Search Ranking Factors and Rank Correlations for Greek Ferry Routes Websites

Google | Greece | 2016
The goal of this study is to provide webmasters, SEOs and content marketers with detailed insights into which aspects are important for Google’s search rankings in 2016, by investigating average values of the top search results from Free and web-available data.

Case study: Greek Ferry Route Websites

The research uses methodology based on Searchmetric™ study “Search Ranking Factors and Rank Correlations Google U.S. 2015”

Searchmetrics, founded in 2005 is the pioneer and leading global enterprise platform for Search Experience Optimization. Search Experience Optimization combines SEO, Content Performance Marketing, Social Media and PR analysis to create the foundation for developing and executing a successful content strategy. It places the spotlight on the customer, contributing to a superior and memorable online experience.

Over 100,000 users from more than 8,000 brands use the Searchmetrics Suite to plan, execute, measure and report on their digital marketing strategies. Supported by its Research Cloud, which is a unique continually updated global data and knowledge repository, Searchmetrics answers the key questions asked by SEO professionals and digital marketers. It delivers a wealth of forecasts, analytic insights and recommendations that boost visibility and engagement, and increase online revenue. Many respected brands, such as T-Mobile, eBay, Siemens, Zalando, Tripadvisor and Symantec, rely on the Searchmetrics Suite.
Internet users consider search engines as the central reference point for exploring online content. The results of their queries, transfer them to websites and information that they could not access otherwise.

Google, Bing, Baidu and Yahoo are dominating the search engine market and have been used by most people in the world, but the largest market share is belonging to Google.
In order to have reliable results we had to choose the correct keywords for our research. There are many factors which we had to isolate.

**Localization:** We decide to use a Greek language keywords in Greek Google’s website. (google.gr). The reason for the usage of non-English language is to protect results from potential unidentified factors with Global impact.

**Subject:** We decided to make our research in Greek tourism websites and particularly in Ferry Routes website. Greece is a country with almost 3000 islands in which 200 of them have permanent residents. Ferry routes website have extreme traffic in summer from vacation travelers and medium traffic all the other year due to residents.

**Keyword research:** After studying result from Google Trends website and Google Adwords database we realize that the keyword with the most searches for ferry routes was the 2 words phrase, «δρομολόγια» (routes) with selected destination. We focus in Cyclades islands destinations and we subtract destinations that have airports or have no residents. We wanted to check Google’s result in locations where Ferry boats are the regular and the only mean of transport.
Keywords Selection: We finally select the below 16 keywords for our study:
Δρομολόγια Άνδρος
Δρομολόγια Φολέγανδρος
Δρομολόγια Ίος
Δρομολόγια Κέα
Δρομολόγια Κουφονήσι
Δρομολόγια Κύθνος
Δρομολόγια Σέριφος
Δρομολόγια Σίφνος
Δρομολόγια Τήνος
Δρομολόγια Αμοργός
Δρομολόγια Ανάφη
Δρομολόγια Δονούσα
Δρομολόγια Ηρακλεία
Δρομολόγια Κίμωλος
Δρομολόγια Σχοινούσα
Δρομολόγια Σίκινος

Data collection: The selected keywords were been searched from the same PC, from a single IP, during the same day (June 12th 2016), in which we wrote down the 20 first results from every search of the selective keywords.

Factor Selection: The factors which we test are 43 different factors, which someone can find easily and free through Third party sources, freeware applications, or browser add-ons. The factors were divided in the following categories:
• Technical,
• User Experience,
• Content,
• Social Networks,
• Backlinks,
• Mobile Friendliness,
• SEO Tools
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Social Networks</th>
<th>Backlinks</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
<th>SEO Tools</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Title Tag</td>
<td>24. Keyword in Domain</td>
<td>27. Facebook Activity</td>
<td>29. Root Citation</td>
<td>37. Mobile Pagespeed</td>
<td>42. Moz Rank</td>
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<td>5. Alt Attribute</td>
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<td>33. URL Citation</td>
<td>41. Mobile Friendly</td>
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<td>6. Broken Links</td>
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<td>34. URL Trust</td>
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<td>7. WWW Resolve</td>
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<td>8. IP Canonicalization</td>
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<td>36. Referring Domains</td>
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<td>9. Robots.txt</td>
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<td>10. XML Sitemap</td>
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<td>11. URL Rewrite</td>
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<td>12. Underscores in the URLs</td>
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<td>13. Blocking Factors</td>
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<td>14. Custom 404 Page</td>
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<td>15. Language</td>
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<td>16. Structured Data Markup</td>
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<td>17. SSL Secure</td>
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<td>18. Page Size (Mb)</td>
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<td>User Experience</td>
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<td>19. Google Analytics</td>
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<td>20. Directory Browsing</td>
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<td>21. Desktop Pagespeed</td>
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<td>22. Load Time (Sec)</td>
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<td>23. Ping</td>
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Definition: The TITLE tag is a descriptive name of a page, that is shown by browsers as the page name in the browser window.

