2017

searchmetrics

Media Ranking Factors
Data Insights for Performing
on Google

searchmetrics

Table of Contents

About
Searchmetrics

We are your pathfinder to content that uniquely matches user intent with the deep learning insights of the Searchmetrics Suite™ and Searchmetrics Content Experience™ platforms. Search has evolved into a data-driven field that requires powerful tools to guide companies through discovery, optimization and measurement of engaging storytelling.

There's only one search and content development platform that owns its data: Searchmetrics, the world's #1 SEO and content performance platform. We don't rely on data from third parties. Our historical database spans five years and contains over 250 billion pieces of information, such as keyword rankings, search terms, social links and backlinks. It includes global, mobile and local data covering organic and paid search, as well as social media. We have the largest global reach of any search platform, crawling the web every day in more than 130 countries.

Searchmetrics monitors and reveals the full business available to you online. We provide our customers with a competitive advantage and help them to identify new business opportunities by exposing the content consumers are engaging with on industry and competitors' sites. Our SEO Visibility Score – trusted by reputable media sources such as The New York Times, Bloomberg and The Guardian – reliably indicates your online presence.

We provide the insights our customers need to deliver results. Searchmetrics guides SEOs and content marketers with suggestions for creating content that improves relevance and boosts conversions. It shows the connection between social media links and overall engagement. And its analytics make clear which content performs the best and how an organization's content performs against its competitors'.

With Marcus Tober, one of the top 10 SEO minds in the world, leading Searchmetrics' product development, we have over 100,000 users worldwide, including respected brands such as T-Mobile, eBay and Siemens. They all depend on Searchmetrics continuing innovations to maximize their online performance.

If you have any questions regarding this whitepaper or the Searchmetrics Suite™ , please do not hesitate to contact us at *www.searchmetrics.com/contact/*

Online Media:
Not Just (Fake) News

Online has become a reference point for sports, social media – even garden tips

MLB results, political polls, holiday snaps or gardening ideas: Online media is where people go to find detailed information, catch up on the latest news, read books and get their social media fix. The younger people are, the more exclusively they turn up their noses at offline information sources. Not surprising to many, the younger they are, the more likely they are also to be using their smartphones for media and publishing information.

The variety amongst online media and publishers is huge, but this report finds some interesting commonalities. Among them: Media and publishers link heavily to outside sources to add credibility to their own content; a surprising number of publishers have not adopted Accelerated Mobile Pages; and the switchover from HTTP to HTTPS security remains an unfulfilled promise.

This whitepaper is the first Searchmetrics research that looks specifically at online media and publishing for specific factors that determine online rankings. Its findings, tips and observations below should serve as an important tool for content producers who are looking to grow their audience and maintain credibility in an era where so-called fake news dominates headlines and colors consumer views on the industry.

Key Players in the Online Media Industry:

- General Interest Publishers (e.g. nytimes.com, cnn.com, huffingtonpost.com)
- Special Interest Publishers (e.g. gq.com, bleacherreport.com, politico.com)
- Platforms and Social Networks (e.g. pinterest.com, youtube.com, twitter.com)
- Email Providers (e.g. outlook.live.com, yahoo.com, gmail.com)
- Brands & Brand Blog (e.g.blog.homedepot.com, wholefoodsmarket.com/blog/, disneyparks.disney,go.com/blog/)

e-Newsies: 81% of Americans get their news online

Whilst TV is still the most popular news source for people over 50, a whopping *81% of Americans get at least some of their news online*. For most millennials and post-millennials, the internet is their first port of call. Half of 18-29 year-olds and nearly as many 30-49 year-olds (49%) often get their news from online sources.

News can be found almost anywhere: Special interest web publications, company blogs and other publishers are all competing for attention, traffic and revenue with general news websites, and they are facing pressure from an ever-growing presence: social media sites and the news curation there. In fact, 62% of Americans sometimes use social media as a source of news, with 18% regularly doing so.

Social network growth not just a youth phenomenon

Social networks no longer are just for kids or kicks. More than 80% of 30 to 49-year-olds now regularly log onto at least one social media site, according to 2016 figures from Pew Research. Older generations also aren't sitting out the phenomenon, with 64% of 50 to 60-year-olds and 34% of people older than 64 now maintaining relationships on social networks.

One feature of this report is the relationship between social signals and Google rankings, which is far more pronounced in the media and publishing industry than in other sectors.

The Fast and Furious: 70% prefer their phone for reading news

Publishers should ignore mobile phone usage numbers at their own risk. The key under-30 demo, likely to spend freely and often, hardly ever leaves home without one. Some *92% have a smartphone, and 70% prefer it to their desktop for reading news*.

One major consideration regarding this (and other) generations of mobile phone users: They express a need to click on and see information quickly and efficiently. Online media who have not tailored their content for Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) are likely to see SEO Visibility fall off a cliff – together with losses in traffic and revenue.

Media Websites blazing the AMP trail
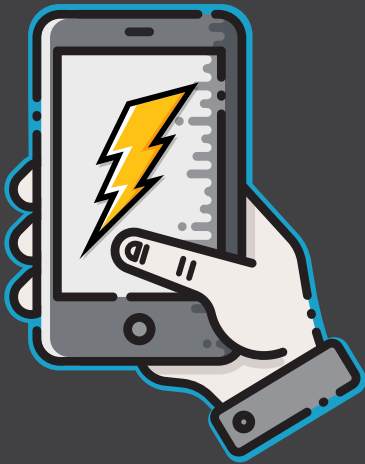
AMP Share – 78%

Description – publisher-relevant key-words including news inte-grations such as headlines or news carousels

The values indicate the percentage of organic AMP search results on the first search results page – for searches from mobile devices on Google.com.

- The benchmark gives the cross-industry value for our general Ranking Factors. Here, the AMP share is 21%.
- The share for media is based on the keyword set for this study. For media, we find 26% of the organic results to be AMP.
- For publisher-relevant keywords, the AMP share in the organic URLs on the first search result page is 30%.
- When we include news integrations such as headlines or news carousels, the AMP share shoots up to 78%.

Find out all about AMP in the Searchmetrics Glossry

THE RIGHT STUFF: Content needs the right business model

The online media environment is highly competitive, forcing many outlets to expand their business models to compensate for sinking revenue from display advertising. Alternatives today include affiliate links and content promotion via "Outbrain" or "plista." Outlets also are creating sponsored posts or charging for digital subscriptions. *Research by the American Press Institute* found that 15% of adults have a paid subscription to mobile or tablet news apps, 10% to a digital news site and 9% to a print or digital newsletter.

