

THE REFERENCING
OF BUILDING MATERIALS

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a stylized 'E' and 'I' followed by 'nic' and a long horizontal stroke.

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The opinions expressed are those of the author, and hence the bounds of professional discretion require that it's desirable to anonymize texts. The letters X, Y and Z don't refer to the same organizations from one work to another. Any resemblance to existing natural or legal persons of the past, present and future is purely coincidental.

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- Mrs. C Y, Mr. P Y and the full body of the Y team and the Z group

The Y business students of my graduating class for the years 2016-2018, and other students at the Y school whom I constructively worked with.

Foreword

This essay was born out of a concrete concern for the website of the company, so that its products are as far as possible correctly indexed by search engines. Within the pages you'll discover a more detailed presentation of stakeholders and issues. I'm going to speak now about my motivations.

I was born in 1975, I have been integrated into the labor market since 1993, and I have worked mainly in the field of sales, especially in real estate. I embarked on a hands-on training path, with already five years of professional experience as a sales manager and a supervisor, and it was only late in the day that I was finally able to apply to a business school, because my record over the past years in my activities and the work I do today allow me to have enough time to participate fully in training and take full advantage of it.

It's possible to conciliate various activities, but working and pursuing vocational training and education at the same time is more difficult. In my personal and professional experience, marketing is considered as a natural development of sales force and bargaining; similarly, my interest in construction materials and building is experienced as a way of deepening the specific knowledge which I have of real estate. This essay is the result of this convergence.

So with this foreword I would like to talk about me. As will be seen below, the choice of referring to myself in the third person (using terms such as “the candidate”, “the student worker”, “the man on mission”) is a natural choice as this may help to show a willingness to take distance. The following pages come from the shop floor. Reflection paved the way for their final form.

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Introduction

The building materials trade is a traditional business. At the same time the importance given over the Internet in the economy since the 1990s has led all players in the sector to take account of the need to serve the public, through information and communication technologies (ICTs), in such a way as to provide the best information we can and thus improve the attractiveness of such materials, while showing how the business sets itself apart from the competition into the surrounding geographical neighborhood, especially in terms of choice and quality. The imperative to keep customers up to date in order to attract more demand raises the question of the referencing of building materials on websites.

It would become immediately obvious that analysis should consider two important things: in addition to the above-mentioned referencing, there are also user experiences. Given the diversity of activities and products within the context of the construction sector and the building materials trade, do we always have to do the same when we are expanding a dedicated website content, in compliance with the specific recommendations of a communication agency in order to ensure search engine optimization (SEO) of the site? That actually brings us to another question, which is the central issue of this essay: when trying to achieve the double objective of improving SEO and enhancing the user experience (a site that can easily be found and satisfied surfers with the content), in this case in the building materials sector, do we always have to meet the same criteria? In other words, to sum up: do we always have to bring SEO into line with user experiences?

Whatever the answer to the key question is, the resulting working hypothesis builds logically upon the search for balance between, on the one hand, a well-referenced corporate website in comparison with other traders competing in materials and, on the other hand, customers who are pleased with the website and

agreeing with giving the business a chance. We can see that the goal of this question, the central question, and the working hypothesis is part of a commercial and pragmatic vision, for this goal suggests that a well-referenced website in search engines is only beneficial for the business if, once accessed, the website provides tangible results, such as new interested visitors who have discovered the business through the Internet and have therefore decided to purchase locally because they valued the online presentation of the products concerned.

This passage from the *Mercator* summarizes the topic brought up by the generalities of referencing: “We have seen that the display order of search engines results is a crucial factor as the top positions monopolize clicks. The position in search engines results is dependent on the quality of what is improperly called “natural indexing”, which actually has little to do with a natural process since it’s largely the result of the full respect of technical recommendations in relation to search engines (programming languages, texts formatted with tags, organization of websites facilitating indexing by search engines...). It is worth adopting best practices in terms of developing editorial contents (section names, keywords) and applying techniques that can be used to make websites more popular (number and quality of the links to them)”¹.