Comments: The content of the Title Tag is one of the most important factors used by search engines in determining the relevancy of the page against search queries and the content of the Title Tag can often be shown in the Search Engine Results Pages.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: There is no valuable statistical results due to the fact that almost all websites uses Title tag.

Other sources: WooRank: High impact Searchmetrics: Positive impact
**Definition:** Meta descriptions are HTML attributes that provide concise explanations of the contents of web pages. Meta descriptions are commonly used on search engine result pages to display preview snippets for a given page.

**Comments:** Strong meta description text will help optimize the search engine results page; headings help organize the landing page content. This improves the user experience, click-through rates and bounce rates, which will in turn improve rankings.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** Almost 50% High ranked website don’t use any Meta.

**Other sources:** 
- **WooRank:** High impact
- **Searchmetrics:** Positive impact

**Correlation:** 0.45
**Definition**: The `<h1>` to `<h6>` tags are used to define HTML headings. `<h1>` defines the most important heading.

**Comments**: The reasons for these elements is the search engine robot better able to obtain the relevant information from these parameters - implementation of these components also means an enhanced user experience.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites**: Almost half or the average top 20 website in results does not use H1 tags.

**Other sources**: **WooRank**: Medium impact
**Definition:** The `<h1>` to `<h6>` tags are used to define HTML headings. `<h1>` defines the most important heading.

**Comments:** The reasons for these elements is the search engine robot better able to obtain the relevant information from these parameters - implementation of these components also means an enhanced user experience.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is a certain Correlation between the h2 tag existence and Ranking position.

**Other sources:** **WooRank:** Medium impact

*Correlation: -0.55*
Definition: Alternative allows you to add a description to an image.

Comments: Alternative text helps make an image more likely to appear in a Google image search.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: There is not any significant result for the regular usage of Alt Attribute for the Greek Ferry Route Websites.

Other sources: WooRank: Medium impact
Definition: Broken links send users to non-existent web pages.

Comments: They hurt a site's usability and reputation, which impacts SEO.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The higher we move in ranking position, lesser the existence of broken Links. Even though there is no significant correlation

Other sources: WooRank: High impact
**Definition**: Search engines see the www.randomwebsite.com and randomwebsite.com as different websites.

**Comments**: This means they could see a large amount of duplicate content, which they don't like.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites**: The higher we move in ranking position, lesser the existence of www Resolve. Statistically there is high correlation.

**Other sources**: **WooRank**: High impact

**Correlation**: -0.59
Definition: If there are multiple domain names under one IP address, the search engine could possibly label the websites as duplicate content.

Comments: From a SEO point of view, canonicalization is very important. If you have a website that has the same content spread across different URLs, search engines will split the rankings as well.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The vast majority of Greek Ferry Route Website use IP Canonicalization algorithm.

Other sources: WooRank: Low impact
**Definition**: A robots.txt file allows you to restrict the access of search engine crawlers to prevent them from accessing specific pages or directories.

**Comments**: They also point the web crawler to your page’s XML sitemap file.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites**: The higher we move in ranking position, lesser the existence of Robots.txt file. Statistically there is high correlation.

**Other sources**: WooRank: High impact
Definition: The Sitemaps protocol allows a webmaster to inform search engines about URLs on a website that are available for crawling. A Sitemap is an XML file that lists the URLs for a site. It allows webmasters to include additional information about each URL: when it was last updated, how often it changes, and how important it is in relation to other URLs in the site.

Comments: This allows search engines to crawl the site more intelligently and more quickly.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: There is not exist any statistical significance

Other sources: WooRank: High impact
**Definition:** URL parameters are used to track user behaviors on site (session IDs), traffic sources (referrer IDs) or to give users control over the content on the page (sorting and filtering).

**Comments:** The issue with URL parameters is that Google sees each unique parameter value as a new URL hosting the same thing - meaning you could have a duplicate content problem. Sometimes, it’s able to recognize these URLs and group them together. It then algorithmically decides which URL is the best representation of the group and uses it to consolidate ranking signals and display in search results.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** In somewhat it seems that there is a relation but without statistical significance.