These statistics underline the importance of a highly visible presence in organic search results. By comparison, search engine advertising or social media advertising are expensive and relatively short-term strategies for generating traffic and turnover. The next post or article is just a click way. To build up a long-term relationship with readers (and customers), information has to be tailored to the user intent, with content that provides the perfect user experience – ideally delivered at lightning speed via AMP, direct to people's smartphones.

About the Study
An Introduction to Ranking Factors

This analysis is one in a series of Searchmetrics' ranking factor whitepapers that focus exclusively on one specific industry. If you've just tuned in, you can get started with our Ranking Factors 101:

What is a Ranking Factor?
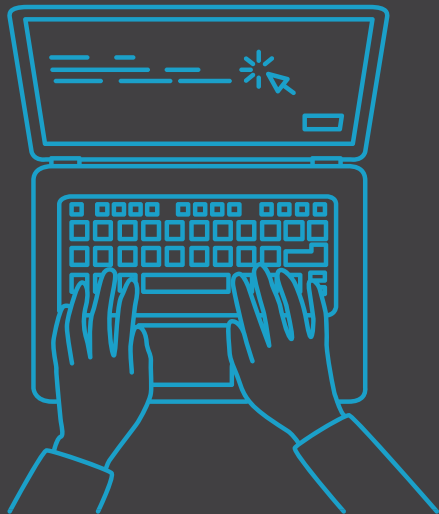
Rebooting Ranking Factors

Find out more about general ranking factors

General Ranking Factors as a Benchmark for differing Industry Ranking Factors

For each of our industry studies, the general ranking factors, which were published in a separate whitepaper, serve as a benchmark. Whilst the general ranking factors and rank correlations provide an overview of which elements are generally the most important in terms of search, and how top-ranking landing pages vary regarding these elements, the general factors can no longer be considered equally relevant for all webmasters. Although there is a basic set of factors that can be considered a general requirement for rankings, ranking factors differ from industry to industry, and are therefore not generally applicable for all websites. Content demands based on user intent have simply become too differentiated. For this reason, the general ranking factors act as a comparative benchmark, providing context to the results. By comparing them with the general ranking factors, we can identify the ranking factors for which the media industry has its own set of rules, and where webmasters operating in this industry should focus their attention or at least what they should be aware of.

About the Study
Ranking Factors for the Media Industry

The following 10 search queries are examples of the keywords used for the analysis in this whitepaper. Of course, not all keywords included in the set are equally relevant for all media industry companies. Nevertheless, the use of specifically selected data enables a much more precise analysis of the media industry than would be possible with a generic keyword set.

- Kim Kardashian
- Scary movies
- Czech Republic
- Science news
- Net neutrality
- Latest polls
- Country music
- NFL mock draft
- Virtual reality
- Weather NYC

Ranking Factors for Industries
Whitepaper & Infographics
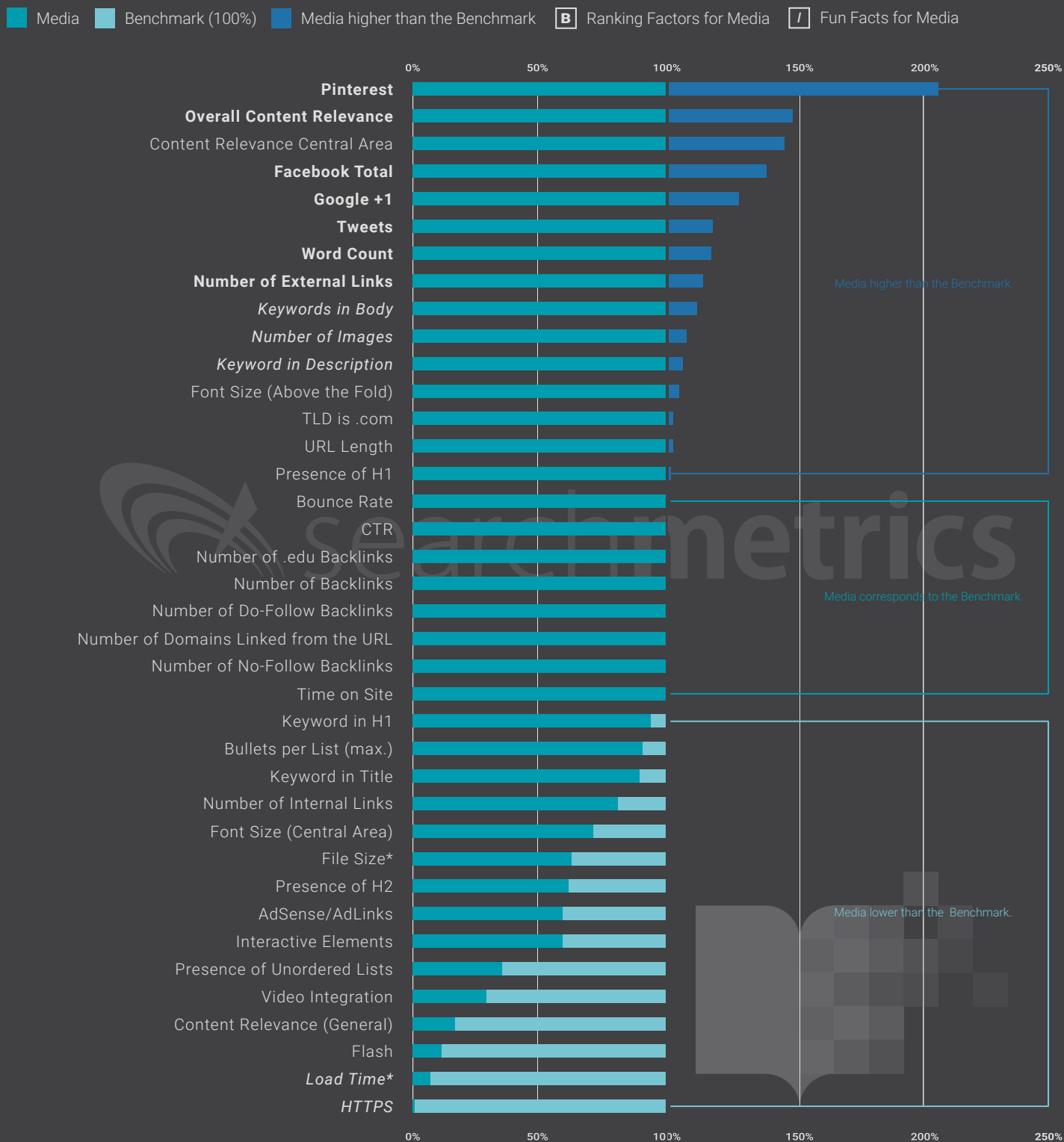
Finance

Health

Travel

e-Commerce

Media

Industry-specific keyword set

To analyze the ranking factors relevant to the media industry, we created an industry-specific keyword set. Whilst the keyword set for the general ranking factors contained search terms related to all topics and fields – and primarily included terms with a high search volume – the results for this industry whitepaper are based on a smaller, more distinct dataset. For this analysis, keywords were only included that are relevant for the media industry. with an overlap of around 50% between the industry keywords and those of the general ranking factors. This is a much higher overlap than in other industries like finance or travel since people tend to search more often for current news or what's on TV than for insurance policies or holidays.