In order to explore these issues related to the features of building materials, we will follow a three-point plan. Firstly, it will be a matter of establishing a theoretical framework for the referencing of building materials. Secondly, this essay will provide an example of a business website in the X case relating to the building materials trade. Thirdly, an attempt will be made to present the means of action for implementation intended to improve SEO of the materials website following a number of findings in the field.

¹ Lendrevie J., Lévy J., *Mercator*, 11th edition, Dunod, 2014, p. 479

At first it will be necessary to define the main concepts involving the referencing of building materials: referencing, building materials, materials, fields of construction, trading, materials trade, products, construction products, and after that reference will be made to the generalities of natural indexing (even though the authors of the *Mercator* don't find these terms appropriate as we have just seen), SEO of corporate websites in all sectors and SEO of corporate websites in the building materials trade. Attention will also be given to principal authors who are experts in the field of referencing, their ideas and the practical implications of these ideas in materials trade: following a brief presentation of the history of the Internet, a quick report on research into referencing and recent developments, we shall quote some authors and ideas, and after that we will be able to provide an overview on the implementation of these ideas in practice, looking at some corporate websites in the number of big businesses in the building materials sector.

Next, the book's first section will focus on the relationship between referencing and the many skills deployed throughout and around this particular field, in the following points: the versatility of companies in the materials trade and its influence over referencing, the role of communication agencies in the natural indexing of traders specializing in building materials, the case of the referencing of materials suppliers' websites for professionals, the local competition and local strategies. This will bring us to the very heart of the subject, and from this approach, therefore, trading companies as such will be seen as belonging to an advertising, economic, cultural, ethical and evolving dimension. The first section will conclude with the question of the direct and indirect impacts relating to referencing, communication and marketing, in general and in particular with respect to building materials.

In a second step, we will present the X business and the context of the mission with regard to communication & marketing: the

facilities, the suppliers, the communication agency, the business school and the marketing man on mission, the company's history, the aspects of the mission relating to the referencing of the website; the teams, the product families. In this way, having laid these foundations, we will then be able to form a better understanding of the contents we needed to produce for the purpose of the website, through the perspective of a complex approach involving referencing, communication and marketing, right to the edge: user experiences, photos on the website and the underlying methodology.

Third and last, progress updates will be made, areas of improvement will be defined, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the following questions will be answered:

- What more could be done to manage the website and related issues?
- Who is going to be dealing with them and how is that going to happen?

The introduction and the first section cover all footnotes. The reason for that is because the sources from which it has been possible to write the second and third sections follow on from the first theoretical references, or from the help received from field agents throughout the mission: information provided by managers or employees + professional literature and technical documentation available for consultation on the premises. Please refer to annexes for further detail. With the exception of competing websites, it can therefore be assumed that there's only one footnote in respect of the second and third sections of the essay as a whole: the source is always the X space or X materials. The style is sometimes enumerated, which is justified by the importance of explaining the context through use of correct terminology.

Part one – Theoretical research regarding referencing construction products and building materials

1.1. General information about the natural referencing of building materials trade companies

1.1.1. Definitions of the key concepts of the referencing of materials

As can be seen here referencing can be defined both as “taking into account websites in search engines and directories” and “technical processes designed to improve the position of websites in search results (position in search engines)”². This double definition is rather general in nature and at the same time gives some idea of the complexity of referencing, while being suitable for the problems encountered on companies premises in the efforts aiming at increasing visibility in public life.

In keeping with the title, this essay deals about the referencing of building materials. Building materials are “materials used in the construction sectors: building and public works (BPW)”³. The term materials usually means: “naturally or artificially occurring elements transformed as a result of human action to produce objects”⁴. These broad definitions are nevertheless correct and may have merit for use in an analysis of multifaceted companies from a supply side perspective, which is the case of trading of building materials companies in comparison with one or the other of their specialty suppliers.

Regarding the construction sectors, we must also point out the following: “Construction activities are mainly implementation or installation activities at the customer’s site, both for new construction as well as renovations, including repair or maintenance. (...) Building and civil engineering works are complex structures as a result of business activity in many areas.

² <http://aide.meabilis.fr/glossaire/r/definition-referencement.html>

³ <http://www.techno-science.net/?onglet=glossaire&definition=4711>

⁴ <http://www.techno-science.net/?onglet=glossaire&definition=4596>