have a H1 title than is the case for all other websites in the top 30. The graphs for Google and Bing are very similar in terms of this feature.

Chart (40) shows that it is quite rare for brands to fulfill the factor "keyword in description."

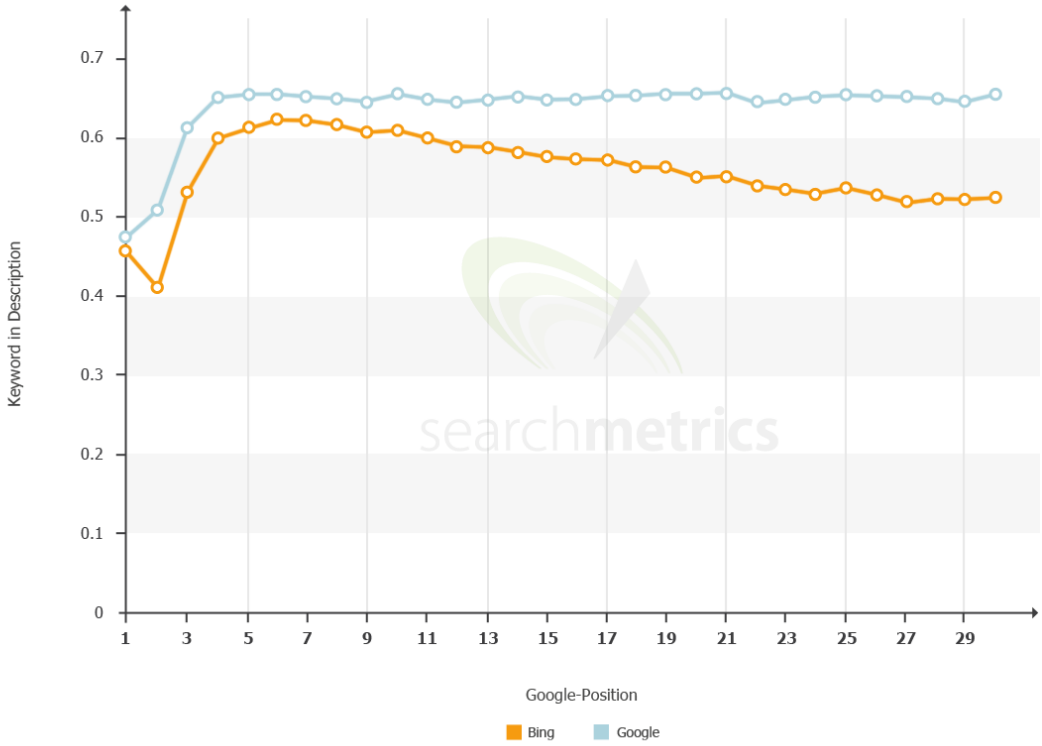

Figure 42: Average by ranking – Keyword in the description

On average, about 64 percent of webpages out of the top 30 do have a keyword in the description. Only for the top 3 ranking pages is the average significantly lower. This is, again, true for both analyzed search engines, although the graphs do show some difference in shape in this case.

5.2 Not only brands rank in the top positions

While the requirements placed on non-brands to be ranked on the first SERP are consequently very high, the top search result positions for certain search queries appear to be reserved for brands per se, without the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of certain Ranking Factors being of any relevance.

This failure to implement some important factors, which for non-brands is a basic precondition to be ranked at all, concerns mainly the on-page area; for example,

brand websites use keywords in the title or description much less frequently, offer less content on average and have a lower number of internal links.

On the positive side, brand websites usually feature a better than average backlink profile. Link sources with high SEO Visibility tend to establish links to brands more frequently. In addition, brands receive significantly more social signals. Consequently, factors from the off-page area seem to have to a considerable impact on the special role of brands.

When comparing Bing to Google in terms of the specific graphs of certain features, it becomes clear that both search engines seem to handle the brand factor differently. The Google graphs are much sharper and clearer. The brand factor seems only to affect the very first position, whereas in the case of Bing, the first four to six positions often show some kind of influence that seems to be caused by the brand factor. The graphs are often softer, the positive/negative peaks are not that strong and, finally, the differences across the top 30 concerning the occurrence of the respective features are smaller.

Given the comparison of the data from both search engines, one could summarize that Google, on the one hand, seems to have developed a more effective algorithm that is able to identify brands and separate them from non-brands. Bing, on the other hand, seems to be on the right track to follow Google in this capacity, but they seem to be a few steps behind.

6. Summary of Searchmetrics SEO Ranking Factors - Rank Correlation 2013 for Bing US

To conclude this study, we provide an overview of all rank correlation coefficients, as well as a comparison with the respective Google values. The factors providing the Google parameters of 2013 are in lighter colors in the background.

It should be be mentioned that social signals correlate well with better rankings and content quality; in addition, the number and diversity of backlinks also seem to have a huge impact on search result rankings.

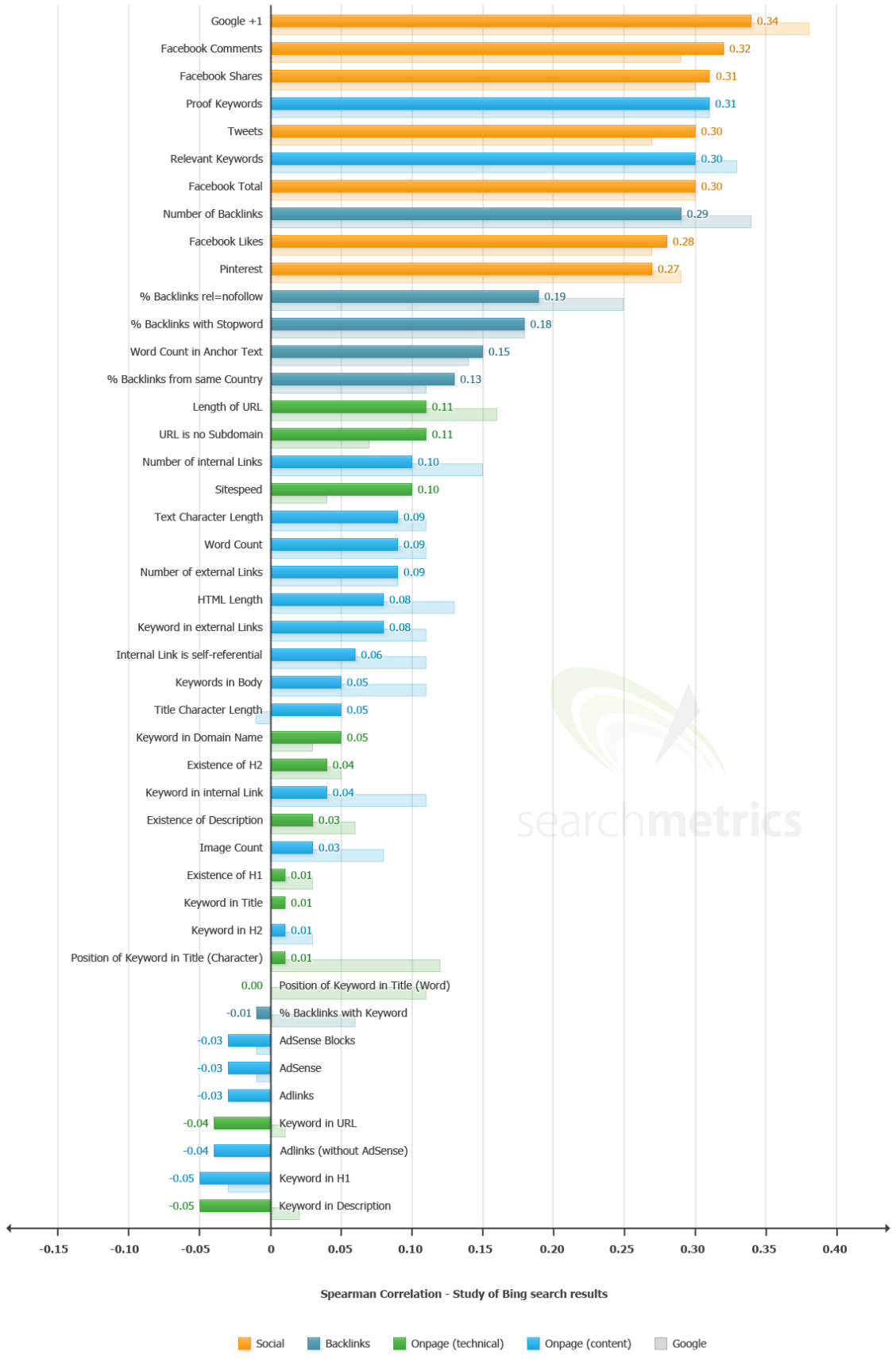

Figure 43: US Bing SEO Ranking Factors – Rank Correlation 2013 – vs US Google

Summary of most important developments in Ranking Factors - Rank Correlation 2013:

With regards to the basics, Bing seems to have an algorithm that is probably constructed quite similarly to the Google algorithm, which is not surprising. But when it comes to specific details, the shape of single correlations and the ways certain factors are evaluated, there are – of course – differences.

Concerning Bing's technical on-page factors, both the values of the correlations and the specific graphs representing the averages of the absolute numbers are very similar to Google results. The only exceptions are the factors relating to the position of the keyword in the title, which are nearly zero for Bing and positive for Google. As a whole, technical on-page factors also play a decisive role concerning Bing rankings and the majority of the factors seem to be trivial – irrespective of the respective correlation – because most of the crawled pages ranking on the Bing top 30 did in fact feature the respective factor.

When it comes to on-page content factors, the situation is similar. The specific graphs do not look very distinct from Google in their shape, but they represent a slightly higher absolute number. Furthermore, the graphs are a bit "softer", which results in slightly lower correlations. This means that the differences between the Bing top 30 concerning the content features are lower than the respective values for Google.

Furthermore, Bing – in contrast to Google – (still) seems to rank pages with a rather "monotonous" link profile (thus far). The number of backlinks seems to be the most relevant metric, whereas the majority of the other backlink features – like nofollow links or the presence of stopwords in the anchor text – seem to occur only in rare cases.

Bing's social correlations are very similar to Google's; in fact, Bing-values are slightly lower. However, to digress slightly, unlike Google, Bing features no demonstrable link between social signal and indexing/ranking. With respect to Google, small Searchmetrics test scenarios have shown that social signals – especially plus ones – result in faster indexing and comparatively better ranking results. This was not the case for Bing.

Last but not least, Bing seems (as of now) to have some difficulties in separating brands from non-brands. The occurrence of some factors is in some cases much broader at the top of the SERPs as is the case with Google. Furthermore, there are still some EMDs left in Bing results, which do not appear in Google results anymore in favor of the specific brands.

In a nutshell, the Bing algorithm is very similar to the Google algorithm when it comes to general trends of structuring the SERPs with respect to the relevance of websites and their content. Nevertheless, there is some work left to do for Bing to achieve the high level that Google already has.

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The company has offices in Berlin, London, Paris and New York and sells its SaaS solution through a network of partners and its online store. The fast-growing Berlin-based company, in which the Holtzbrinck publishing group and well-known venture capitalists Neuhaus Partners and Iris Capital hold an interest, currently has over 100 employees and an ever-growing customer base. T-Online, eBay, Siemens, TUI and Kaspersky are some of the well-known customers who already rely on Searchmetrics to achieve excellent search engine rankings and to implement optimal strategies for the digital world.

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