The use of a specially determined keyword set is essential because an individual industry – in fact, even each individual search query – has differentiated ranking factors.

Ranking Factors for the Media Industry
Comparison of the Top 10 Average Values with the Benchmark in %

■ Media ■ Benchmark (100%) ■ Media higher than the Benchmark [B] Ranking Factors for Media [I] Fun Facts for Media

Factor	
0%	50% 100% 150% 200% 250%

Pinterest
Overall Content Relevance
Content Relevance Central Area
Facebook Total
Google +1
Tweets
Word Count
Number of External Links
Keywords in Body
Number of Images
Keyword in Description
Font Size (Above the Fold)
TLD is .com
URL Length
Presence of H1

Media higher than the Benchmark.

Bounce Rate
CTR
Number of .edu Backlinks
Number of Backlinks
Number of Do-Follow Backlinks
Number of Domains Linked from the URL
Number of No-Follow Backlinks
Time on Site

Media corresponds to the Benchmark.

Keyword in H1
Bullets per List (max.)
Keyword in Title
Number of Internal Links
Font Size (Central Area)
File Size*
Presence of H2
AdSense/AdLinks
Interactive Elements
Presence of Unordered Lists
Video Integration
Content Relevance (General)
Flash
Load Time
HTTPS

Media lower than the Benchmark.

0% 50% 100% 150% 200% 250%

The data is based on a comparison of Google ranking factors for media industry websites with the general ranking factors covering all industries (Searchmetrics Whitepaper December 2016). Download the whole whitepaper at: searchmetrics.com/media2017

*Values inverted, because better optimized pages have smaller file sizes and faster load times

Analysis & Results
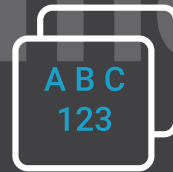## The Ranking Factors where Media Stands out from the Crowd

RANKING FACTORS

Number of External Links

Overall Content Relevance

Social Signals:
Facebook Total, Tweets, Google+1, Pinterest

A B C 123

Word Count

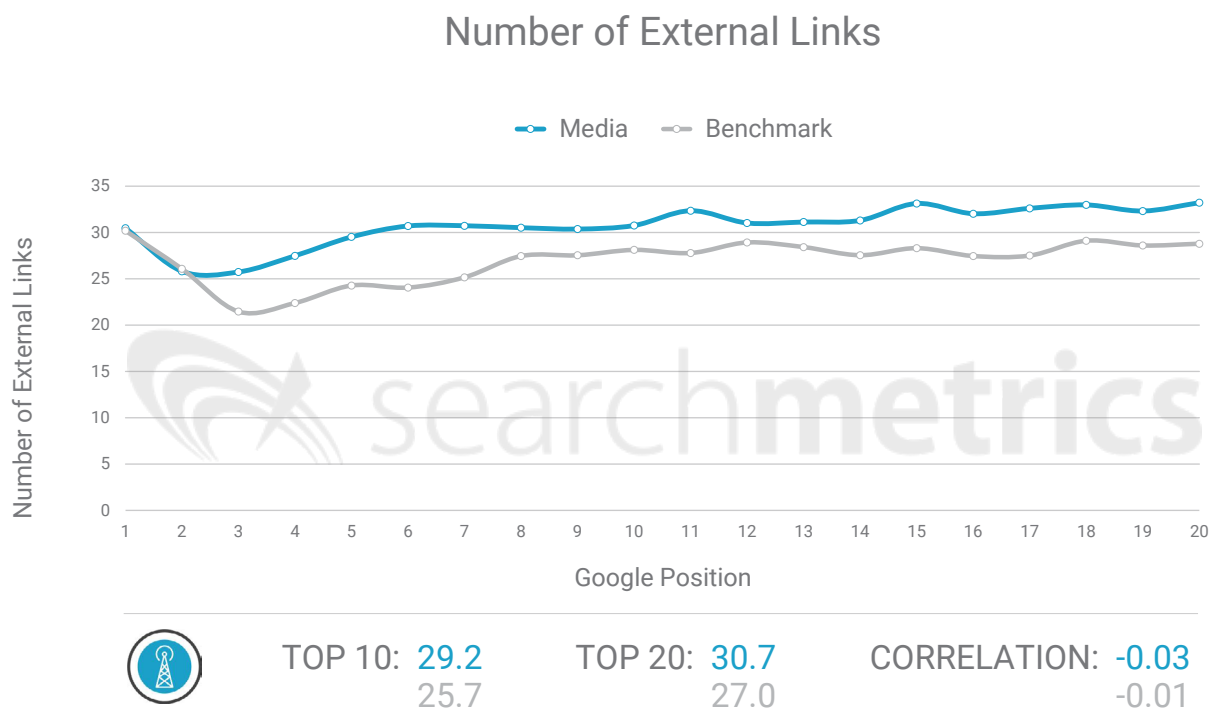**The most interesting factors for media – and some "Fun Facts"**

As ranking factors differ for each industry, it's not always the same factors that are the most interesting. For this reason, we have used our media keyword set to first evaluate all ranking factors that were part of the general benchmark analysis. Based on these results, we have identified some ranking factors that are most interesting for media websites from our perspective.

Moreover, we are looking at some factors that show a significant difference in values and/or trends, when comparing the media results with the benchmark analysis, though these may not necessarily be true ranking factors. These are our "Fun Facts."

Number
of External Links

URLs ranking in the top 20 for media keywords have an average 30.7 links to external Websites – more than the mean rate across all industries.

Number of External Links

Media ⚬ Benchmark ⚬

Y-axis: Number of External Links (0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35)
X-axis: Google Position (1 to 20)

	TOP 10:	29.2	TOP 20:	30.7	CORRELATION:	-0.03
		25.7		27.0		-0.01

Number of External Links

Media landing pages in the top 10 have an average of 29.2 links to external websites. This rises to 30.7 for the top 20. This means that media URLs have the highest number of external links of all analyzed industries – and higher than our benchmark value.

OBSERVATION: One reason for the high number of external links is likely that media websites often work with many external providers. Nevertheless, external links can also be advantageous in an editorial context. Including links to original documents, websites and other sources will provide users with further information and – assuming reliable sources are linked to – can help to increase the credibility of your own page.

Overall
Content Relevance

Texts on media landing pages are significantly more relevant than the average content on pages across all industries.

Overall Content Relevance

— Media   — Benchmark

TOP 10: **131.7**
88.3

TOP 20: **114.6**
83.9

CORRELATION: **0.01**
0.04
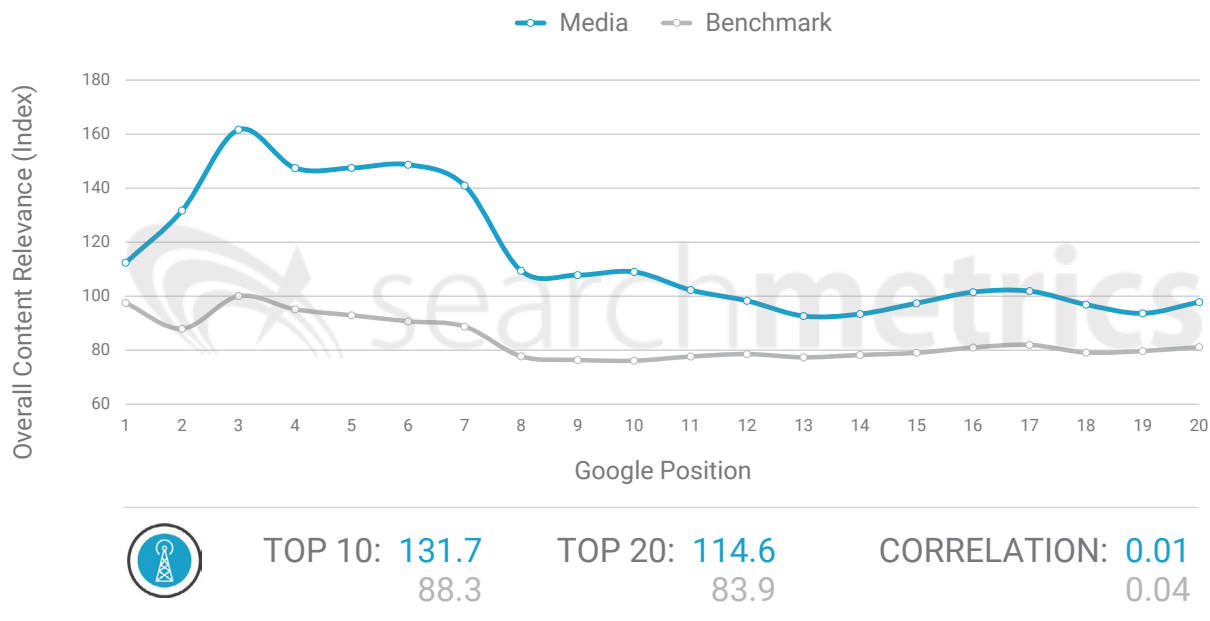
Overall Content Relevance

[Find out more about Content Relevance]

URLs in the media industry that rank on Google's first search results page, show a far higher level of content relevance than the average measured in our benchmark study. For the general ranking factors, we developed an index, for which the ranking position with the highest content relevance was given a content relevance score of 100. All other results were evaluated and scored in relation to this index.

OUR OBSERVATION: Users are looking for information and search for specific media-related keywords. Try to serve this informational intent with holistic, up-to-date content – pages that do this have a better chance of ranking on Google's first page. Lose the "publish-and-forget" approach and keep an eye on the performance of your existing content. Updating older pages to keep them relevant is very likely to have a positive impact on your online performance.

Social
Signals

The number of Social Signals generated by high-ranking media pages is considerably more than pages of other industries.

Facebook Total

Media   Benchmark
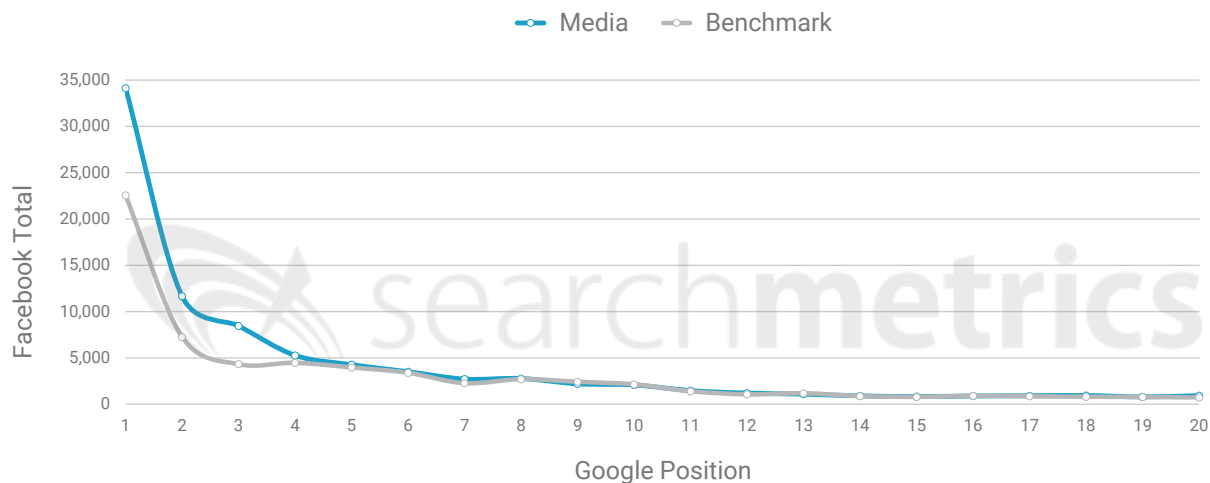
TOP 10: **7,708**
         5,552

TOP 20: **4,352**
         3,245

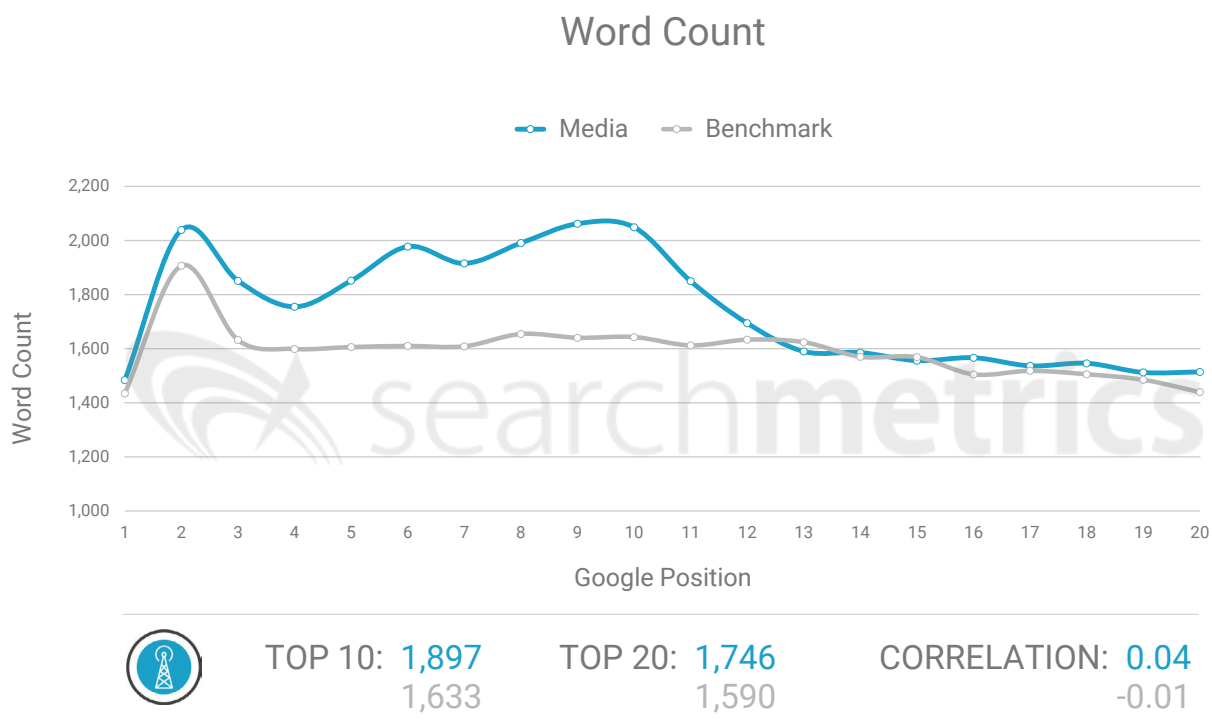CORRELATION: **0.21**
              0.20

Social Signals

Facebook, Pinterest, Google + and Twitter, the story is the same: URLs ranking on the first search results page for our media keyword set have vastly more mentions in social networks. Even though social signals are not a direct ranking factor, likes, tweets and pins can have a positive effect on traffic as they generate new visits. In this way, social signals can help to generate positive user signals. It remains up for discussion whether these user signals actually impact rankings or whether the relationship between social signals and high rankings is nothing but a pseudo-correlation.

OBSERVATION: Media URLs usually communicate information and are highly popular in social networks. Make use of this opportunity to reach additional users and to achieve better search engine rankings in the long term.

Word
Count

A B C
123

Texts on media URLs ranking in the top 10 contain 16% more words than the benchmark average.

Word Count

○— Media   ○— Benchmark

Word Count (y-axis): 1,000 to 2,200
Google Position (x-axis): 1 to 20

	TOP 10:	1,897	TOP 20:	1,746	CORRELATION:	0.04
		1,633		1,590		-0.01

Word Count

Landing pages in the media industry often contain text that is supposed to satisfy the user's need for information. Accordingly, media URLs ranking in the top 10 contain around 260 more words than the top 10 average in our benchmark analysis.

TIP: Users are looking for specific information. But keep in mind "the longer, the better" is not generally true. For some searches, a video or image gallery may be enough; it depends on the user intent. All these can create comprehensive, well-structured, accessible content. Be prepared to invest in the creation of suitable, detailed content that tallies with the user's needs.

Related Discussion
AMP

Share of AMP on the first results page - Mobile, Google.com
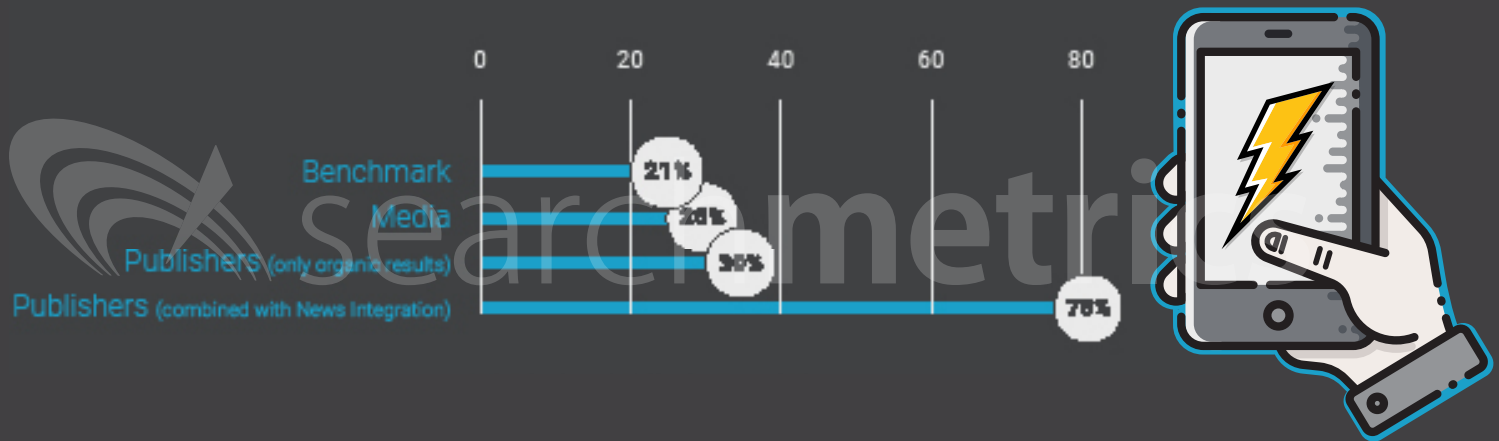
- The more relevant keywords are to publishers and news, the higher the proportion of AMP landing pages on Google's first search results page for mobile devices.

- About 26% of media URLs in the top 10 mobile search results are AMP-enabled, compared to our benchmark ranking factors keyword set's 21%.

- For news publishers, in particular, AMP enablement of organic results rises to 30%. If we include news integrations then 78% of the search results for publisher-relevant news keywords have an AMP logo.

About the AMP study

The organic results on the first search results page on mobile devices with and without AMP were counted for the keyword sets from the benchmark study and for the media ranking factors.

For the publisher study, the mobile results on the first search results page were examined for 50 keywords trending on Google News. Organic results and news integrations with and without AMP were counted. The news integrations include the so-called "Top stories," a Universal Search element, the AMP News carousel and the AMP Publisher carousel. For these last two, a horizontal scrollable carousel with up to 10 topics including picture and heading is displayed. The AMP News carousel includes various publisher websites; the AMP Publisher carousel acts as a "shop window" for one single publisher website.

Analysis & Results
The "Fun Facts" we observed for Media

FUN FACTS

HTTPS

Keywords in Body, Keyword in Description
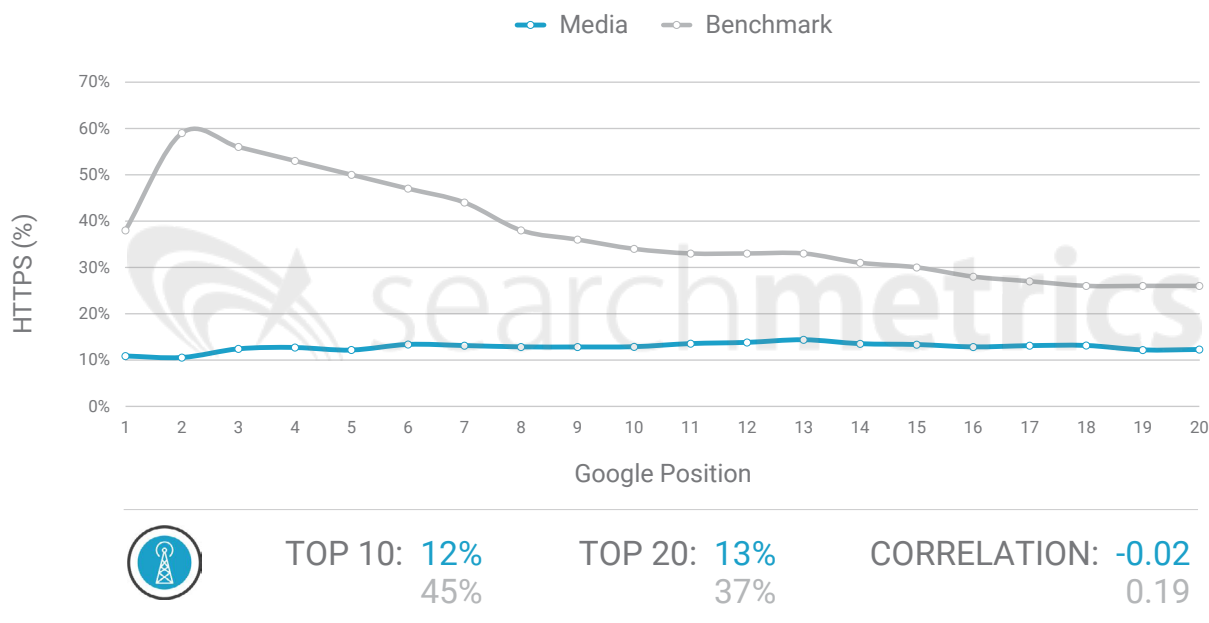
Number of Images

Load Time

Fun Facts

In this context, "Fun Fact" means that these factors are obviously interpreted as not being decisive for ranking highly in google.com's search results pages, according to our analysis of the online media industry. However, we consider these factors to be worth mentioning because they show a significant difference in values and/or trends, when comparing the media results with the benchmark analysis.

HTTPS

Only 12% of media websites use HTTPS encryption - this is barely a quarter of the rate measured in our benchmark whitepaper.

HTTPS

Legend: Media, Benchmark

Y-axis: HTTPS (%), 0% to 70%
X-axis: Google Position, 1 to 20

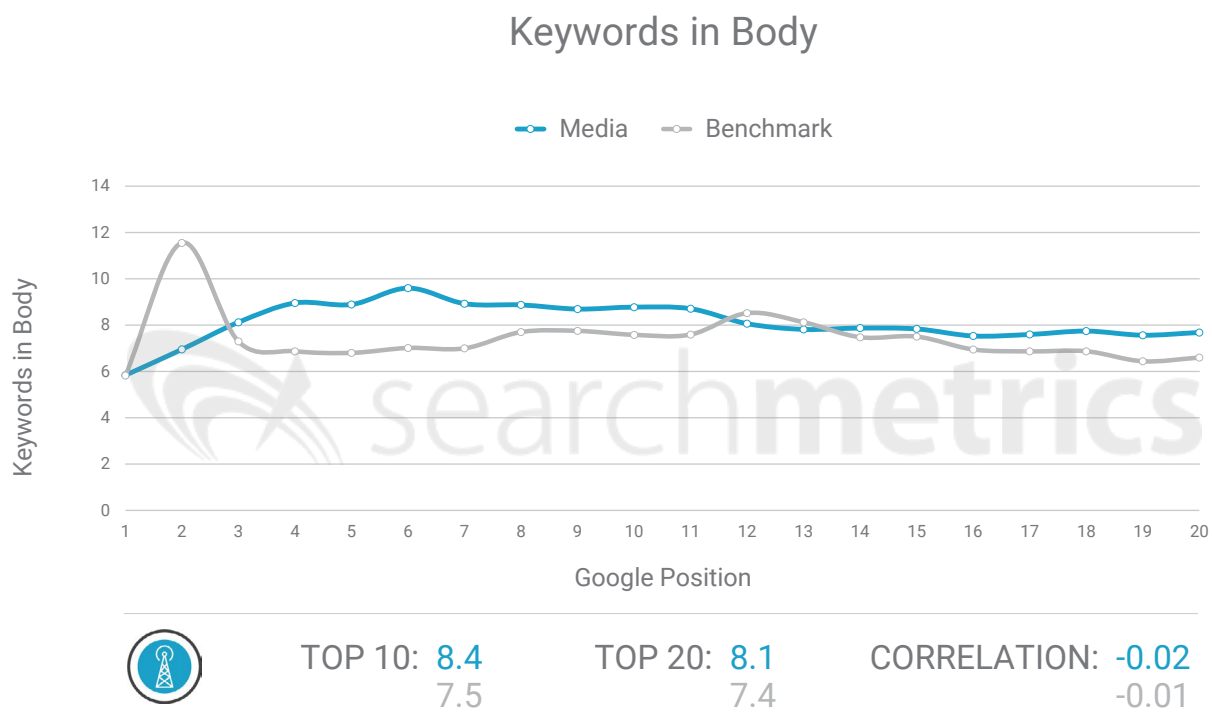|	TOP 10:	TOP 20:	CORRELATION:
Media	12%	13%	-0.02
Benchmark	45%	37%	0.19

HTTPS

Of the media websites in the top 10 of Google's search results for our industry-specific keyword set, only 12% use HTTPS encryption - this is way below the 45% that was measured in our benchmark analysis based on high-volume keywords from all sectors. One reason for this is presumably the advertising-based business model of publishers. When marketers can provide sufficient HTTPS-capable ads, it will be easier for publishers to switch to HTTPS.

OUR OBSERVATION: On the one hand, media websites rarely ask for personal data — this is presumably one other reason for the low proportion of HTTPS pages in the top 10. On the other hand, publishers who now switch to HTTPS may be able to gain a ranking advantage. At least, Google has confirmed they are using HTTPS as a ranking signal. Furthermore, most of the browsers mark unsecured pages with a warning, which may be a reason for users to leave the site before even interacting with it. The website *securethe.news* documents the uptake of HTTPS in the media industry and ranks publishers according to their application of encrypted data transfer.

Keywords
in Body/Description

Media websites use the searched keyword in the body text and the meta description slightly more often than the benchmark average.

Keywords in Body

Media ○— ○ Benchmark

Keywords in Body (y-axis)

Google Position (x-axis)

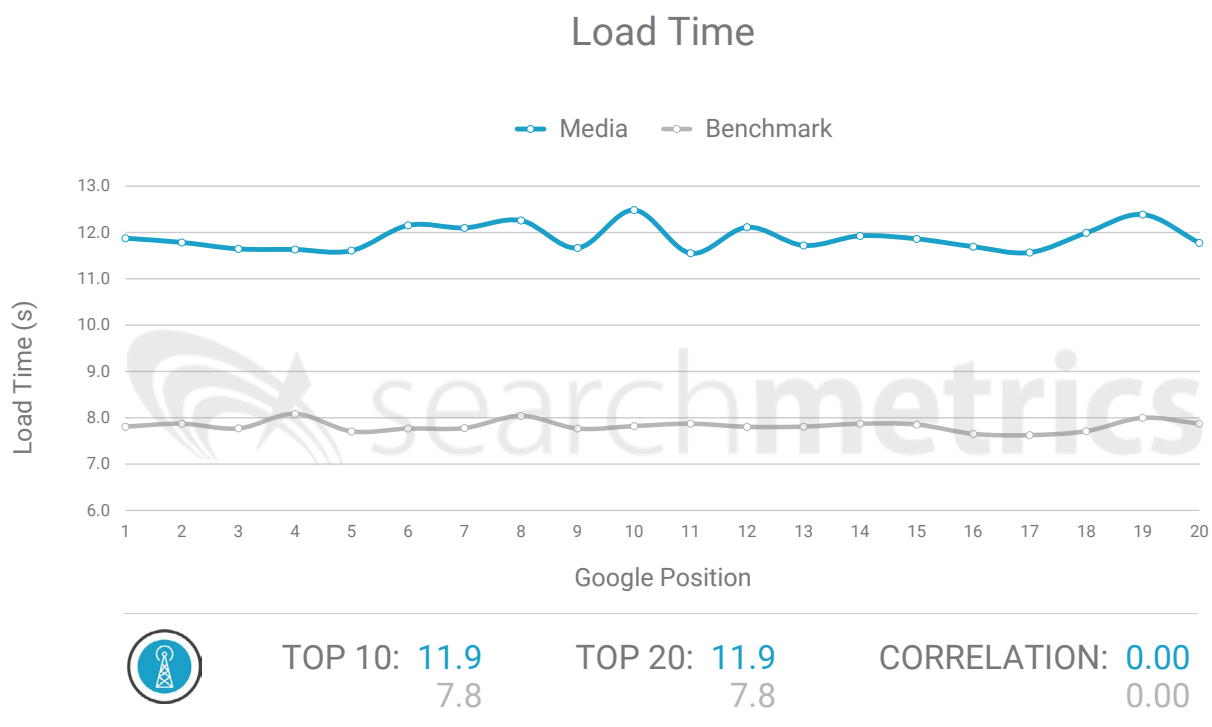|	TOP 10:	8.4	TOP 20:	8.1	CORRELATION:	-0.02
		7.5		7.4		-0.01

Keywords in Body/Description

Top-ranking media landing pages show a slightly higher keyword appearance on-page. For example, the keyword is found more often in both the meta description and page body than in the top pages in our benchmark analysis.

OUR ADVICE: While in some industries the importance of the searched keyword has dropped significantly, media websites do still use it quite frequently - this doesn't mean you should resort to keyword stuffing, but – this is especially true for news, where putting the keyword in the description is likely to generate more attention and therefore clicks – make sure that the keyword is used an appropriate amount on your media landing pages.

Load
Time

The load time for top 10 media websites is nearly 4 seconds slower than for pages in our benchmark analysis.

