



Ability Commerce Whitepaper

SEO Help: Code-to-Text Ratio

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Code to Text Ratio

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Executive Summary

This white paper explains what search engine articles, experts and optimization tools mean when they describe or measure “code to text ratio”. Different experts will provide different opinions on how important code-to-text ratio is, so this paper provides a little background on both sides of the argument, to help you decide for yourself how significant a factor code-to-text ratio may be in your own optimization strategy.

The paper concludes with some free tools you can use to quickly and easily check your code-to-text ratio, and some best practice tips to consider if you decide that a better code-to-text ratio is important for your ecommerce web site.

What is Code-to-Text Ratio?

The code-to-text ratio represents the percentage of actual text in a web page. It's sometimes also referred to as the page text ratio, or the visible text ratio, because it represents how many of the characters within the body of the page code represent visible text, versus how many represent HTML code, image tags, and other non-visible information.

How Important is Code-to-Text Ratio?

The theory is that the higher the code to text ratio (the more visible text you have relative to page code), the more crawlable content you have on your site, which in turn will make your pages weighted more heavily by the search engines. There are two schools of thought on the importance of code-to-text ratio.

One Side Says: Algorithms Use Code-to-Text Ratio to Weight Your Page Results

Some SEO experts contend that the ratio is calculated by search engines, and used as part of the search engine algorithms to weight results. For example, seochat.com, which offers search engine optimization forums and tools, states on their site, “The code to text ratio of a page is used by search engines and spiders to calculate the relevancy of a web page. A higher code to text ratio gives you a better chance of getting a good page ranking for your page.” They continue by clarifying that, in their opinion, “not all search engines are using the code to text ratio in their index algorithm, but most of them do. So having a higher code to text ratio than your competitors gives you a good start for on-site optimization.”

The Other Side Says: Algorithms *Don't* Use the Ratio to Weight Your Page Results

The other side of the argument, which is espoused by a number of experts, is that the algorithms don't use the actual code-to-text ratio to weight page results. These experts contend that there's no way to logically determine via this number alone whether a page is more "useful" (thus weighted more heavily) if it has a higher code-to-text ratio, or a lower one.

For instance, it's pretty easy to get a high ratio with lots of content in a smaller number of bytes on a very plain web page that doesn't do anything with JavaScript and other code tricks. But that page might not be particularly useful—it's just got lots of content. So as a standalone indicator, code-to-text ratio may not mean all that much. Informally, even Google employees will make this case (see the Other Resources section for ways to access what Google has to say).

So What's My Strategy? Should I Care About This Ratio?

No matter which side of the debate they're on, search and usability experts agree on one thing: making pages that your visitors like is always good for search engines.

Checking the code-to-text ratio is a good way to help yourself ensure that your pages aren't too code heavy and/or too large. If they have a good code-to-text ratio, they likely aren't too image heavy, they likely have a good amount of text, the page probably isn't too huge to load quickly, and the code's likely pretty clean. These *are*, indisputably, all good things for getting indexed well, and checking the ratio is therefore a quick and easy way to tell if you're making your pages better over time.

See the resources section for ways to check your code-to-text ratio, and ways to make sure your pages stay well-optimized.

Resources

Free Tools to Check Code-to-Text Ratio

Content ratio tools extract the text from paragraphs and the anchor text from HTML code and calculates the content ratio based on this information. Try these and see what you find:

[Firefox free text to code ratio checker from Firefox Add-ons](https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/150366?src=oftenusedwith)

(<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/150366?src=oftenusedwith>)

[RankQuest Text-Ratio Checker](http://www.rankquest.com/tools/Text-Ratio.php) (<http://www.rankquest.com/tools/Text-Ratio.php>)

How to Get Good Page to Code Ratio

Here are a few basics to keep in mind as you're working to "lighten up" your page code.

- Keep your code lean. Remove as much erroneous code as possible. Remove comments; get rid of huge white spaces; avoid lots of spaces and tabs. You can often shave off a few kilobytes of the total file size just by removing things like this.
- In most cases, tables can be avoided; don't use them for layout unless they really make the most sense for your particular content.
- Streamline by using cascading style sheets (CSS) for formatting rather than font tags and other older means of formatting.
- Research and size images carefully and appropriately.

Other Resources

Always check Google Webmaster Central for good rules of thumb and practical advice; the forums can be very helpful: <http://www.google.com/support/forum/p/Webmasters?hl=en>.

Also see, regarding file size maximums: <http://articles.sitepoint.com/article/indexing-limits-where-bots-stop>

Summary

Don't obsess over the page to code ratio, but do use it as one of the few objective measures of how your page content is changing over time, and as a simple means of ensuring that you're keeping lots of fresh, visible text content, not making your pages too code heavy and interfering with the user experience.

About Ability Commerce

Ability Commerce designs ecommerce software and solutions to meet the specific needs of multi-channel merchants. Together with their parent company, Marketing Concepts, they employ more than 120 staff members with offices in Delray Beach, Florida and Spicer, Minnesota.

Our Ability SmartSite ecommerce site design and management tool is a quick and easy way to ensure that your site's code stays clean and indexes high. When the algorithms change, your site keeps pace—our experts keep tabs on the search engines and the industry discussions to make sure your sites do what they should behind the scenes. You concentrate on selling your products; we concentrate on making sure your site stays state-of-the-industry.

For more information about our best-practice marketing solutions please call 561-330-3151, or visit us on the web at www.AbilityCommerce.com.