**Other sources:** WooRank: Low impact
**Definition:** Use the URL Parameters Tool in Google Search Console to tell Google how your URL parameters affect page content and how to crawl URLs with parameters.

**Comments:** Use this tool very carefully - you can easily prevent Google from crawling pages you want indexed through overly restrictive crawling settings, especially if you have URLs with multiple parameters.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is no any statistical significance

**Other sources:** WooRank: Low impact
Definition: While it often looks nicer, Flash content can't be properly indexed by search engines. Maximize your SEO efforts by avoiding Flash.

Comments: Search engines also have problems with frames because they can't crawl or index the content within them. Avoid them if you can and use a NoFrames tag when you can't.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: In somewhat it seems that there is a relation but without statistical significance.

Other sources: WooRank: Medium impact
Definition: The 404 or Not Found error message is a Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) standard response code, in computer network communications, to indicate that the client was able to communicate with a given server, but the server could not find what was requested.

Comments: Custom 404 error pages are an opportunity for you to reduce customer frustration and link to other pages on your site.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: It seems that there is a strong relation, with high correlation rating.

Other sources: WooRank: Medium impact
**Definition:** The HTML lang attribute can be used to declare the language of a Web page or a portion of a Web page. This is meant to assist search engines and browsers.

**Comments:** Make sure your declared language is the same as the language detected by Google.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** More than half of the GFR Websites just let Google to detect their language. In the other hand the website that declare their language in HTML seem to gain highest Google positions.

**Other sources:** *WooRank: Medium impact*
**Definition:** Structured Data Markup is used to generate Rich Snippets in search engine results. It is a way for website owners to send structured data to search engine robots; helping them to understand your content and create well-presented search results.

**Comments:** Get the most out of Google's rich snippets for content types such as: Reviews, People, Products, Businesses and Organizations, Recipes, Events, Videos and Music.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** No Structured Data Markup has been detected in most of cases. It seems that there is a strong relation, with high correlation rating.

**Other sources:** **WooRank:** Medium impact

**Correlation:** -0.62
**Definition:** Using an SSL certificate creates an encrypted connection between your visitor's browser and your website's server adding an extra layer of security.

**Comments:** In 2014, Google™ announced that HTTPS would become part of their ranking algorithm and since your website is not HTTPS, it will likely rank below your HTTPS competitors.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is strong correlation between SSL Certificate existence and Ranking position. Still there is only a very small number of website that use it.

**Other sources:** WooRank: Medium impact
**Definition:** Page size is the actual size of all data that have to been downloaded to any user in order the website to appear in user’s browser. Such as the HTML document, any included images, style sheets, scripts, and other media.

**Comments:** With responsive practically becoming the standard, it’s harder than ever to define the best size for a website.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is not exist any statistically significant evidence that explain any relation with Google ranking positions

**Other sources:** **WooRank:** No impact
**Definition:** Web analytics let you measure visitor activity on your website. You should have at least one analytics tool installed, but it can also be good to install a second in order to cross-check the data. Popular Analytics Tools Include: Google™ Analytics, Quantcast™, AdobeAnalytics™, Piwik™, chartbeat™, Clicky™, ClickTale™, etc.

**Comments:** Using Google analytics actually gives Google’s access to all of your tracking data for perfect evaluation.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** Most of the website have install Google’s analytics. Seems to have a light impact but without any significant correlation.

**Other sources:** **WooRank:** Medium impact
**Definition:** A web directory or link directory is a directory on the World Wide Web. A collection of data organised into categories. It specializes in linking to other web sites and categorizing those links.

**Comments:** A web directory is not a search engine and does not display lists of web pages based on keywords; instead, it lists web sites by category and subcategory.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** Most of the websites use directories. Seems to have a very light impact but without any significant correlation.

**Other sources:** **WooRank:** High impact
**Definition:** PageSpeed Insights is an online tool which helps in identifying performance best practices on any given website, provides suggestions on a webpage’s optimizations, and suggests overall ideas of how to make a website faster. This tool can be accessed directly in any browser. Per URL request, it grades webpage performance on a scale from 1 to 100 and provides a report on suggested optimizations, divided into categories of high, medium, and low priorities. Most of the observed issues are image optimization, minification of js & css, and render blocking, which addressed on PageSpeed Insights.

**Comments:** According to several researchers, mod_pagespeed can reduce loading times by up to 80% (Wikipedia).

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is not any significant result in our cases.

**Other sources:** Google: High impact
**Definition**: Load time refers to the time in which web pages are downloaded and displayed on the user’s web browser.

