

## Unified Theory of Google

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If someone were to ask you to name the core business of General Motors, chances are you would naturally respond, "automobile manufacturing". If that were your answer, you would be invited to join the 99% who also answered incorrectly. The correct answer is automobile purchase financing through General Motors Approved Credit, (GMAC). In reality, GM makes most of its money from interest payments it earns helping consumers purchase the vehicles it builds.

Similarly, if someone were to ask what Google's core business is, the vast majority of respondents would answer, "search engine", smiling the giddy grins of those who know they are right. I've tried this one on my friends, most of which are already used to the torrent of trick questions that seem to stream from my tongue. Though most of them have heard me lecture about Google in public and private, most still get the answer wrong. Google's primary business is advertising, as it makes the bulk of its billion-dollar quarters from advertising revenues.

Along with its competitors, Google has been undergoing a remarkable series of changes over the past six months as it adds new features, acquires new technologies and expands its operations. It is no longer a pure search engine company though its search engine is the most popular around the world. Google acknowledged the shift early last summer when CEO Eric Schmidt famously defined Google as a media company.

That is an important distinction moving forward towards global domination. Google is a very big business, one that is growing faster and far more powerful than any other business before it. In seven short years, Google has grown from a university dorm room to universal dominance. After nearly five years of being at the top, being in second place is not on the agenda. That puts Google in the interesting position of being among the most watched firms on the planet. Search Engine Optimizers pay attention to all major search engines but we obsess about Google.

Recently, the StepForth research team took a long, hard look at Google and made some well-educated assumptions about what we saw. Our findings, though absolutely unscientific have been labeled the Unified Theory of Google, an expansion on the European Football inspired name [Google United](#).

### The Unified Theory of Google

Five years ago Google had the basics covered, producing the most accessible information resource ever built. Google spent those five years growing rapidly to include as many forms of spiderable media in its index as possible. In that time it has been remarkably successful, having collected more information from a greater variety of sources than any other repository ever has. It also enjoys the highest usage numbers, attracting more visitors in an hour than Disneyland does in a year.

Today, Google is a collection of several Internet technologies, many of which work together to improve the experience of each end-user and/or Google's bottom-line. For example, satellite maps generated by Google Earth have been incorporated into maps generated for users of Google Local search. Similarly,

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paid-search ads placed through Google AdWords augment organic search results and are also displayed to users of Gmail, Google Groups, Google Local, Froogle, and other branded search appliances.

Google has a number of branded search appliances. Known for its general search engine, Google also has News Search, Image Search, Comparison Shopping Search (Froogle), Local Search, Desktop Search, Blog Search, Google Answers, Video Search, Google Groups, and Email search features through Gmail, (to name but a few). Enabling and supporting the [interoperability](#) of its various components has been an important mission for Google engineers. Google appears to be trying to unify itself.

For search engine marketers, a unified Google offers a wide array of information resources to work with in planning and executing strategic initiatives. From a search engine optimization perspective, the Unified Theory of Google starts and ends with the search engine results pages (SERPs).

The SERP is the primary environment where the work of search marketers makes a difference. An in-depth understanding of how those results are generated is the product search marketers sell. Getting a client's URL on the first page of Google results for related keyword queries is the primary goal of all SEMs.

On a typical SERP served by Google there are five unique elements. Starting from the top of the page, users see a coloured box containing the top 2 or 3 AdWords, News results drawn from Google News, Desktop Search results drawn from the computer the search is conducted on, and ten organic results. Running down the right hand side of the screen, under the heading Sponsored Links, are the rest of the paid ads generated by AdWords.

Google has traditionally kept paid advertising separate from organic search results, at least when it comes to calculating placements in each format. Since the advent of AdWords, there has been a fear in the SEO community that Google would give special consideration to paying advertisers. As far as we can tell, Google does not grant organic privileges to paid advertisers.

It does however offer special services to another group of non-paying users, its growing membership. Membership has its privileges in an inter-exploitative sort of way. This was one of the reasons we changed our in-office reference from Google United to Unified Google.

In the early autumn of 2004, Google purchased a well-known web analytics firm called Urchin. In November 2005, Google opened Urchin to its membership, rebranding it Google Analytics. The server-side software package was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm by webmasters, causing a continuing series of problems for Google engineers. They appear to have most of the preliminary bugs worked out now but are still limiting new sign-ups to a waiting list of those who registered in November.

Google Analytics is designed, primarily, to support and promote AdWords advertising. Offering webmasters and search marketers over 70 unique stats that track visitors through the URL, the analytics package gives a clear view of how the public views a particular website. There are several tools included that help webmasters or SEMs improve the conversion rates of documents, along with revenue based goal setting and tracking features.

At Google's end of things, information from Google Analytics is used to inform both Googlebot and Google's AdWords algorithm. While most of the data acquired by Google is not site specific, the info that does relate to unique documents is assumed to be recorded in the historic profile Google accumulates about every document in its index.

An important note, a Google Membership account is required to access Google Analytics. For savvy search marketers, use of Google Analytics, along with other Google branded search features can be highly beneficial to client rankings. In our research, we have been using Google Analytics to track visitors to the StepForth domain. While we do not currently run paid-advertising on any of our sites, we have learned a lot from the experience and are reworking our website accordingly.

Getting clients signed up for Google Analytics will be a priority for us as soon as Google reopens the program to the general public. In the meantime, there are a number of other steps we believe our clients (and other SEOs) should consider when thinking about Google's organic rankings.

No honest SEO is 100% certain about anything in regards to Google, however, following the Jagger algorithm update, we are confidently certain Google has incorporated several of the concepts covered in their March 2005 patent application, "Information retrieval based on historical data". ([click here](#) to read our examination of the patent)

This knowledge has forced us to take a look at other ways to promote our clients' websites through Google's vast system. Working on the assumption that Google considers itself a trusted authority, we have started posting or providing information to as many Google branded search appliances as possible. (Note to all SEOs, follow the rules Google posts in each instance and avoid spamming. Don't blow the environment, its too cool to lose to petty abuse.)

One of the simplest ways to provide information to Google is through the use of an xml sitemap. We continue to subscribe to the SEO School of Spider Control, believing that the more we can drive spiders through our clients' offerings, the better those clients will rank. The trick is, it is not the number of times our clients get spidered, it comes down to how and where they get spidered. For us, that first line comes in the use of the simple sitemap.

Next, SEOs need to convince their clients to pump product or service information into Google Base. Earlier this week, folks at the [SERoundTable](#) noticed data from Google Base leaking into the general Google SERPs. We are assuming that including clients in Google Base is going to become increasingly important as Google tests a clustering engine that will produce results drawn from its various search appliances to present them in an info-tree format.

Lastly, SEOs need to pay attention to the past as well as the present when planning future website promotions. As Google acquires more information about the histories of documents in its index, and compares those histories against sites linked together, a continuing cascade will show itself in the SERPs. We believe that Google is entering a period where it favours its membership though we are not convinced this was an intended consequence. We are however, convinced that signing our clients up for Google memberships, primarily through Google Analytics and Google Base will be beneficial in the long run as Google works to draw results from its multiple databases.

The Unified Theory of Google, (and it is only a theory), suggests to us that as Google grows into itself, it will subtly favour information found within its own databases. We believe this provides a series of indispensable tools along with a basic outline for client campaigns that uses the strengths of Google to propel client sites to the top of the general SERPs. Which is why they came to us in the first place.