

# Influence of Generic Domain Names on Google, Yahoo and Bing Search Rankings

## Executive Summary

125 generic .co.uk domain names (housing active sites) were randomly selected, and an analysis was conducted to determine the position of each site within the first 2 pages (20 results) for a search on the keyword or keyphrase contained within its domain name. For example, SpecialEffects.co.uk and the 'special effects' keyphrase.

Rankings outside the top 20 were disregarded for the purpose of this study. This analysis was conducted on Google UK, Yahoo UK and Bing UK, both in default search mode, and after selecting the "results from the UK" modifier offered by each search engine.

Two metrics were examined: the presence (yes/no) of the site within the first 20 results, and the specific position at which the site was displayed within those first 20 results.

Yahoo UK (default mode) and Google (default mode) both saw similar numbers of domains ranking within the first 20 results, at 56% and 57% respectively. In other words, over half of all the sites in the study ranked within the top 20 results on Yahoo UK and/or Google UK for a search on the keywords making up their domain name, and this was the lowest overall result. For Bing UK (default mode), 62% of domains ranked within the top 20 results.

It's worth noting that all 3 search engines gave a "boost" to the domains in the study when the "UK results" mode was selected. This increase in ranking probability averaged 4% to 5%, depending on the search engine. For Bing UK in UK mode, two thirds of the sites in the study ranked within the top 20 results.

While it's impossible to calculate the exact contribution of the domain name to the overall ranking probability, it would seem evident from the above that it is an important factor.

It's clear that the domain name is even more relevant in determining the position of a particular site within the overall search results. This is a straight like-for-like comparison since Google, Yahoo and Bing are all attempting to rank exactly the same sites. On all 3 search engines, ranked sites fell on average within the top 7 results, and the domain name clearly played the most important role in the case of Bing, with ranked sites ending up inside the top 3 results.

Since all other on-page and off-page factors are nominally going to be the same for each search engine, it's possible to attribute at least a significant part of the ranking differential between the 3 search engines to the influence of the domain name and the keywords it contains.

Google gives sites the least boost from their domain name, with Yahoo being slightly more generous. Bing, on the other hand, appears to place a huge degree of importance on the domain name, with sites being both more likely to rank, and more likely to rank well, on Bing than on either of the other search engines.

It would seem evident that the domain name is a significant factor in achieving a top 20 ranking on all 3 major search engines, with Bing being the most influenced by the domain name and Google the least.

# Introduction

The process by which the search engines rank websites is a black box, since the precise criteria they use to rank sites for a given search query is a tightly guarded trade secret. Nevertheless, it's possible to construct tests that allow for a peek at the inputs and outputs of this "black box" and to infer some of its internal workings.

One such test is to examine the rankings of a statistically significant number of randomly selected sites, each of which is hosted on a descriptive generic domain name.

It has long been inferred within the webmaster community that the presence of keywords within the domain name is a "ranking factor" affecting the position of that site within the search results, and that is the scenario this test was designed to examine.

## The Scenario

For this study, we used 125 randomly selected domain names drawn from the 200 domain names first introduced in the *100 Smart Companies that Understand the Concept of Generic Domain Names* and *100 More Smart Companies that Understand the Concept of Generic Domain Names* articles published on the MemorableDomains.co.uk site. Those 200 names were initially selected by typing a wide range of generic keyphrases directly into the browser address bar and checking the resultant site, without recourse to a search engine.

This initial list of 200 domain name/site candidates was whittled down to the final 125 by eliminating any that used 301, 302, META redirects or other forms of redirection to transfer visitors from the initial landing page to a different page. The presence of such redirection would significantly impair the likelihood that the site in question would rank under its original domain name. The remaining 125 sites used in this study all had "regular" landing pages with content related to the keywords in the domain name.

Each domain name was examined on 6 search engine configurations: Google UK in default mode, Yahoo UK in default mode and Bing UK in default mode, and all 3 search engines in their "UK specific results" modes. All personalisation features were turned off in each search engine to give the "cleanest" possible results.

## Results

Two data points were collected for each domain name/search engine pairing:

- Did the site appear within the first 20 results for a search on the exact keyphrase making up its domain name?
- If the site was present in the first 20 results, at what position did it appear?

These data points are summarised in the following table:

	Google UK (default)	Google UK (UK results)	Yahoo UK (default)	Yahoo UK (UK results)	Bing UK (default)	Bing UK (UK results)
% of domains ranked within top 20 results	57%	62%	56%	60%	62%	66%
Average position for ranked domains	6.56	5.60	5.73	5.37	2.81	2.71

As the above shows, the sites ranked within the first 20 search results anywhere from 56% to 66% of the time, depending on the search engine, with sites being least likely to rank on Yahoo UK (default mode) and most likely to rank on Bing UK (UK results mode).

At the same time, if a site ranked at all it tended to rank well. The influence of the domain name seemed weakest for Google UK, with sites ranking at an average position of 6.56 (default mode) and 5.60 (UK results mode) respectively. At the other end of the spectrum, Bing gave a remarkable boost to sites with an exact-match domain name, with ranked sites appearing at an average position of 2.81 (default mode) and 2.71 (UK results mode) respectively.

## Conclusions and Discussion

These results lead us to draw several conclusions about the SEO value of a generic domain name.

A generic domain name clearly has an influence over both the likelihood of a good (top 20) result for an exact-match search, and over the actual ranking of the site within that universe of results.

While it's impossible to quantify the specific contribution of the domain name in the probability that a given site will rank well, it's clear from the wide range of sites examined (large sites and small niche sites, popular sites and obscure sites, sites with hundreds of pages of content and brochure sites with few pages, or composed primarily of graphics or flash) that the domain name plays some role, given how many of the sites in the study ranked (at least 56% and up to 66% of the time, depending on the search configuration).

All other things being equal, an exact-match generic domain name will give a boost in search rankings on Google, a slightly larger boost on Yahoo, but a very substantially larger boost on Bing.

The average position of a ranking site was within the top 3 results on Bing, the top 6 results on Yahoo and the top 7 results on Google. In other words, despite considering rankings down to and including the 20th position, the average ranking in each case was well inside the top 10.



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## Raw Data Used in Study

DOMAIN	KEYWORDS	G	G	Y	Y	B	B
		(def)	(UK)	(def)	(UK)	(def)	(UK)
AdvertisingAgency.co.uk	advertising agency	3	2	1	1	9	8
AfterDinnerSpeakers.co.uk	after dinner speakers	na	na	2	2	1	1
Alpaca.co.uk	alpaca	na	na	na	na	2	1
AluminiumCasting.co.uk	aluminium casting	na	na	na	na	na	na
AntiqueAuctions.co.uk	antique auctions	na	na	na	na	na	na
Antivirus.co.uk	antivirus	na	13	na	11	na	na
ArchitecturalModels.co.uk	architectural models	na	na	4	3	na	na
Autographs.co.uk	autographs	3	3	15	14	1	1
Avionics.co.uk	avionics	na	na	10	8	2	1
BackingTracks.co.uk	backing tracks	na	6	8	7	3	3
BarcodePrinters.co.uk	barcode printers	na	na	19	19	na	na
Bellows.co.uk	bellows	na	na	2	1	na	na
Billiards.co.uk	billiards	8	5	2	1	1	1
Biscuits.co.uk	biscuits	19	14	na	na	na	na
CarpetTiles.co.uk	carpet tiles	1	1	2	2	2	2
CharteredAccountants.co.uk	chartered accountants	15	16	na	na	na	na
Chocolate.co.uk	chocolate	16	5	2	1	1	1
Cigars.co.uk	cigars	5	4	5	3	2	1
Clarinets.co.uk	clarinets	na	na	10	8	na	na
CompanyFormation.co.uk	company formation	na	na	na	na	20	19
Construction.co.uk	construction	na	na	na	na	na	na
Costumes.co.uk	costumes	na	na	na	na	na	2
Cufflinks.co.uk	cufflinks	7	6	2	2	1	1
Deckchairs.co.uk	deckchairs	1	1	1	1	1	1
DedicatedWebHosting.co.uk	dedicated web hosting	na	na	na	na	na	na
Dentures.co.uk	dentures	16	11	na	18	na	na
DesignerSunglasses.co.uk	designer sunglasses	4	4	2	2	1	1
Diamonds.co.uk	diamonds	na	na	na	na	na	na
Domain.co.uk	domain	na	na	10	7	10	6
Dubbing.co.uk	dubbing	10	1	9	4	9	5
EnglishWine.co.uk	english wine	4	4	6	6	2	2
Ergonomics.co.uk	ergonomics	13	7	6	3	3	2
EveningDress.co.uk	evening dress	na	na	15	15	2	2
Fabric.co.uk	fabric	10	9	na	na	5	3
FishingTackle.co.uk	fishing tackle	na	na	na	na	na	na
Fountains.co.uk	fountains	18	9	9	8	2	2
FuneralDirector.co.uk	funeral director	8	8	3	3	1	1
Globes.co.uk	globes	na	na	4	4	na	5
GolfClub.co.uk	golf club	17	15	na	na	na	na
GolfSchool.co.uk	golf school	1	1	1	1	1	1
GraphicDesignServices.co.uk	graphic design services	na	na	na	na	na	na
Guitars.co.uk	guitars	5	2	3	2	1	1
HangGliding.co.uk	hang gliding	3	3	11	7	4	3
HighVisibility.co.uk	high visibility	na	na	3	3	na	na
Homestays.co.uk	homestays	1	1	3	3	1	1
Host.co.uk	host	5	3	na	na	na	na
Jams.co.uk	jams	1	1	3	1	2	2
JapaneseTea.co.uk	japanese tea	2	1	1	1	1	1
Kilts.co.uk	kilts	10	7	na	na	1	1
Kipper.co.uk	kipper	8	5	4	3	3	2
Knitting.co.uk	knitting	na	na	na	na	na	na
Landscaping.co.uk	landscaping	9	7	na	na	4	4

LeatherChairs.co.uk	leather chairs	1	1	1	1	1	1
LifeJackets.co.uk	life jackets	1	1	1	1	9	8
LogoDesign.co.uk	logo design	1	1	4	4	1	1
LondonTaxi.co.uk	london taxi	15	15	14	14	na	na
LondonTaxis.co.uk	london taxis	11	12	3	3	na	na
LongTermCare.co.uk	long term care	na	na	1	1	na	na
MetalDetectors.co.uk	metal detectors	1	1	2	2	2	2
Mixer.co.uk	mixer	5	3	2	1	1	1
MusicLessons.co.uk	music lessons	5	5	18	15	2	2
Optician.co.uk	optician	na	na	3	2	na	na
Orthodontist.co.uk	orthodontist	5	4	na	17	1	1
PaperBags.co.uk	paper bags	9	9	na	na	3	3
Pasta.co.uk	pasta	na	na	na	na	2	1
PayrollManagement.co.uk	payroll management	na	na	na	na	2	2
Pearls.co.uk	pearls	4	3	na	19	3	4
Pencils.co.uk	pencils	3	1	2	1	2	1
Pens.co.uk	pens	4	4	2	2	1	1
PersonalisedGifts.co.uk	personalised gifts	na	na	na	na	2	2
PetSupplies.co.uk	pet supplies	8	9	na	na	7	6
PhotoProcessing.co.uk	photo processing	na	na	na	na	na	na
PlantPots.co.uk	plant pots	4	4	4	4	1	1
Plants.co.uk	plants	13	9	na	na	3	2
PlasticSurgery.co.uk	plastic surgery	na	na	na	na	na	7
PortableToilets.co.uk	portable toilets	12	10	11	11	3	3
Portraits.co.uk	portraits	na	na	na	9	1	1
PosterPrinting.co.uk	poster printing	3	3	7	7	na	na
Powertools.co.uk	power tools	18	13	na	na	1	1
Presentations.co.uk	presentations	na	10	na	na	3	3
Prints.co.uk	prints	na	na	na	na	na	na
PrivateInvestigator.co.uk	private investigator	na	na	1	1	na	na
Psychologist.co.uk	psychologist	na	na	na	na	na	na
PushChairs.co.uk	pushchairs	9	9	na	na	1	1
QualityControl.co.uk	quality control	18	5	na	na	4	3
Rafting.co.uk	rafting	1	1	3	2	1	1
RockingHorse.co.uk	rocking horse	1	1	2	2	1	1
Roses.co.uk	roses	1	1	2	1	1	1
Rowing.co.uk	rowing	12	9	18	15	5	4
SailBoats.co.uk	sail boats	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sausages.co.uk	sausages	7	4	7	5	1	1
SchoolUniforms.co.uk	school uniforms	9	8	7	6	1	1
Shelving.co.uk	shelving	na	na	na	na	na	na
Signage.co.uk	signage	na	11	9	5	na	na
SilkTies.co.uk	silk ties	na	na	na	na	na	na
SilverCutlery.co.uk	silver cutlery	1	1	7	7	1	1
Slippers.co.uk	slippers	12	9	5	5	1	1
SmokedSalmon.co.uk	smoked salmon	1	1	3	2	1	1
Snacks.co.uk	snacks	na	na	17	11	1	1
Solicitor.co.uk	solicitor	na	na	na	na	na	na
SpecialEffects.co.uk	special effects	3	2	2	1	11	8
Stickers.co.uk	stickers	2	2	na	na	1	1
Surveys.co.uk	surveys	na	na	na	na	na	2
Taxidermy.co.uk	taxidermy	2	1	5	3	1	1
TaxReturn.co.uk	tax return	5	5	13	14	3	3
Tea.co.uk	tea	2	1	1	1	1	1
TeethWhitening.co.uk	teeth whitening	na	na	na	na	na	na
TermLifeInsurance.co.uk	term life insurance	na	na	na	na	na	na
ThermalImaging.co.uk	thermal imaging	2	1	18	5	1	1

TimberGarage.co.uk	timber garage	na	na	na	na	na	na
TimeManagement.co.uk	time management	na	na	na	na	na	na
TowelRails.co.uk	towel rails	6	6	13	13	1	1
Tshirt.co.uk	tshirt	12	7	na	na	1	1
Turnstiles.co.uk	turnstiles	na	20	1	1	4	2
TVMounts.co.uk	tv mounts	na	na	na	na	na	na
UPVCConservatories.co.uk	upvc conservatories	na	na	na	na	na	na
USBMicroscope.co.uk	usb microscope	na	na	na	na	na	na
WalkingTours.co.uk	walking tours	3	3	1	1	1	1
WaterBed.co.uk	water bed	1	1	1	1	na	na
WaterFeatures.co.uk	water features	9	9	11	11	3	3
WebDesign.co.uk	web design	na	na	na	na	na	na
Wedding.co.uk	wedding	na	na	na	na	15	20
WeddingVenue.co.uk	wedding venue	na	na	na	na	na	15
WeightLoss.co.uk	weight loss	na	na	na	na	na	na
Whisky.co.uk	whisky	na	19	na	na	6	5