**Comments**: Faster website download speeds have been shown to increase visitor retention and loyalty and user satisfaction, especially for users with slow internet connections and those on mobile devices.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites**: It seems that there is strong impact in ranking position due to Load Time. Probably due to certain rare cases there was not any Significant correlations in this case study.

**Other sources**: **WooRank**: High impact, Pingdom.com : High impact, Google.com : High impact

**Correlation**: Non-Significant
**Definition:** Ping is a computer network administration software utility used to test the reachability of a host on an Internet Protocol (IP) network. It measures the round-trip time for messages sent from the originating host to a destination computer that are echoed back to the source.

**Comments:** The command-line options of the ping utility and its output vary between the numerous implementations. Options may include the size of the payload, count of tests, limits for the number of network hops (TTL) that probes traverse, and interval between the requests and the physical distance between user and server.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** Smallest Ping times take place in servers near to Users. Website which are hosted in Greece or even in Europe have better ranking position, in our cases, than others in far distances. 

*Correlation 0.39*
**Definition:** The usage of the investigated keyword in the domain name of the website.

**Comments:** Several years ago, having a keyword as a domain name had positive effects on the ranking of this domain for the respective keyword.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is not any significant result in our cases.
Definition: The usage of the investigated key word in the URL address of the particular webpage which appear in the search results.

Comments: Having a keyword as a URL address have positive effects on the ranking of this domain for the respective keyword.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: There is a certain relation of the existence of search keyword in the website’s directory.
**Definition:** Domain age answers to the real age (in years) of the first domain name use.

**Comments:** In general Google needs a lot of months or years in order to evaluate the significant of website. In addition older website have more content.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is not exist any significant result, in our cases.
Definition: The number of Facebook likes & shares across all examined search result positions.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

Other sources: WooRank: High impact, SearchMetrics High impact
**Definition:** The number of Google+ interactions across all examined search result positions.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

**Other sources:** *WooRank*: High impact, *SearchMetrics*: High impact

**Correlation:** -0.65
Definition: A metric designed to predict how influential a link in a site might be, by considering the links pointing to it. It does not bother about the quality of links.

Comments: If there are more domains pointing to a webpage, then the more influential it is.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

Other sources: Majestic: High impact, Google: High impact (PageRank)
**Definition:** A metric designed to decide how trustworthy the link is. Based on the QUALITY of backlinks pointing to the site.

**Comments:** If there are authoritative, trustworthy backlinks to a site, then the greater is the trust flow.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

**Other sources:** Mamma: High impact, Google: High impact (Pagerank)
Definition: This value represents the number of external backlinks. A backlink for a given web resource is a link from some other website (the referrer) to that web resource (the referent).

Comments: A backlink is a reference comparable to a citation. The quantity and sources of backlinks for a web page are among the factors that Google's PageRank algorithm evaluates in order to estimate how important the page is. The PageRank score is, in turn, one of the variables that Google Search uses to determine how high a web page should go in search results. This weighting of backlinks is analogous to citation analysis of books, scholarly papers, and academic journals.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

Other sources: Majestic: High impact, Google: High impact (PageRank)
Definition: This value is similar with the external links counter. The only difference is that count only unique Domains.

Comments: Many backlinks of a single website is counting as one.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

Other sources: Majestic: High impact, Google: High impact (Pagerank)
**Definition:** A metric designed to predict how influential a link in a site might be, by considering the links pointing to it. It does not bother about the quality of links. This is similar with Root citation with the only difference that count only for a certain URL.

**Comments:** If there are more domains pointing to a webpage, then the more influential it is.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** The rank correlations between the individual positions are non Significant.

**Other sources:** Majestic: High impact, Google: High impact (Pagerank)
**Definition**: A metric designed to decide how trustworthy the link is. Based on the QUALITY of backlinks pointing to the site. This is similar with Root Trust with the only difference that count only for a certain URL.

**Comments**: If there are authoritative, trustworthy backlinks to a site, then the greater is the trust flow.

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**Comments:** A backlink is a reference comparable to a citation. The quantity and sources of backlinks for a web page are among the factors that Google's PageRank algorithm evaluates in order to estimate how important the page is. The PageRank score is, in turn, one of the variables that Google Search uses to determine how high a web page should go in search results. This weighting of backlinks is analogous to citation analysis of books, scholarly papers, and academic journals.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** The rank correlations between the individual positions are non-significant.

**Other sources:** *Majestic:* High impact, *Google:* High impact (PageRank)
Definition: This value is similar with the external links counter. The only difference is that count only unique Domains and that count only for a certain URL.

Comments: Many backlinks of a single website is counting as one.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The rank correlations between the individual positions are non Significant.