Load Time

○— Media   ○— Benchmark

Load Time (s) vs Google Position

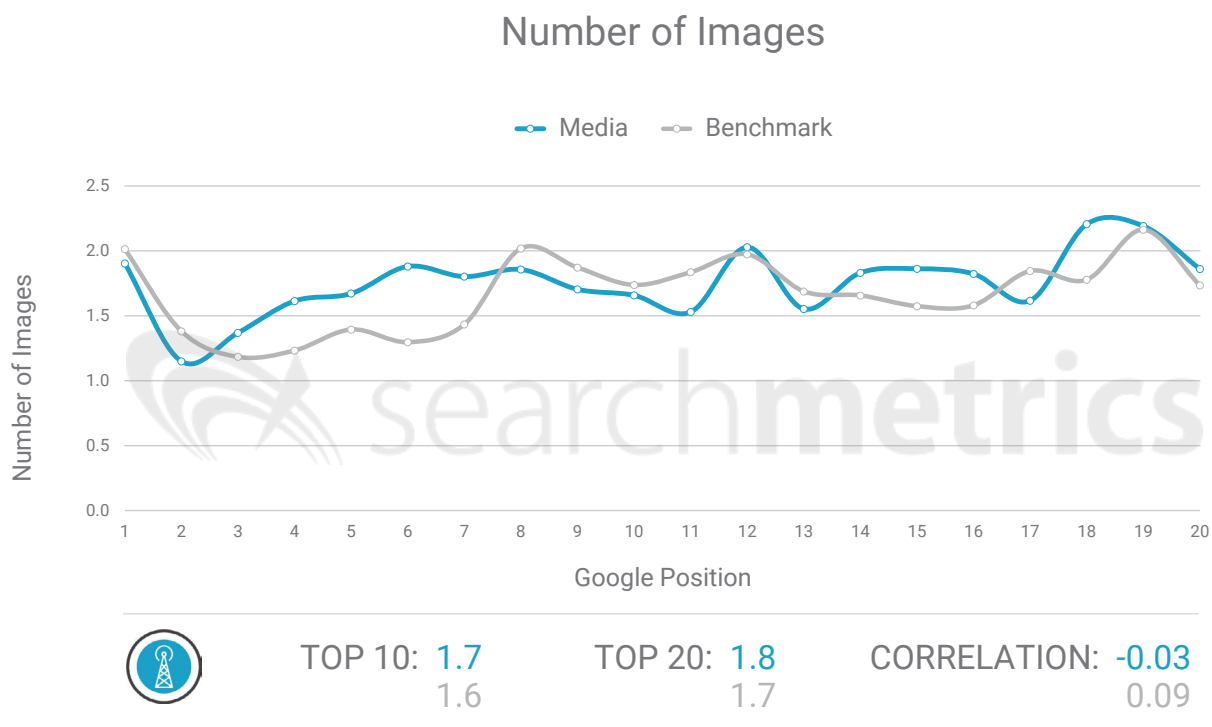TOP 10: 11.9 / 7.8   TOP 20: 11.9 / 7.8   CORRELATION: 0.00 / 0.00

Load Time

Whilst media websites are the pioneers in the uptake of Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) for quick load times on mobile devices, the values for the desktop URLs paint a quite different picture. Here, the load times of top 10 media URLs are, on average, 4 seconds slower than in our benchmark analysis. This is a consequence of the business model of many publishers that generates revenue from advertising. Media websites often rely on adverts that dramatically slow down the page load times.

TIP: Pay particular attention to quick load (and waiting) times on the mobile versions of your pages. Implementing AMP can help to gain you ranking advantages which, e.g. when Google rolls out its long anticipated "Mobile-First Index" - can have a positive impact on traffic across all devices. Also, wherever possible, ads should be loaded asynchronously to avoid extending the load time of the actual site content.

Number of
Images

Media URLs in the top 10 use more images of 200 x 200 pixels than the benchmark average.

Number of Images

Legend: ── Media   ── Benchmark

Y-axis: Number of Images (0.0 – 2.5)
X-axis: Google Position (1–20)

	TOP 10:	1.7	TOP 20:	1.8	CORRELATION:	-0.03
		1.6		1.7		0.09

Number of Images

Media pages on the first page of search results use 7% more images of at least 200 x 200 pixels than the benchmark average. That this number isn't even higher could be a result of pages using smaller images to keep file sizes down, as well as the use of other content formats such as longer texts and video.

HINT: Don't overload your page with images. Photos are important for media, yet informative, detailed texts and other content formats (e.g. video) will often be more appropriate.

Conclusions

Websites that want to rank highly for media keywords have to pay similar attention to user signals like Click-Through Rate and Bounce Rate, as well as ensure a clean technical optimization (particularly on mobile), as in other industries. In addition, there are several factors where the trends in the media industry differ strongly from the average values across all sectors. This is often, at least in part, a result of media and publishing websites having a business model dependent on advertising revenue, which means they must make different trade-offs from e.g. eCommerce sites. The main findings are:

RANKING FACTORS

- URLs ranking in the top 20 for media keywords have an average 30.7 links to external Websites – more than the mean rate across all industries.
- Texts on media landing pages are significantly more relevant than the average content on pages across all industries.
- The number of Social Signals generated by high-ranking media pages is considerably more than pages of other industries.
- Texts on media URLs ranking in the top 10 contain 16% more words than the benchmark average.

AMP

- While the AMP share in the top 10 mobile results for our benchmark keyword set is 21%, 26% of the media URLs are already available as AMP URLs.
- For publishers in particular, search results on current news topics are of interest — here the AMP share of the organic results increases to 30%.
- If we include news integrations, then 78% of the search results for publisher-relevant news keywords have an AMP logo.

FUN FACTS

- Only 12% of media websites use HTTPS encryption - this is barely a quarter of the rate measured in our benchmark whitepaper.
- Media websites use the searched keyword in the body text and the meta description more often than the benchmark average
- The load time for top 10 media websites is nearly 4 seconds slower than for pages in our benchmark analysis.
- Media URLs in the top 10 use more images of 200 x 200 pixels than the benchmark average.

Media websites have longer text with a higher content relevance than in our benchmark whitepaper. At the same time, the keyword density for high-ranking URLs in the media industry is far lower than the overall average.

This clearly shows that useful, holistic text content – supported by the use of suitable images – is even more important for media domains than for websites in general.

Comparison
Table

The table summarizes the percentage differences between the top 10 averages for media pages and the benchmark average values from the general ranking factors.
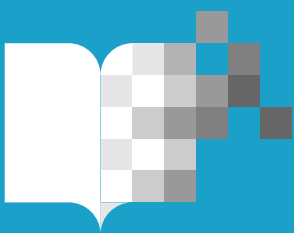
Ranking Factors	Top 10 Benchmark	Top 10 Media	Comparison (%)	Correlation Benchmark	Correlation Media
Pinterest	153	316	206%	0.19	0.20
Overall Content Relevance (Index)	88.3	131.7	149%	0.04	0.01
Facebook	5,552	7,708	139%	0.20	0.21
Google +1	4,026	5,143	128%	0.17	0.20
Tweets	888	1,044	117%	0.17	0.20
Word Count	1,633	1,897	116%	-0.01	-0.01
Number of Images	25.7	29.2	114%	-0.01	-0.03

Fun Facts	Top 10 Benchmark	Top 10 Media	Comparison (%)	Correlation Benchmark	Correlation Media
Keyword in Description (%)	45%	55%	112%	-0.02	-0.01
Keywords in Body	7.5	8.4	111%	-0.01	-0.02
Number of Images	1.6	1.7	107%	0.09	-0.03
Load Time (s)*	7.8	11.9	66%	0.00	0.00
HTTPS (%)	45%	12%	27%	0.19	-0.02

*Values inverted, because better optimized pages have smaller file sizes and faster load times.

1100 PARL PL #150
SAN MATEO, CA 94403
(866) 411 9494

If you have any questions regarding this whitepaper or the Searchmetrics Suite™, please do not hesitate to contact us at *whitepaper@searchmetrics.com*