

What is contextual linking?

We've discussed organizing your site and how that sets up a basic linking structure already, through your menu, breadcrumbs and more. Using these classifying links to organize your website is important, but not enough. To really build a solid site structure in which you clearly highlight and reinforce your most important pages, you need another type of internal links: contextual links.

Contextual links

Contextual links are links within your own content that refer to other pages within your site. For a link to be contextual, the page you link to should be relevant for someone reading the current page – like when we link to our Ultimate guide to blogging from our blog post called 'Why should a blogger focus on SEO?' (Image 1). Your most important pages are probably often very relevant to mention on several pages across your site, so you'll link to them most often. Just remember that not only the page you're linking to is relevant, the context of the link is important as well.

Let's get started!

Feeling inspired to start? Great! Feeling worried? I can imagine. Don't worry, this is just the first post in a blog series where I'll take you through the daunting jungle of SEO to show you (and myself) that it's not a big bad world out there.

I would love to hear from you what you find hard about SEO for your blog so I can possibly touch that subject in a next blog post.

Read more: [Blogging: the ultimate guide »](#)

Image 1: Example of a contextual link on yoast.com

Why link context matters

Google uses the context of your links to gather information about the page you're linking to. It uses the anchor text (or link text) to understand what the page you're linking to is about, for example. In the example in Image 2, "our company mission" is the anchor text.

According to Marieke, Yoast Academy fits Yoast to a tee: "Yoast Academy fits perfectly within [our company mission](#). At Yoast, we want to make it possible for everyone to build a findable website, and by

Image 2: In this fragment from one of our blog posts about Yoast Academy, the anchor text of the link helps Google understand that the page we're linking to is about Yoast's company mission.

The anchor text isn't the only thing Google looks at, though. More and more, it also considers the content around the link to gather extra information. As Google is becoming better at recognizing related words and concepts, this is becoming more and more important. Adding links from a meaningful context allows Google to properly value and rank your pages.

Google uses its understanding of context and related concepts to offer even more relevant information to searchers. You'll see an example of that when you search for 'best pasta sauces recipes', for example (Image 2). A pasta sauce is part of a pasta dish, so Google shows different types of pasta dishes in the search results. These types of pasta dishes are labeled 'Related search'. Google understands that different types of pasta dishes are related to your search and thinks you might be interested in those as well.

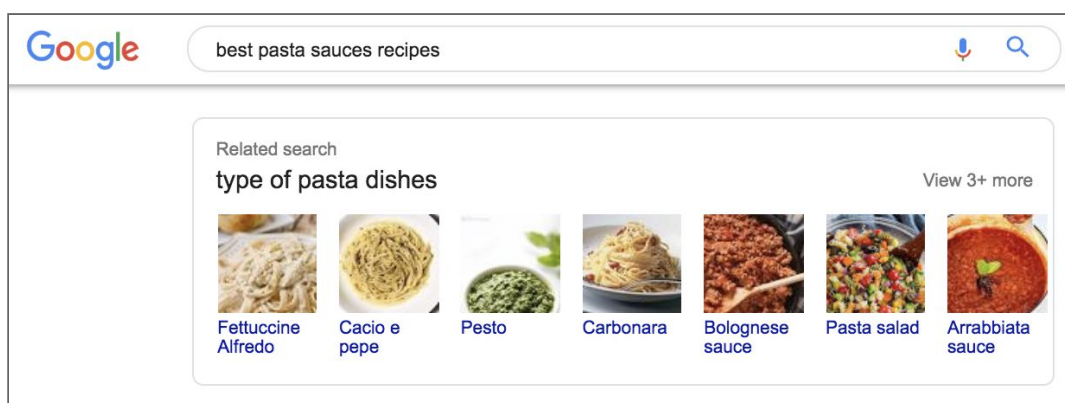


Image 2: Example of Google's understanding of context and related concepts

We've already told you that a good internal linking structure makes it easier for Google to understand which of your pages are most relevant to visitors. You'll link to relevant content more often, using well-crafted contextual links.

Contextual linking: blogs vs. online shops

Contextual linking works quite differently in an online shop environment than it does on a blog. In the second video in this lesson, we discussed how to approach contextual linking on a blog. You identify your most important pages as cornerstone articles and write extensively on one particular topic. You link from related posts to your cornerstone articles, and from the cornerstone articles back to related posts. In this way, you'll make sure that your most important pages have both the most links and the most relevant links. In the next module, we'll tell you exactly how to write cornerstone articles.

As we've already mentioned, contextual linking works differently on an online shop with very few to no pages that are exclusively meant to inform. You don't explore a specific topic on your product pages: you're selling a product. Therefore, on product pages, you mostly want to keep people on a page and convince them to buy the product. Consequently, contextual linking is far less prominent in this context than it is on a blog or other type of site with more informational content. You generally shouldn't add contextual links to your product descriptions, because it could lead to people clicking away from the page. To be fair, there are a few exceptions. In most cases, however, you definitely want to limit the

number of links in the content of your product pages. We'll explore the exceptions later in this text.

So what do you do when you have a shop which consists almost exclusively of individual product pages and archive pages? In that case, your site structure depends more on a good taxonomy structure with categories and tags that makes sense, and good archive pages to rank with. That's generally enough for search engines to understand how your shop works. We discussed how you can achieve this in the previous module. But there are also things you can do to link contextually between product pages without hurting your chances of selling your products. Of course, if you have an online shop with a blog, or with pages with a lot of informational content, you can mix the two approaches and link between related pages.

Contextual linking opportunities for online shops

There are just a couple of meaningful ways of adding contextual links to your product pages. Say you have a dedicated page for a product bundle which consists of several products you also sell individually, for example. In that case, it may be helpful to also link to the individual product pages that are included in that bundle for more information.

Besides that, there are a number of ways you can link to other products on your product pages. This can help reinforce the relationship between your products. By linking more often to important products, it could reflect the importance of certain products as well. This depends on the size of your shop, however. If you have 10,000 individual product pages across a lot of different types of products, for example, it's very hard to reinforce your main pages this way. However, these links may drive additional traffic to pages you want people to end up on. We'll list the main options here. They're all quite similar in that they are trying to point out related items to visitors.

1. a 'related items' or 'compare with similar items' section
2. a 'customers also bought' section
3. a 'product bundles' or 'frequently bought together' section

Let's explore them one by one below.

1. A 'related items', 'similar items' or 'alternatives' section

People browsing a product page may be interested in similar items. By adding a related items section, you provide meaningful links to related products. This helps both users and Google understand which products are related.

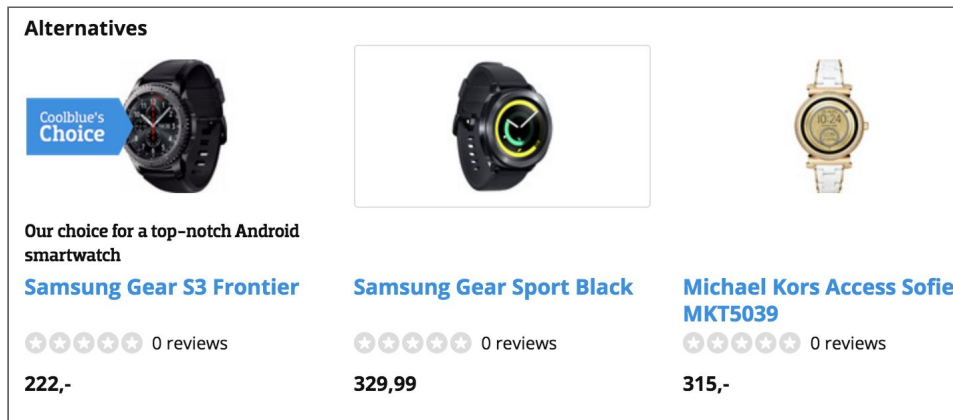


Image 3: Dutch online shop Coolblue offers alternatives for the product you're currently viewing

Example: Susan's bookshop

Susan could link to similar books. When people are on the product page of one of the books from the 'Twilight' series, for example, they might be interested in young adult fantasy books like 'Vampire Academy' as well. Or another book by the same author. Susan could also link to one of the other books from the 'Twilight'. A small list of three alternative products people might be interested in could help your visitors find the products they prefer.

2. A 'customers also bought' or 'recommended' section

People tend to trust experts and other people's opinions. They also use those opinions to discover new products. Adding a 'customers also bought' section helps your users find related products that they might enjoy and could drive sales at the same time.

Customers who bought this item also bought





Lacdo Shockproof External USB CD DVD Writer Blu-Ray & External Hard Drive Neoprene Protective...
★★★★☆ 1,071
\$8.99 ✓prime



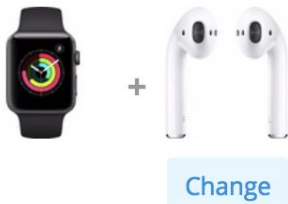
Lacdo USB CD DVD Writer Blu-Ray & External Hard Drive Protective Storage Carrying Case Bag for...
★★★★☆ 1,071
\$10.99 ✓prime

Image 4: Amazon.com shows what products other customers also purchased

Recommended combinations

Recommended by the expert

Apple Watch Series 3 42mm Space Gray Aluminum/Black Sport Band + Earbuds



Change

5% discount
on the accessory

€488,-
€ 480,05



✓ **Delivered tomorrow** | Store stock ?

Image 5: Dutch online shop Coolblue offers recommended combinations.

Example: Susan's bookshop

The example of Susan's bookshop works here as well. When people are on the 'Twilight' product page, they might be interested in young adult fantasy books like 'Vampire Academy' as well. It would make sense that people buy both these books, which would allow you to add meaningful contextual links.

3. A 'frequently bought together' or 'accessories' section

You can add meaningful contextual links to pages of products that people often buy together. Like if you buy a vacuum cleaner, you're extremely likely to buy the bags you need to put into them. You could even consider bundling these products and providing discounts for them.



Image 6: Amazon.com shows visitors what products are often bought together.

Example: Susan's bookshop

In her online bookshop, Susan could bundle all the books in a series and sell them at a discount. She could also sell notebooks with writing accessories, for example.

Online shops with informational content

Of course, there isn't a hard line between online shops and sites with informational pages. Many websites feature a combination of product pages and informational pages. Some have a full-blown blog in addition to selling products, like we do at Yoast. Others will have a smaller set of informational pages which support their collection of products. A shop which sells horse tack (equipment), for example, could have an informational page which tells customers how to select the best horse boots. And more pages along the same lines.

So let's assume you have an e-commerce shop. You have a number of non-product pages that are important to you. You want to rank for them. You should apply the contextual linking strategy we introduced in the video to those pages. Therefore, let's revisit the ideas we discussed in the video and apply them to this scenario.

We'll start by painting a picture of the situation you want to end up with: you want to rank for your archive pages when it comes to products and you want to rank for your most important informational pages to draw in visitors looking for information. Consequently, you have two different goals, which you should try to achieve in separate ways. Therefore, they require separate approaches, which we'll detail below.

Goal 1: Ranking for your cornerstone informational content

You rank for your cornerstone informational content by adding contextual links from other informational pages. You do this in much the same way that you add contextual links on a blog. It's very important to note that you should **not** add links to these articles from product pages in your shop, even if they're closely related. Don't link from your product pages to your important informational pages just to indicate to Google that they are important to you. That would make users click away from pages you want to sell a product on. Use your collection of related informational pages for contextual linking. If you have too few pages to achieve this, consider adding pages with relevant content to allow you to set up a decent structure.

Goal 2: Ranking for your product archive pages

As we discussed in module two, you generally want to rank for important product terms with your product archive pages. You achieve this by setting up a good taxonomy structure. We taught you this in the previous module. However, you can also provide Google with some additional clues by adding links from your informational pages to your product archive pages (or product pages if you want to rank for an individual product).

In situations like the one we described above, you should approach your informational content as a funnel to your product archive pages. In other words, you link from your informational content to your product archive pages. You do this because you expect people may buy those products, simply because they're interesting to them. Someone looking for information on how to pick the best horse boots is very likely to eventually be looking for a set of horse boots. This has the added benefit of expanding the number of links to your most important product pages.

Conclusion

Contextual linking means adding relevant links within the content of your pages, which lead to other related pages. By building a good contextual linking structure, you can tell Google which of your pages are most important. You do this by linking to them most often from meaningful contexts. Make sure the anchor text of the link does a good job of showing visitors and search engines what they will find on the page the link leads them to.

Contextual internal linking is an extremely important tool for guiding your visitors and Google through your site. This is especially true for informational pages, whether they're part of a blog or a set of pages which supports an online shop. For online shops with no content other than product pages, contextual linking matters less. Here, setting up a good taxonomy structure is key. Still, you can benefit from adding links to related products and product bundles.