Other sources: Majestic: High impact, Google: High impact (Pagerank)
**Definition:** PageSpeed Insights is an online tool which helps in identifying performance best practices on any given website, provides suggestions on a webpage’s optimizations, and suggests overall ideas of how to make a website faster. This tool can be accessed directly in any browser. Per URL request, it grades webpage performance on a scale from 1 to 100 and provides a report on suggested optimizations, divided into categories of high, medium, and low priorities. Most of the observed issues are image optimization, minification of js&css, and render blocking, which addressed on PageSpeed Insights. In this particular metric the check is focused to Mobile devices only.

**Comments:** According to several researchers, mod_pagespeed can reduce loading times by up to 80% (Wikipedia)

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is not exist any significant result, in our cases.

**Other sources:**
- **Google:** High impact

**Correlation**
- Non-Significant
Definition: The Mobile App UX Principles report is a conversion optimisation framework tailored to "Smartphone" mobile apps. It defines the key considerations when assessing apps, in order to identify how to improve the user experience (UX), optimise conversion and measure performance.

Comments: It covers the whole customer journey, conversion points at each stage, and usability hygiene.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: There is not exist any significant result, in our cases.

Other sources: Google: High impact
**Definition:** The ability of a website to be accessed by mobile devices.

**Comments:** Is useful if a website does not embed any special types of web content, such as Flash, Silverlight or Java,

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** There is a certain Correlation between Mobile Compatibility and Ranking position.

**Other sources:** **WooRank:** Medium impact

**Correlation**

\[ -0.49 \]
Definition: This is a value point if the web page’s text is legible on mobile devices.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

Other sources: WooRank: Medium impact

Correlation: -0.66
Definition: This Google tool helps to analyze a web page and report if the page has a mobile-friendly design.

Comments:

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The rank correlations between the individual positions are non-significant.

Other sources: Google: High impact
**Definition:** MozRank represents a link popularity score. It reflects the importance of any given web page on the Internet. Pages earn MozRank by the number and quality of other pages that link to them. The higher the quality of the incoming links, the higher the MozRank.

**Comments:** They calculate this score on a logarithmic scale between 0 and 100. Thus, it's much easier to improve from a MozRank of 30 to 40 than it is to improve from 80 to 90. An "average" MozRank of what most people think of as a normal page on the Internet is around 30.

**Greek Ferry Route Websites:** The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

**Other sources:** Moz: High impact

**Correlation:** -0.69
Definition: WooRank is an online website review SEO tool. Really simple to use, just enter the URL you want to analyze in the designated field and click enter. WooRank then analyzes and creates a deep SEO analysis, shows you where your site is doing well, where the areas for improvement are and what errors you need to fix. WooRank also provides a dynamic grade on a 100-point scale that represents your overall Internet Marketing effectiveness at a given time.

Greek Ferry Route Websites: The rank correlations between the individual positions are high.

Other sources: WooRank: High impact
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<td>Keyword in Sub-Directory</td>
<td>Manual</td>
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<td>Webconfs.com</td>
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<td>Woorank.com</td>
<td><strong>Social Networks</strong></td>
<td>Moz.com</td>
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**Social Networks**

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**Mobile**

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**Alternative Sources**

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<td>43 Woorank</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources**

Legent: (++) Very Positive Impact, (+) Positive impact, (0) No impact, (-) Negative impact

GFRW: Greek Ferry Routes Websites
✓ **Technical** factors are important for achieving good rankings. Help Search engines to read your content better and are easy to apply them in websites, in order to optimize rankings. An ever increasing number of pages are highly optimized and feature a meta description as well as components such as H-tags.

✓ From that point Developers must invest in **User Experience** factors in order to achieve longer and more in depth visits in websites. Better loading times and faster browsing are always good.

✓ Depending of the subject of the website **Content** gives value over time. Bigger content gives more data. But from that point quantity doesn’t mean always quality. The quality content has as a result better user opinions.

✓ Usually Trusted websites are valuable sources, so **Backlinks** connect them with other websites. Backlinks also been measured for their quantity and quality. Actually this is one of the most import factor for Search engines because it really proves the ranking position.

✓ On the other hand **Social Network** interaction provides how useful is our content and to whom.

✓ Finally the increasing usage of Mobile devices highlights the importance for **Mobile** friendly websites.

✓ In addition, every developer or website owner must trust some **Alternative Sources** to evaluate better Search Engine Optimization.
• Hellenic Chamber of Hotels, 2016. HOTEL RESIDENCES OF GREECE. s.l.: Hellenic Chamber of Hotels.
• PwC, 2016. IAB internet advertising revenue report. s.l.: Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB).