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EBOOK

SEO FOR BEGINNERS

AN INTRODUCTION TO SEO BASICS

Search...

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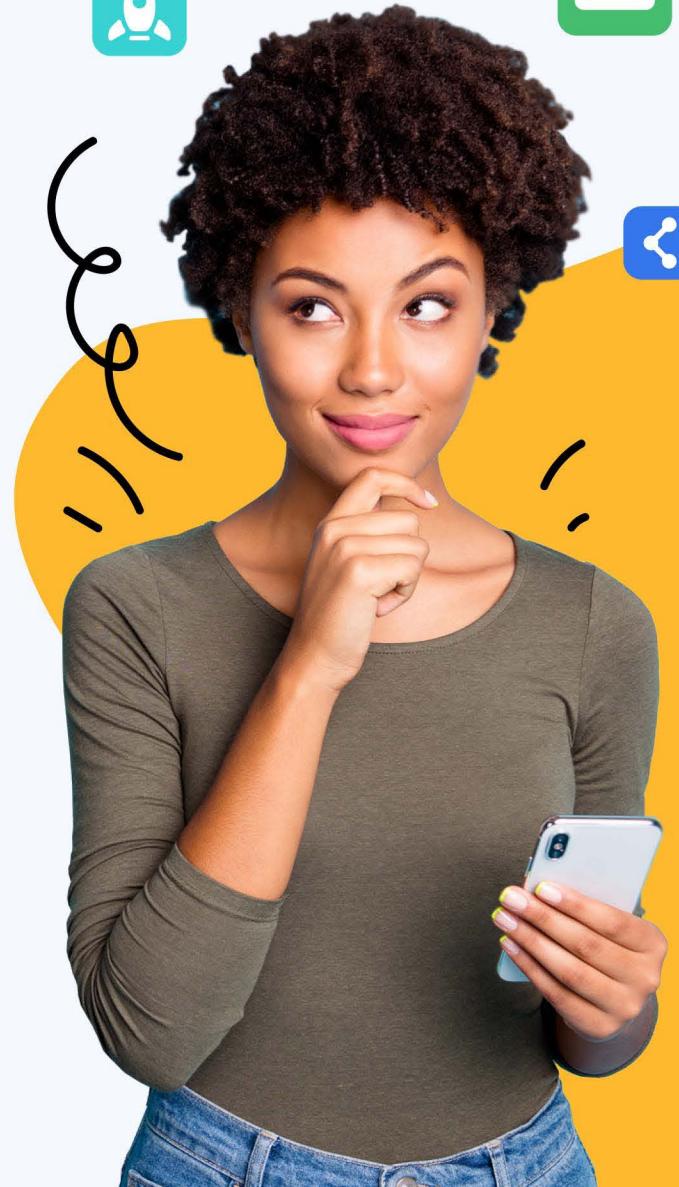
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SEO 1⬤1 QUIZ

See how much you've learned about search engine optimization after reading this guide.

Take our short quiz on the basics of SEO at the end of the ebook!

WHAT IS
SEO & HOW
IT WORKS

1

AUTHOR
LOREN BAKER

SEO, HTTPS, PBN, KPI.

These are just a few industry terms SEO professionals use every day.

Yet if you're a small business owner or new to the industry, you couldn't tell you what those acronyms stand for.

And, it can seem intimidating to ask.

So, what in the world is SEO? What does all this mean?

Don't worry. I'll help you become fluent in the language of SEO.

This post will cover everything I know about SEO. Well, everything that I could fit into 2,000 or so words at least.

WHAT IS SEO, ANYWAY?

SEO stands for search engine optimization.

At its core, SEO is the process of making your site rank as high as possible in Google when someone types in "burrito blanket" (or whatever it is you sell, promote, or talk about.)

The higher your site ranks, the more visible your business is, and the more traffic and sales your business is likely to generate.

If you are just getting started in SEO, though, you might be a little lost.

There are tons of sites, books, guides (**we even wrote one here at Search Engine Journal**) – and you might find that most of those resources offer conflicting information.

Part of the reason SEO frustrates so many people is that it changes continuously.

Why? Because when marketers get their teeth into a new "strategy," they like to run it into the ground.

Essentially, we are why we can't have nice things.

Also, there's the fact that **Google is constantly updating its algorithm**.

SEO is a never-ending battle to get more eyes on your website and convince Google that your site is worth sending searchers to.

YOUR TOP SEO QUESTIONS ANSWERED

So what matters when it comes to SEO?

- Is it all about the links?
- Does the URL structure really matter?
- What exactly is a meta description, anyway?
- Do you need to crank out a 2,000-word blog post four times a day?

Before diving into the more technical aspects of SEO, I'm going to answer the most-asked questions about SEO.

Is SEO Dead?

Yes. It's completely dead.

Our jobs are over. You should just quit now.

I'm kidding, mostly.

I'd argue that SEO is constantly dying repeatedly. Think it like Bill Murray in Groundhog Day.

As the strategies we've come to know and love gets replaced by newer, more effective strategies, SEO best practices die, and new ones are reborn.

So while it isn't dead, SEO is always changing. If you want to succeed at SEO, you've got to be willing to roll with the punches.

What Is The Most Important SEO Factor?

There isn't one golden SEO factor that outranks all the others.

One of the most common answers you'll get in SEO is, "Well, it depends...." Which might be frustrating, but it's the truth.

- Do links matter? Yes.
- Do you have to have links to rank? Probably, but not necessarily.
- Does content length matter? Yes, but a crappy long post won't outrank a short, amazing post.

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How Long Does SEO Take to Work?

Well, it depends. (Sorry!)

Only Google knows exactly how its algorithm works.

They do release updates, and there are a few lists out there of the most crucial ranking factors.

The truth is SEO takes as long as it takes – that might be weeks or even months, depending on your strategy. If someone else does something just a tiny bit better, you might get bumped off the top of the SERPs.

What Is The Difference Between On-Page SEO & Off-Page SEO?

On-page SEO refers to changes you make on the site you own that impact SEO.

For example, **adding an XML sitemap to boost your SEO.** Off-page SEO refers to SEO strategies that happen off your website, such as building links to pillar content.

Link Building Is Hard – Can't I Just Buy Links?

You could. You could also run your hand through a blender – no one is going to stop you. But it's an ineffective SEO strategy.

Rather than buying links, I'd recommend starting here, with **our guide to building and acquiring links.**

SEO FACTORS THAT RULE TODAY & BEYOND

Now that we've covered the basics, you are ready to get your hands dirty.

Below, we'll cover a few of the most critical SEO factors.

Keep in mind that **SEO trends change constantly,** and what works now might not work in a few months.

Relevant, Optimized Content Wins Every Time

There are a ton of technical SEO factors – site structure, anchor text, URL structure, and so forth.

Those details matter, but the backbone of SEO is high-quality, optimized content. If you get that right, the rest of SEO will be much easier.

If you want to crack the first page on Google, you need relevant, well-optimized content that earns links.

What do we mean by high-quality content?

Here are a few things to keep in mind when developing content:

- **Keywords are still critical, but context matters more.** Google crawlers now analyze the context and look for related secondary keywords that share the searcher's intent.
- **Include clear, keyword-rich titles, meta descriptions, alt attributes, H1 tags, and URLs.** These factors tell Google that your site is relevant and helps it rank.
- **Length matters, but relevance matters more.** Google says: "The amount of content necessary for the page to be satisfying depends on the topic and purpose of the page."

In short, ensure that all the content you produce is written for humans first and optimized for Google second.

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Meta Data Matters

Meta data is the title and lines of text that show up in the search results page.

For example, if you Google "who killed Carol Baskin's husband," here's the metadata you'll see:

www.nytimes.com › tiger-king-carole-baskin-don-lewis
'Tiger King': What Happened to Carole Baskin's Ex-Husband ...
Apr 1, 2020 - 'Tiger King': What Happened to **Carole Baskin's Husband**, Don Lewis? ... He repeatedly accused Ms. Baskin of **killing** her **husband** and of ...

en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Disappearance_of_Don_Lewis ▾
Disappearance of Don Lewis - Wikipedia
^ Jump up to: "Tiger King: Who is **Carole Baskin's** first **husband** Jack 'Don' Lewis and when did he disappear?". Metro. March 19, 2020. Archived from the original ...
Background · Investigation · Unofficial theories

Meta data tells the user what they can expect to find if they click on the page.

Optimizing your meta data is pretty simple:

- Include relevant but not repetitive, keywords, and variations in the title and description.
- Keep it short, but not too short. Google cuts off meta descriptions around 160 characters, so aim for less than that.
- Be clear and concise, so users know what to expect.

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Think of meta data as ads for your content.

Why should users click? What can you tell them?

Use the meta to encourage clicks, which will drive traffic, which will lead to more traffic.

Links Matter, But....

Links have been a critical aspect of SEO as long as Google has existed.

Essentially, links work as 'votes' telling Google that other sites think your content is useful and relevant.

The more high-quality, relevant links you acquire, the higher your site will likely rank for related key terms.

In short, links are still fundamental to SEO.

But, quality matters more than quantity.

If you invest in link building as part of your SEO efforts, target links from high-authority, high-traffic websites.

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User Experience (UX) Impacts Rankings

User experience (UX) plays a substantial role in how well your website will rank on Google.

However, user experience depends on a ton of factors like site infrastructure and layout, content, and so forth, making it hard to measure.

If you want to win at SEO in 2020, UX should be a top priority.

Here are a few best practices to follow:

- **Ensure time on page and CTR are high, and the bounce rate is low.** These signals are not direct ranking factors, but optimizing your site for high engagement can help indirectly. Happy users, happy Google.
- **Make your site easy to navigate.** Improve your website's navigation to make sure users quickly Google said Way find a page that they are looking for. "The simpler, the better" approach works perfectly here. Navigation bars, drop-down menus, internal links, and a site search will help.
- **Site speed matters a lot.** In an ideal world, your site should load in less than 2 seconds. Image compression, code and structure optimizations, and faster servers will help. Start with Google's **PageSpeed Insights tool** to see where you stand.

As Google becomes smarter, UX is likely to play an even more important role in the future.

So now is the time to learn the basics and implement best practices on your site.

Mobile Matters More the Ever Before

In 2018, Google **moved to mobile-first indexing**, which means the search engine uses mobile versions of your site to rank your sites in their results.

Google's move makes sense because **more than 50%** of traffic worldwide is generated from a mobile device.

What does that mean for SEO?

First, Google **suggests investing in responsive design.** You need to make your content consistent across desktop and mobile devices and ensure your site loads fast on both mobile and desktop.

In short, you need to up your mobile game or your site to languish at the bottom of Google search results.

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Don't Ignore Voice Search

When it comes to voice, there's a lot of conflicting information out there.

Google said, way back in 2016, that voice searches made up around **20%** of all searches performed in the Google app.

Today, **over a quarter** of all Americans own a smart speaker. Yet **72%** of marketers have no plans to **optimize for voice search.**

Does voice search matter? It does.

Voice search has been growing in popularity and will likely continue to do so. It shouldn't be your #1 SEO priority, but it does make sense to start optimizing for voice search.

Here's why:

Most of the voice search optimization strategies make sense for **semantic search** as well.

Here are a few steps to help optimize your site for voice search:

- Use natural language in content and answer questions.
- Optimize for **featured snippets.**
- Create and markup an FAQ page (use **Question and Answer schemas**).

Voice search optimization is not a must-have right now, but voice search optimizations make sense for Google in general and may give you a leg up in the future.

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3 TIPS FOR ACTUALLY SUCCEEDING IN SEO

There are two types of SEO advice – the technical stuff I covered above, and then there are the core principles of SEO. The technical stuff will change, but these SEO tips stand the test of time.

If It Seems Shady, It Probably Will Burn You

You might have heard of black hat, white hat, and gray hat SEO.

Black hat SEO refers to practices that are totally against Google's terms of service. Like building 10 sites and interlinking them to make Google think your crappy bitcoin sites are legit. This is where that **acronym PBN** comes into play.

Then there is a gray hat, which may not be technically wrong but walks a thin (gray) line.

White hat is above the board, totally legit SEO. Some have argued convincingly, however, that **white hat isn't really a thing anymore.**

A lot of SEO pros walk the gray hat line. And a lot of them get burned.

If you want to succeed in SEO, you need to do things the right way.

If something feels off – like buying or selling links – it's probably going to burn you and torpedo your site.

Trust me. It is not worth the long-term risk.

Read Real Experts

There's a lot of SEO "experts."

Some of them claim to get you the top page of Google "Guaranteed!" others who don't actually do SEO, but write about it a lot.

Follow the real SEO experts and take their advice with a grain of salt.

What works for an ecommerce site in tech isn't necessarily going to work for a restaurant supply store.

Pay attention to what comes from Google directly from folks like **John Mueller** and **Gary Illye**s.

Test, Test, and Test Again

SEO is all about figuring out what works for your site in your industry based on your unique landscape.

The only way to figure that out is to test – and keep testing over and over again.

Remember, all your work may go to waste if Google's latest algorithm update changes things or if your competitor does something new.

Testing is an eternal part of any successful SEO strategy.

CONCLUSION

SEO is ever-evolving.

Every SEO professional would love to find the magic formula that rockets their sites to the top of SERPs and keep them there forever.

Unfortunately, SEO doesn't work that way.

There are rules and best practices, but the core of SEO is about figuring out what works for your site or client and then changing it when it stops working.

**My final advice is this:**

- Keep a close eye on your competitors.
- Follow best practices.
- Test.

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20 YEARS OF SEO:
A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

AUTHOR
LOREN BAKER

Search engine optimization (SEO) very much revolves around Google today.

However, the practice we now know as SEO actually predates the world's most popular search engine co-founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin.

Although it could be argued that SEO and all things search engine marketing began with the launch of the **first website** published in 1991, or perhaps when the first web search engine launched, the story of SEO "officially" begins a bit later, around 1997.

According to **Bob Heyman**, author of "Digital Engagement," we can thank none other than the manager of rock band Jefferson Starship for helping give birth to a new field that we would grow to know as "search engine optimization."

You see, he was quite upset that the official Jefferson Starship website was ranking on Page 4 of some search engine at the time, rather than in Position 1 on Page 1.

Granted, we may never know if this tale is more revisionist history or 100% fact, all signs definitely point to the term SEO originating around 1997.

Do a little more hunting around and you'll see **John Audette** of Multimedia Marketing Group was using the term as early as February 15, 1997.

Ranking high on search engines in 1997 was still a pretty new concept.

It was also very directory driven.

Before DMOZ fueled the original Google classification, LookSmart was powered by Zeal, Go.com was its own directory, and the Yahoo Directory was a major player in Yahoo Search.

If you're unfamiliar with DMOZ, the Mozilla Open Directory Project (remember, Mozilla was a company and Moz was a brand well before SEOMoz), it was basically a Yellow Pages for websites. Which is what Yahoo was originally founded upon, the ability to find the best websites out there as approved by editors.

I started doing SEO in 1998, as a need for our clients who have built cool sites but were getting little traffic.

Little did I know, it would become a lifestyle.

Then again, the World Wide Web was still a pretty new concept at the time to most people.

Today? Everybody wants to rule the search engine results pages (SERPs).

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION VS. SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING

Before Search Engine Optimization became the official name, other terms were used as well.

For example:
- Search engine placement
- Search engine positioning
- Search engine ranking
- Search engine registration
- Search engine submission
- Website promotion

But no discussion would be complete without mentioning another term:

Search Engine Marketing.

At one point in 2001, one prominent industry writer **suggested** search engine marketing as a successor to search engine optimization.

Obviously, it didn't happen.

Prepare yourself now: you're going to see many false claims (e.g., "SEO is dead," "the new SEO"), and attempts at rebranding SEO (e.g., "Search Experience Optimization").

While SEO as a term isn't perfect – after all, we aren't optimizing search engines, we're optimizing our web presence – it has remained the preferred term of our industry for more than 20 years now and likely will be for the foreseeable future.

As for **Search Engine Marketing**?

It is still used but is now more associated with paid search marketing and advertising.

The two terms co-exist peacefully today.

A TIMELINE OF SEARCH ENGINE HISTORY

Search engines have changed the way we find information, conduct research, shop for products and services, entertain ourselves, and connect with others.

Behind almost every online destination – whether it's a website, blog, social network, or app – is a search engine.

Search engines have become the connecting force and directional guide to everyday life.

But how did this all start?

We've put together a timeline of notable milestones from the history of search engines and search engine optimization to understand the roots of this technology, which has become such an important part of our world.

DAWN OF SEO: 'THE WILD WEST' ERA

In the last decade of the 1900s, the search engine landscape was highly competitive.

You had your choice of search engines – both human-powered directories and crawler-based listings – including the likes of AltaVista, Ask Jeeves, Excite, Infoseek, Lycos, and Yahoo.

In the beginning, the only way to perform any kind of SEO, was through on-page activities.

This included optimizing for factors such as:

- Making sure the content was good and relevant.
- There was enough text.
- Your HTML tags were accurate.
- You had internal links and outbound links.

If you wanted to rank well in this era, the trick was pretty much just repeating your keywords enough times throughout your webpages and meta tags.

Want to outrank a page that uses a keyword 100 times? Then you'd use the keyword 200 times!

Today, we call this practice spamming.

Here are some highlights:

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1994

Yahoo was created by Stanford University students Jerry Wang and David Filo in a campus trailer. Yahoo was originally an Internet bookmark list and directory of interesting sites.

Webmasters had to manually submit their page to the Yahoo directory for indexing so that it would be there for Yahoo to find when someone performed a search.

AltaVista, Excite, and Lycos also launched.

1996

Page and Brin, two Stanford University students, built and tested Backrub, a new search engine that ranked sites based on inbound link relevancy and popularity.

Backrub would ultimately become Google. HotBot, powered by Inktomi, also launched.

1997

Following on the success of A Webmaster's Guide to Search Engines, Danny Sullivan launched Search Engine Watch, a website dedicated to providing news about the search industry, tips on searching the web, and information about how to rank websites better. (Ten years later, after leaving SEW, Sullivan founded another popular search publication, Search Engine Land.)

Ask Jeeves also debuted and Google.com was registered.

1998

Goto.com launched with sponsored links and paid search. Advertisers bid on Goto.com to rank above organic search results, which were powered by Inktomi. Goto.com was ultimately acquired by Yahoo.
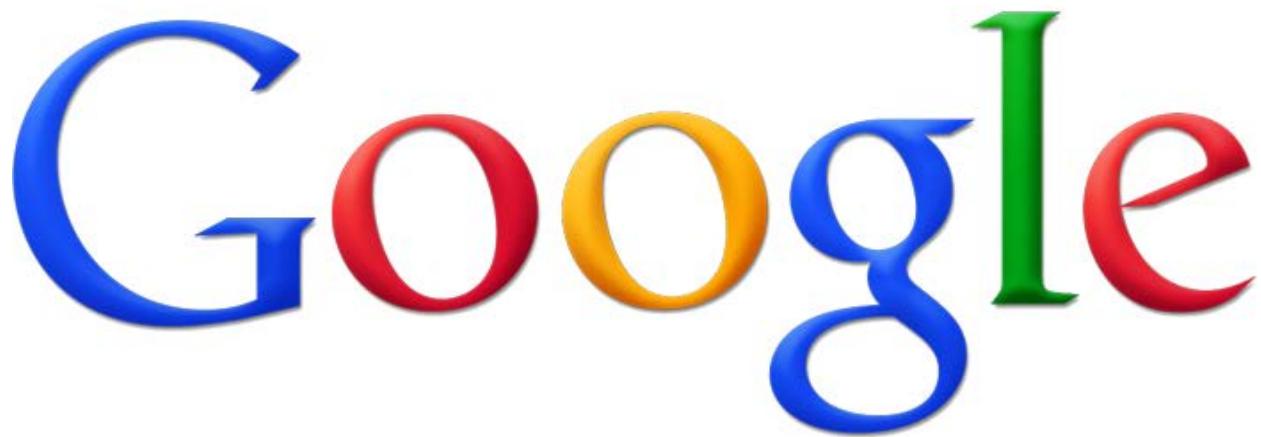
DMOZ (the Open Directory Project) became the most sought-after place for SEO practitioners to get their pages listed.

MSN entered into search with MSN Search, initially powered by Inktomi.

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1999

The first-ever all search marketing conference, Search Engine Strategies (SES), took place. You can read a retrospective on that event by Sullivan **here.** (The SES conference series continued running under various monikers and parent companies until shutting down in 2016.)

THE GOOGLE REVOLUTION

In 2000, Yahoo pulled off the worst strategic move in the history of search and partnered with Google and let Google power their organic results instead of Inktomi.

Beforehand Google was a little-known search engine. Hardly known!

The end result: every Yahoo search result said "Powered by Google" and they ended up introducing their largest competitor to the world and Google became a household name.

Until this point, search engines mainly ranked sites based on the on-page content, domain names, ability to get listed in aforementioned directories, and basic site structure (breadcrumbing).

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But Google's web crawler and PageRank algorithm were revolutionary for information retrieval.

Google looked at both on-page and off-page factors – the quantity and quality of external links pointing to a website (as well as the anchor text used).

If you think about it, Google's algorithm was essentially about "if people are talking about you, you must be important."

Although links were only one component of Google's overall ranking algorithm, SEO practitioners latched onto links as being the most important factor – and an entire sub-industry of **link building** was created.

Over the next decade, it became a race to acquire as many links as possible in the hopes of ranking higher.

Links became a heavily abused tactic that Google would have to address in coming years.

It was also in 2000 that the **Google Toolbar** became available on Internet Explorer, allowing SEO practitioners to see their PageRank score (a number between 0-10).

This ushered in an era of unsolicited link exchange request emails.

So with PageRank, Google essentially introduced a measure of

currency to its linking. Much like domain authority is misused today. Google's organic results also got some company in the form of AdWords ads starting in 2000.

These paid search ads began appearing above, below, and to the right of Google's natural (i.e., unpaid) results.

Meanwhile, a group of webmasters informally got together at a pub in London to start sharing information about all things SEO in 2000.
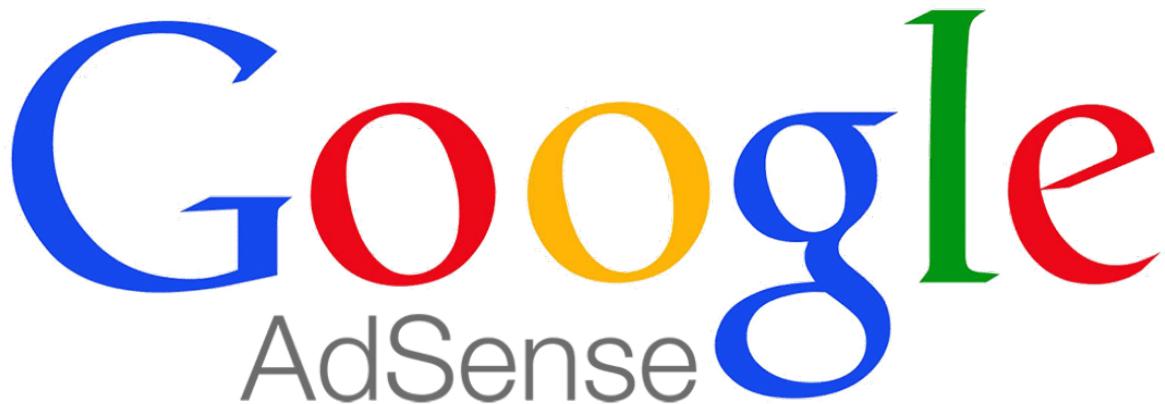
This informal gathering eventually turned into Pubcon, a large search conference series that still runs today.

Over the coming months and years, the SEO world got used to a monthly Google Dance, or a period of time during which Google updated its index, sometimes resulting in major ranking fluctuations.

Although Google's Brin once famously said Google didn't believe in web spam, his opinion had probably changed by the time 2003 rolled around.

SEO got a lot harder following updates like **Florida** because it became much more important than just repeating keywords x amount of times.

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GOOGLE ADSENSE:
MONETIZING TERRIBLE SEO CONTENT

In 2003, after acquiring Blogger.com, Google launched AdSense, which serves contextually targeted Google ads on publisher sites.

The mix of AdSense and Blogger.com led to a surge in simple, monetized online publishing – and a blogging revolution.

While Google probably didn't realize it at the time, they were creating problems they would have to fix down the road.

AdSense gave rise to spammy tactics and Made for AdSense sites filled with thin/poor/stolen content that existed solely to rank well, get clicks, and make money.

Oh and something else important happened in 2003.

I founded the site you're on, Search Engine Journal!

And I'm incredibly happy to say we're still here, going stronger than ever!

LOCAL SEO & PERSONALIZATION

Around 2004, Google and other top search engines started improving results for queries that had a geographic intent (e.g., a restaurant, plumber, or some other type of business or service provider in your city or town).

By 2006, Google rolled out a **Maps Plus Box**, which I was quite impressed by at the time.

It was also around 2004 that Google and search engines began making greater use of end-user data, such as search history and interests, to personalize search results.

This meant that the results you saw could be different than what someone sitting next to you in a coffee shop saw when he or she did a search for the same query.

Also in 2005, nofollow tags were created as a means to combat spam.

SEO pros began using this tag as a way of **PageRank sculpting.**

Google also unleashed a couple of noteworthy updates:

- **Jagger,** which helped to diminish the level of unsolicited link exchanges that were flying around, as well as heralding the decline in the importance of anchor text as a factor due to its corruptibility.

- **Big Daddy** (coined by Jeff Manson of RealGeeks), which improved the architecture of Google to allow for improved understanding of the worth and relationship of links between sites.

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YOUTUBE, GOOGLE ANALYTICS & WEBMASTER TOOLS

In October 2006, Google **acquired** user-generated video sharing network YouTube for $1.65 billion, which ultimately became the second most used search property in the world.

Today, YouTube has 2 billion users!

Due to its soaring popularity, video SEO become crucial for brands, businesses, and individuals that wanted to be found.

Google also launched two incredibly important tools in 2006:

- **Google Analytics.** This free, web-based tool was **so popular at launch** that webmasters experienced downtime and maintenance warnings.

- **Google Webmaster Tools.** Now known as the Search Console, Google Webmaster Tools let webmasters view crawling errors, see what searches your site showed up for, and request reinclusion.

Also in 2006 **XML sitemaps gained universal support from the search engines.**

XML sitemaps allow webmasters to display to the search engines, every URL on their website that is available for crawling.

An XML sitemap contains not only a list of URLs but a range of further information, which helped search engines to crawl more intelligently.

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UNIVERSAL SEARCH

We really began to see search starting to evolve in new and exciting ways starting in 2007.

All of these updates were aimed at improving the search experience for users.

Let's start with **Google's Universal Search.**

Until this point, the search results had consisted of 10 blue links.

Then Google began blending traditional organic search results with other types of vertical results like news, video, and images.

This was easily the biggest change to Google search – and SEO – since the Florida update.

CLEANING UP THE CESSPOOL

In 2008, then-Google CEO Eric Schmidt said the Internet was becoming a cesspool and that **brands were the solution**. "Brands are how you sort out the cesspool," he said.

Less than six months after his comment, along came a **Google update called Vince.**

Big brands suddenly seemed to be ranking a whole lot better in the SERPs.

But it wasn't really intended to reward brands, **according to Google.**

Google wanted to put a greater weight on trust in the algorithm (and big brands tend to have more trust than smaller and less-established brands).

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Shortly after this update, Google released another to improve the speed of their indexing, called **Caffeine.**

As Search Engine Journal reported at the time, Caffeine was "a next-generation search architecture for Google that's supposed to be faster and more accurate, providing better, more relevant results and crawling larger parts of the web."

Speaking of speed, in 2010 Google **announced** that site speed was a ranking factor.

BING & THE SEARCH ALLIANCE

In 2009, Microsoft Live Search became Bing.

Then, in an attempt to challenge Google's nearly 70% grip of the U.S. search market, Yahoo and Microsoft joined forces to partner on a 10-year search deal (though it ended up being reworked five years later).

The Search Alliance saw Microsoft's Bing power Yahoo's organic and paid search results.

While it made Bing the clear Number 2 search engine, they ultimately have failed to break Google's massive grip on search in the U.S. and globally. In October 2020, Bing officially **rebranded** to Microsoft Bing.

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THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Another phenomenon was emerging late in the 2000s: social networks.

Google made its big bet on YouTube (although it would try again with the now-defunct **Google+**).

But other networks like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn all emerged as major players (with many more to come and go in the following years).

Along with the rise of social media came speculation that social signals can impact search rankings.

Yes, social media can help SEO, but indirectly – just as other forms of marketing can help drive more traffic to your website and increase brand awareness and affinity (which generates search demand).

While the impact of social shares (likes, tweets, +1's, etc.) has been denied time and again by Google through the years as being ranking factor, it continued to be listed as having a strong correlation in various **ranking factor studies**.

If you want to read more about this topic, I highly suggest reading **How Social Media Helps SEO [Final Answer].**

SCHEMA

Schema markup, a form of microdata, was introduced in 2011 to help search engines interpret context of query. You can view every schema markup type on **Schema.org**.

Schema is not a ranking factor. And, there is little evidence to support it has an impact on your search performance.

However, schema does help you stand out in the SERPs with rich snippet and featured snippets.

For example, in a Search Engine Journal webinar, Milestone shared they saw a **33-66%** boost in search impressions for large fast-food restaurant chain after schema was deployed.

Another **experiment** by InLinks revealed that sites with schema gained rankings once schema was implemented.

If you're unsure if you properly implemented structured data, test it in **Google's Structured Data Testing Tool**.

THE GOOGLE ZOO: PANDA & PENGUIN

Two major algorithmic updates – Panda in 2011 and Penguin in 2012 – had a big impact on SEO that is still being felt to this day, as Google once again attempted to clean up its search results and reward high-quality sites.

In 2011, Google found its search results facing severe scrutiny because so-called "content farms" (websites that produced high volumes of low-quality content) were dominating the search results.

Google's SERPs were also cluttered with websites featuring unoriginal and auto-generated content – and even, in some instances, scraper sites were outranking content originators.

As a result, these sites were making tons of advertising revenue (remember when I mentioned Google's self-made AdSense problem?).

These sites were also living and dying by organic traffic from Google.

But once **Google's Panda update** rolled out in 2011, many websites saw much, if not all, of that traffic vanish overnight.

Google provided some insight on **what counts as a high-quality site**.

Aimed at eliminating low-quality (or thin) content, Panda was updated periodically over the coming years, eventually becoming **integrated into Google's core algorithm** in 2016.

With websites still recovering from the effects of Panda, Google unleashed a hotly anticipated over-optimization algorithm, intended to eliminate "aggressive spam tactics" from its results.

Eventually dubbed **Penguin**, this algorithm targeted link schemes (websites with unusual linking patterns, including a high-amount of exact match anchor text that matched keywords you wanted to rank for) and keyword stuffing.

Penguin wasn't updated nearly as frequently as Panda, with more than a year passing between some updates. And, like Panda, **Penguin became part of Google's real-time algorithm** in 2016.

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THINGS, NOT STRINGS

In May 2012, Google unveiled the **Knowledge Graph**.

This was a major shift away from interpreting keywords strings to understanding semantics and intent.

Here's how Amit Singhal, Google's former SVP for engineering, **described it at launch**:

"The Knowledge Graph enables you to search for things, people or places that Google knows about – landmarks, celebrities, cities, sports teams, buildings, geographical features, movies, celestial objects, works of art and more – and instantly get information that's relevant to your query. This is a critical first step towards building the next generation of search, which taps into the collective intelligence of the web and understands the world a bit more like people do."

SEJ Search Engine® Journal

Google enhanced its search results with this information.

Knowledge panels, boxes, and carousels can appear whenever people do a search for one of the billions of entities and facts in the Knowledge Graph.

The next step in Google's next generation of search came in September 2013 in the form of **Hummingbird**, a new algorithm designed to better address natural language queries and conversational search.

With the rise of mobile (and voice search), Google needed to completely rebuild how its algorithm worked to meet the needs of modern searchers.

Hummingbird was considered to be the biggest change to Google's core algorithm since 2001. Clearly, Google wanted to deliver faster and more relevant results, especially to mobile users.

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MOBILE-FIRST

Starting somewhere around 2005 or so, one question kept being asked in our industry:

Is this the "Year of Mobile"?

Well, it turns out that it wasn't in 2005.

Or 2006.

Neither was 2007.

Or 2008. Or 2009.

Not even 2010 – when Google transformed itself into a mobile-first company.

Then 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 came and went.

Mobile was talked about and much-hyped because it was growing like crazy all this time.

As more users adopted smartphones, they were increasingly searching for businesses and things while on the move.

Finally, in 2015, we had the Year of Mobile – the point at which **mobile searches overtook desktop search** for the first time on Google. And while this is true in terms of raw search numbers, it's also true that search intent is quite different and conversion rates remain much lower on mobile devices.

This was also the year that comScore reported **mobile-only internet users surpassed desktop-only users**.

It was also in 2015 that Google launched a much-anticipated **mobile-friendly algorithm update**, designed to give users "the most relevant and timely results, whether the information is on mobile-friendly web pages or in a mobile app."

In an attempt to speed up pages, Google also introduced Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) in 2016.
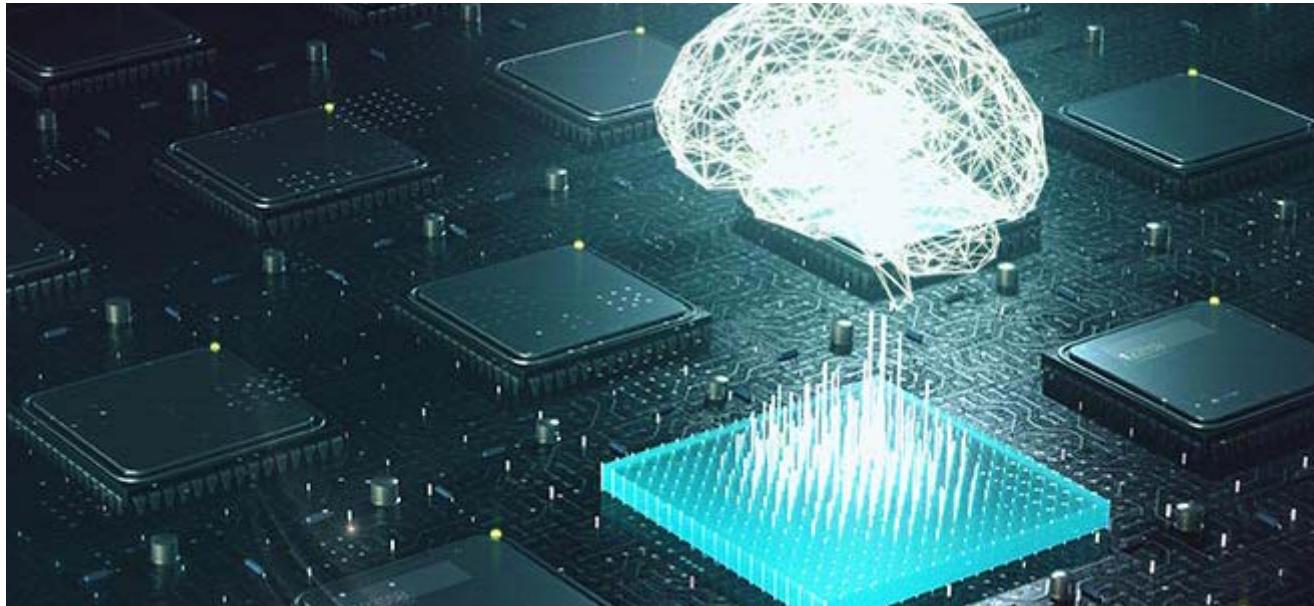
The idea behind AMP was to instantly load content. Many news media and publishers quickly adopted AMP and continue to use it to today.

And, this may not surprise you, but in January 2017, Google announced that **page speed will now be a ranking factor for mobile searches.**

In that same month, Google stated it will begin to **devalue pages with intrusive pop-ups.**

In July 2019, **mobile-first indexing was enabled** for all new websites. And, **by March 2021**, all websites will have switched to mobile-first indexing.

MACHINE LEARNING & INTELLIGENT SEARCH

Earlier, I mentioned that Google, originally built around information retrieval, became a mobile-first company.

Well, that changed in 2017 because Google CEO Sundar Pichai declared Google a machine learning-first company.

Today, Google search is designed to inform and assist, rather than giving users a list of links.
That's why Google has built machine learning into all of its products – including search, Gmail, Ads, Google Assistant, and more.

In terms of search, we've already started to see the impact of machine learning with **Google RankBrain**.

Announced in October 2015, RankBrain was initially used to try to interpret the 15% of searches that Google has never seen before, based on the words or phrases the user has entered.

Since that time, Google has expanded RankBrain to run on every search.

While RankBrain impacts ranking, it isn't a ranking factor in the traditional sense, where you get rewarded with better rankings for doing x, y, and z.

And there's much more coming soon in the world of intelligent search.

- **Voice searches** are increasing.
- **Visual search** has gotten insanely good
- Users (and brands) are increasingly adopting chatbots and using personal assistants (e.g., Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, and Microsoft's Cortana).

These advances in technology mean more exciting times are ahead for those who do SEO.

GOOGLE'S CORE UPDATES

Google makes updates to its algorithm every day.

But, throughout the year, Google releases core updates when there is a change to its algorithm.

There are also **broad core algorithm updates.**

The goal of these core updates is to create a better search experience for users with more relevant, trustworthy search results.

These Google core updates don't target a certain page or site but aim to improve how the system tracks content.

Here's how Google **described these core updates:**

"One way to think of how a core update operates is to imagine you made a list of the top 100 movies in 2015. A few years later in 2019, you refresh the list. It's going to naturally change. Some new and wonderful movies that never existed before will now be candidates for inclusion. You might also reassess some films and realize they deserved a higher place on the list than they had before."

In March 2018, Google **confirmed** a broad core algorithm update had rolled out to benefit "under-rewarded" pages.

A little over a month later, Google released another broad core algorithm update targeted at **content relevance.**

Then, another broad core update rolled out in August (sometimes wrongly and inaccurately referred to as the **"Medic" update**) targeting sites with low-quality content.

In March 2019, as an extension of the August 2018 core update, Google confirmed that a core update (a.k.a., Florida 2) was here and it was supposed to be a big one.

But, the SEO community felt it was **more of a rollback of previous algorithms.**

SEJ Search Engine®
Journal

And, another **broad core update hit in June 2019** that exposed weaknesses of E-A-T on websites, focusing on the authority and trustworthiness of incoming links.
Every now and then, Google will release a broad core update that has an impact on all search results worldwide.

For example, there was a **broad core update in September 2019** that aimed at boosting sites with overall optimal performance. And, another **broad core update in January 2020** that targeted YMYL (your money, your life) categories.

That's the key difference with broad core updates vs. core updates – you need to analyze your site overall, not a specific page.

Most recently, Google released **a core update in May 2020** that targeting thin content landing pages while giving a boost to local search results.

BERT

BERT is the biggest Google algorithm update since RankBrain.

BERT stands for Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers used for natural language processing.

Essentially, it helps Google understand the context of search queries better.

For example, the word "bat" can mean a nocturnal winged animal often associated with Batman. Or, it can be used when a baseball player goes up to bat.

With BERT, Google is able to dissect the context to serve up better search results.

What makes BERT even better is that Google can now use the words surrounding your keywords to help its spiders digest your content.

For example, "I went to in the bat cave." Or, "After my bat, I went into the dugout." Google can now generate a context model around other words in the sentence. This is a crucial factor in how natural language processing identified human communication.

As Google's **Danny Sullivan said,**

"There's nothing to optimize for with BERT, nor anything for anyone to be rethinking. The fundamentals of us seeking to reward great content remain unchanged."

If you're still interested in learning more about BERT, Dawn Anderson explains **everything you need to know about BERT here.**

FEATURED SNIPPETS

You've probably seen featured snippets before, but not realized what they were.

Featured snippets are short text, bullet points, numbers, or tables that appear at the top of Google's search.

The goal of a featured snippet is to answer the searcher's query directly in the SERPs without needing to click through to the website.

But, **featured snippets can be extremely volatile** so tread lightly.

Featured snippets are nothing new. They were **spotted** all the way back in 2014.

Featured snippets have kicked off the allure of the coveted "position zero." Meaning, your search result is featured above all the other distractions in the SERPs, plus you would also appear in the organic results.

In January 2020, Google updated this feature to **de-duplicate featured snippet search results** so you would either be included in the featured snippet or the organic result, not both.

And, in **June 2020**, Google released another update stating that featured snippets will now take users directly to the text that is relevant to their search query.

Users now see the text highlighted in yellow.

As voice search continues to refine itself, featured snippet content will provide a big opportunity to increase organic visibility.

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CONCLUSION

Search engines and SEO have come a long way since the 1990s.

And we've only touched on a few of these ways in this post.

The history of SEO has been filled with exciting turns – the birth of new search engines, the death of old search engines, new SERP features, new algorithms, and constant tests and updates – plus the emergence of great SEO publications, conferences, tools, and experts.

While search engines and SEO have evolved greatly over the years, one thing remains true: as long as there are search engines, SEO will remain vital.

And we've only gotten started!

WHY DO PEOPLE VISIT WEBSITES TODAY?

3

AUTHOR

JULIE JOYCE

Back in 2015, Think With Google published four new moments that every marketer should know.

They were mainly concerned with mobile use and listed these moments as follows:

- **I-want-to-know moments.** This includes searches for news, general knowledge, how to return an item you bought online, etc.

- **I-want-to-go moments.** These are searches that are location-specific when a user wants to find something nearby.

- **I-want-to-do moments.** These include searches for how to fix your dishwasher, how to grow tomatoes, a new recipe for tonight, etc.

- **I-want-to-buy moments.** This can be anything related to reading reviews or searching for information on buying something large or small.

They also identified six need states which Search Engine Journal's Roger Monti wrote about in a much more intensive manner last year: **Google: 6 Need States Influence Search Behavior.**

Those states are meant to describe the ways that consumer needs influence search behavior and are as follows:

- Surprise Me.
- Help Me.
- Reassure Me.
- Educate Me.
- Impress Me.
- Thrill Me.

Avinash Kaushik also published what he defined as the **See-Think-Do framework.**

This was designed to help marketers do a better job of giving customers what they want and need, and examples of these segments are listed in the image below:

Chris Hart's SEJ article, **See, Think, Do, Care: A New Way to Communicate Your SEO Strategy**, covers this framework in detail.

These three ways of looking at how humans interact with the internet really condense our reasons as both creators and consumers.

SO WHY EXACTLY DO PEOPLE VISIT WEBSITES TODAY?

1. We Want to Learn

Recently, plenty of schoolchildren in the U.S. have had to learn online as their schools were shut down because of COVID-19. Many were already homeschooling online.

Colleges took their classes out of the classrooms and onto Zoom.

SEOs conducted what would have been in-person conferences via an online platform.

I'm sure that all of us have, at some time or other, decided to dive deep into a topic we knew nothing about, and we scoured the web for information for our own benefit.

We may be watching a show on Hulu and don't know what a reference means, so we Google it and read about it.

We may want to learn more about the political process, or COVID-19, or Victorian England. The web allows us to learn and learn at our own pace.

2. We Want to Buy

With the lockdowns due to COVID-19, e-commerce became the most important way that we could make purchases.

For the first time ever, I started to order groceries online and have them delivered. I've always done a lot of online shopping, but I started to think about things that I'd normally buy in person and figure out if and how I could get them online. I even bought baby chicks online.

Some people turn to spending money as a comfort when they're stressed. Sometimes they need to send a last-minute gift to a friend for a birthday.

We may be asked to make a charitable donation instead of sending flowers for a funeral. It's possible to buy almost anything online these days.

3. We Want to Be Entertained

This is my primary reason for going online, outside of what I do for my job.

I want to watch a movie, or a music video, or a TV show. It stops me from thinking about all the stress in the world.

What would have been live in-person events are now going online.

We have virtual concerts, virtual plays, virtual festivals, etc. Movies that would have been released in the theatres **have even been released online** instead.

The beauty of online entertainment is that you can access it anywhere, at any time, with some exceptions, of course.

If you want to watch Justified at 11:00 a.m. on a Wednesday, you can do it. If you're waiting in your car before getting into the dentist's chair, you can jump on YouTube.

Online entertainment has never been so convenient and accessible.

4. We Need Information

We need to look at a map in order to go pick up our kids at a friend's house.

We need to know if our favorite pizza place is still open at 10 p.m.

We want to know what's happened in the world in the last hour.

Interestingly, Google's I-want-to-know moments list the three most common searches as being for general knowledge, food and grocery, and shopping.

Remember those days when you had to ask someone a question or look something up in a library?

We have always had to search hard to get information, just not online. Now information is available in seconds.

5. We Want to Be Inspired

We've been trying to enjoy our front porch more often, so I've looked at tons of ideas for Victorian front porches.

Whenever I have trouble maintaining my concentration, I'll spend a few minutes looking up a new recipe to try.

Writer and artist friends say that they are always in search of inspiration online.

In terms of content creation, which is something that many of us are involved with, finding inspiration (and data) is a necessity.

There is plenty to inspire you offline, but the online inspiration is neverending. Currently, as I'm writing this, I'm reading articles about how to find inspiration!

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6. We Want to Stay in Touch & Stay Informed

We want to stay in touch not only with people we know but also with people we don't know – with communities, with movements, with news, with the world in general.

With the lockdown and travel restrictions in place, many people have had to communicate with their loved ones on a strictly virtual basis.

Zoom, a popular video conferencing service, recently saw its revenue soar **169%** because of the pandemic-driven need to move communication online.

7. We Want to Feel Connected

As much as I'd love to give up Facebook, it remains the only way that I communicate with certain friends and family members.

I use Twitter to stay in touch with my industry. Social media is great for connecting people, even though it has its downsides.

There's a wonderful Facebook group that I'm a member of where people post photos from their front door so everyone can see their views.

It's been a truly positive experience to look at what other people see each day, and it's a great way to talk to someone in New Zealand or Kenya.

I've also met some great new friends in a music group on Facebook.

We're based all over the world but have one major thing in common (we love goth!), so it's nice to get online and see what everyone's listening to.

8. We're Just Bore

I don't usually feel truly bored, but there are definitely times when nothing much is going on, and I browse the web.

I'll look up anything and everything. I'm sure that countless hours are spent online simply because people are bored, and our phones and tablets and laptops are always accessible.

There's even a **site** just for bored people!

Last (and Probably Least)...

We clicked on a link because the anchor text was descriptive and tempting, and the link fit in so well to the content that we knew we had no other choice than to click on it.

(OK, this is my dream as a link builder... not always my reality.)

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THE TAKEAWAY

As an SEO, why does this matter?

We tend to think in terms of keyword research, promoting content, and optimizing for better rankings. We want to make sites faster and inclusive.

It's good to take a step back from that and really consider the ins and outs of why people visit websites.

WHY SEARCH — AND SEO — IS IMPORTANT

AUTHOR

RYAN JONES
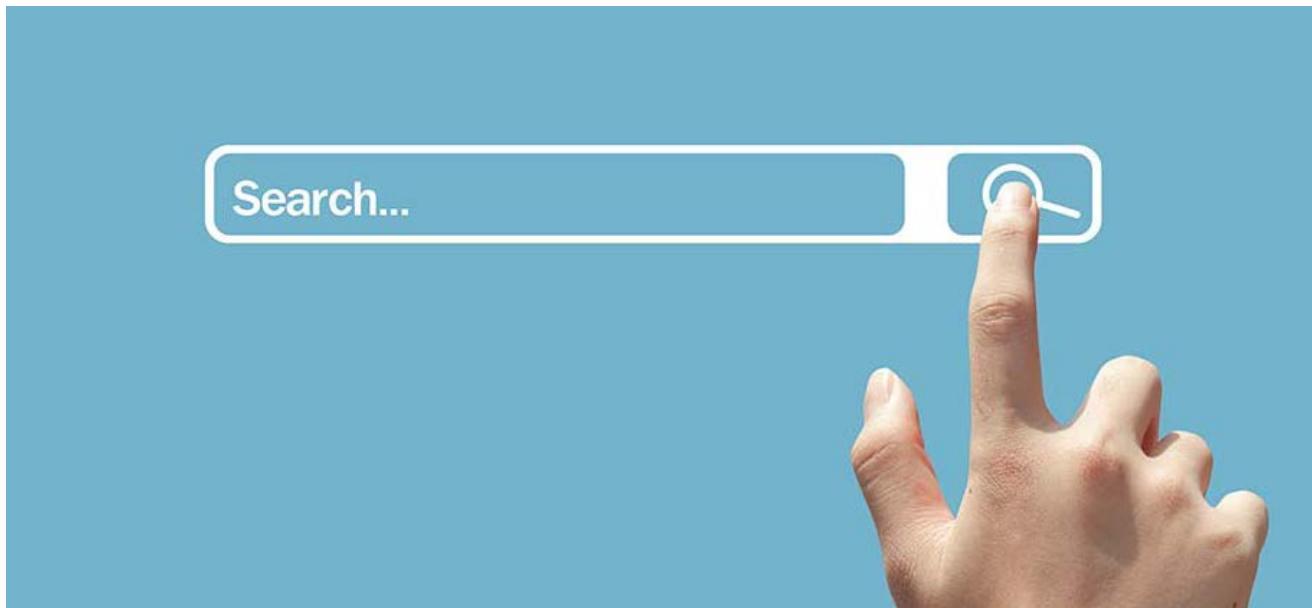
In 2009, Bill Gates gave a speech at a private dinner where he famously said: "The future of search is verbs."

Gates wasn't talking about the words people type into search boxes. He was instead talking about why people search.

Before we can understand why search is important, we need to take a step back and understand why people search.

WHY PEOPLE SEARCH

In the early days, people searched to find a list of documents that contained the words they typed in. That's no longer the case. Today's searchers search to solve problems, to accomplish tasks, and to "do" something.

They might be searching to book a flight, buy something, learn the latest Taylor Swift lyrics, or browse cat photos – but these are all actions. Or, as Gates referred to them, verbs.

When a user starts a search, they're really starting a journey. Marketers love to talk about something called "the consumer journey."

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It's just a fancy way of referencing a user's path from the inception of their task to the completion – and most of these journeys start with a search.

The consumer journey has been gradually playing a larger role in search over the last decade.

Originally depicted as a funnel wherein users move from awareness to consideration to purchase, this old consumer journey has become outdated (although we still use this model for illustrative purposes and to make persona research easier).

THE EVOLUTION OF SEARCH & THE CONSUMER JOURNEY

The modern consumer journey no longer represents a funnel, but looks more like a crazy straw – with various twists and turns representing the various channels, mediums, and devices that users interact with today.

To fit this new model, search has had to evolve from simply words on the page to understanding the user intent at each phase of the journey.

Search is **no longer just about keywords** but has evolved into providing the right content to the right user at the right time in their journey to help them accomplish their task.

For the users, it's all about the verbs. For search marketers, it's all about helping the user on their journey (and, ideally, influencing them a bit along the way.)

Sticking with the crazy straw model, today's consumer journey no longer happens on a single device.
Users may start a search on their mobile device, continue researching on their tablet or work laptop, and ultimately purchase from their desktop at home.

Search isn't just limited to computers or phones.

Users can now search from a variety of devices, including watches, smart glasses, Bluetooth speaker assistants, and even kitchen appliances.

In today's world, even my fridge has its own Twitter account – and search marketers need to be cognizant of how various devices relate to each other and play a part in a user's search experience. There's some healthy debate as to whether this has always been the case, but in today's always-on, hyper-connected world, SEO has morphed into what we'll call "real marketing."

Gone are the days of hacks, tricks, and attempting to reverse-engineer algorithms.

Today's SEO focuses on:

- Understanding personas.
- Data-driven insights.
- Content strategy.
- Technical problem-solving.

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THE 3 MAIN TENETS OF ANY MARKETING STRATEGY OR CAMPAIGN

Search touches all three of these areas:

1. Attract.
2. Engage.
3. Convert.

But search concentrates heavily on the first phase: Attract. "If you build it, they will come" may apply to baseball fields, but it doesn't work with websites.

It's no longer enough to have an awesome product. You must actively attract customers via multiple channels and outlets.

This is why, despite some claims to the contrary from clients or design agencies, every webpage is, in fact, an SEO page.

If a webpage is involved in attracting visitors, **engaging visitors,** or converting them, there should be an important SEO component to that page.

WHY IS SEO IMPORTANT?

OK, users, journey, search, verbs – got it.

Users are important, and many of them start with a search, so search is important.

But why is SEO important?

Isn't SEO just a developer thing?

I heard there was a plugin for it.

Can't Google and Microsoft Bing just figure out my website?

We started this story with a Gates quote, but it was Google rather than Microsoft that took the philosophy to heart.

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Things like **Hummingbird, Panda, Penguin, RankBrain, Mobilegeddon,** Possum, Pigeon, entities, and AMP essentially have all been attempts by Google to adapt its search algorithm to move from words to actions – and help users accomplish whatever tasks they may be focused on – but they aren't that simple to understand.

SEO has come a long way from the days of meta data.

Sure, there's **a lot of best practices** involved that "should" be covered by the development team or a plugin (or built into a framework *cough cough* angular, react, I'm looking at you guys) – but often they aren't.

Today's websites are more application than they are a website, and applications come with lots of fancy features that don't always play nicely with search engines (hi again, angular and react.)

GOOD SEO TODAY

A good SEO can not only focus on content but also help:

- Navigate through multiple versions of the same page.
- Solve tech issues that render content invisible to search engines.
- With proper server settings.
- Integrate with social media, content, creative, user experience, paid search, or analytics.
- Find ways to speed up your site.
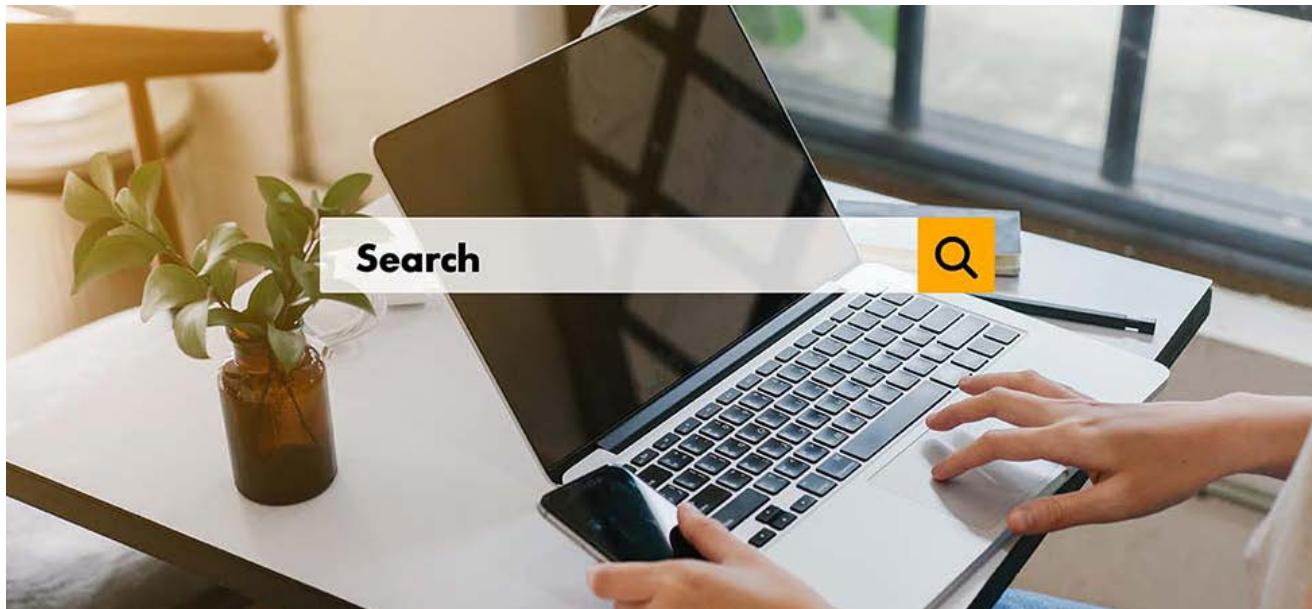
A good SEO professional not only understands the searcher but the competitive landscape as well. It isn't enough to just understand the user's task. Search marketers need to understand what other options are in the marketplace and how they can fill the gap to provide a better solution for the user's task.

We've come a long way from keywords on pages to full-service marketing. SEO pros get to wear multiple hats as they help connect development, information architecture, user experience, content strategy, marketing, social, and paid media teams. It's a game of give and take – all in an attempt to create something that works for search engines and users.

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There are plenty of cautionary tales about things as simple sounding as a site redesign or new CMS system, causing a site's traffic to drop or disappear, leaving businesses scrambling.

The simple fact of the matter is, most website changes these days affect SEO – and only by including SEO upfront and throughout the project can a business hope to see positive results.

SO WHY IS SEARCH IMPORTANT?

Search matters because users matter.

As technology continues to evolve, SEOs will constantly deal with new ways of searching, new devices to search on, and new types of searches (like voice search or searches done by my oven), but the one thing that will remain constant is why people search. The verbs aren't going away.

One day we might be overrun by AI or upload our consciousness into the singularity – but until then, we'll still need to solve problems and accomplish tasks – and some form of search will always be involved in that.

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71 MIND-BLOWING
SEARCH ENGINE
OPTIMIZATION
STATS

AUTHOR

DANNY GOODWIN

Organic search is arguably the most valuable marketing channel there is.

That's why search engine optimization (SEO) is essential for every brand and business that operates online today.

Your company needs SEO. Period.

Small. Medium. Large enterprise.

Startup. Local business. Global brand.

Whenever people enter a query that's relevant to your website into a search engine, you want your result to be the one they click on.

That means your site needs to be findable on search engines. A click on your search result, or the lack thereof, can be the difference between a business thriving or dying.

If your website isn't visible in the search results for the keywords you want to be found for, you can be sure that one of your competitors is!

Yet, for some ridiculous reason, it remains a struggle to justify the value of SEO – even though SEO has a 20+ year record of driving traffic, conversions, and revenue.

Why?

In part, the undeniable proof of SEO's value is scattered across a handful of websites in various reports and studies.

In this chapter, we've brought together all the latest statistics you need to know about organic traffic, industry spending and value, search behavior, Google, and more.

Here are more than 70 mind-blowing statistics you need to know about search engine optimization.

ORGANIC TRAFFIC STATISTICS

53%: The percentage of all trackable website traffic that comes from organic search. (BrightEdge)

32%: The average organic click-through rate (CTR) the first Google desktop search result gets. (Advanced Web Ranking)

26.9%: The average organic CTR, the first Google mobile search result gets. (Advanced Web Ranking)

91.75%: The total worldwide search engine market share Google currently holds. (StatCounter, 2020)

2.75%: The total worldwide search engine market compared to Microsoft Bing's currently holds. (StatCounter, 2020)

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90.63%: The percentage of pages that get no organic search traffic from Google. (Ahrefs)

50.3%: The percentage of all browser-based searches on Google.com that resulted in zero-clicks. (SparkToro, June 2019)

45.25%: The percentage of all browser-based searches on Google.com that resulted in organic clicks. (SparkToro, June 2019)

8.5: The average number of organic mobile search results that Google shows on page 1. (SearchMetrics)

8.7: The average number of organic desktop search results that Google shows on page 1. (SearchMetrics)

INDUSTRY/BUSINESS SPENDING STATISTICS

$79.27 billion: The estimated amount brands and agencies in the United States will shell out for SEO services in 2020. (Borrell Associates)

$39.58 billion: Google's projected net U.S. digital ad revenues by the end of 2020 – equivalent to 29.4% share of the US digital ad market. This is a 5.3% decline from Google's 2019 revenues amounting to $41.8 billion. (eMarketer)

7.2%: The percentage of decrease in Google's U.S. net search ad revenues for 2020. (eMarketer)

>$5,000: The monthly amount the majority of businesses are spending on SEO. (Moz)

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LOCAL SEARCH STATISTICS

Nearly 1 in 3 of all mobile searches are related to location. (Think with Google)

Nearly 2 in 3 of smartphone users are more likely to purchase from companies whose mobile sites or apps customize information to their location. (Think with Google)

76%: The percentage of people who search on their smartphones for something nearby and visit a business within a day. (28%of those searches for something nearby result in a purchase.) (Google)

About 45%: The percentage of global shoppers buy online and then pick up in-store. (Google/IPSOS)

More than 55%: The percentage of shoppers who say they used online video while actually shopping in a store. (Google/IPSOS)

90%: The percentage of consumers who used the internet to find a local business in the last year. (BrightLocal)

91%: The percentage of consumers who say that positive reviews make them more likely to use a business. (BrightLocal)

82%: The percentage of consumers who read online reviews for local businesses. (BrightLocal)

13 minutes and 45 seconds: The time an average consumer spends reading reviews before making a decision. (BrightLocal)

76%: The percentage of consumers who trust online reviews as much as recommendations from family and friends. (BrightLocal)

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USERS & SEARCH BEHAVIOR STATISTICS

52.94% internet users worldwide operate mobile and tablet devices, while **47.06%** use desktop. (StatCounter)

+1,000%: The percentage of search interest growth in "what to watch" queries since 2019. (Google)

65%: The percentage of people who use their phone in their I-want-to-buy moments. (Google)

39%: The percentage of purchasers who were influenced by a relevant search. (Google)

79%: The percentage of people who took a relevant action on their phone prior to making a purchase. (Google)

3: The average number of words a typical searcher uses in their search query. (Moz)

~8%: The percentage of search queries that are phrased as questions. (Moz)

18%: The percentage of queries on Google that result in the searcher changing their search terms without clicking any results. (Moz)

21%: The percentage of searches that lead to more than one click on Google's results. (Moz)

8%: The percentage of Google queries result in pogo-sticking (i.e., the searcher clicks a result, then bounces back to the search results page and chooses a different result). (Moz)

9 days longer: The average number of days people take to make purchase decisions in 2019 compared with 2015. (Google)

LINK BUILDING STATISTICS

75%: The percentage of digital marketers who use content marketing specifically to generate links. (Aira)

1-9 links: The average number of links a content marketing campaign produces as reported by a majority of digital marketers. (Aira)

28%: The percentage of digital marketers who reported having created a campaign that generated no links at all. (Aira)

70%: The percentage of digital marketers who use Ahrefs as a tool for link building. (Aira)

51%: The percentage of digital marketers who use SEMrush as a tool for link building. (Aira)

34%: The percentage of digital marketers who would choose Domain Authority (Moz), If you could only choose one metric to measure authority and / or quality of a link. (Aira)

38%: The percentage of digital marketers who consider rankings as the primary KPI to measure the effectiveness of link building. (Aira)
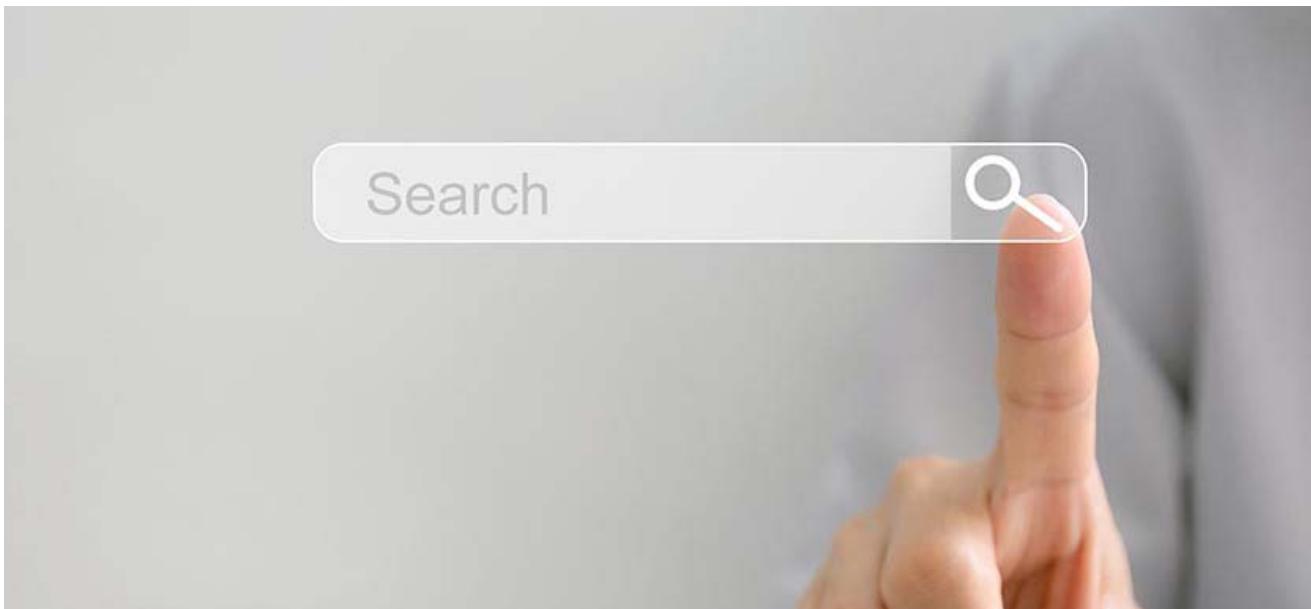
53%: The percentage of digital marketers who consider guest posting as the most effective link building strategy. (SEMrush)

Over 63%: The percentage of digital marketers who prefer to outsource their link building routines. (SEMrush)

66.31%: The percentage of webpages that have no backlinks. (Ahrefs)

$77.80: The average cost of publishing a guest post. (Ahrefs)

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GOOGLE SEARCH STATISTICS

15%: The percentage of searches that Google has never seen before – out of the billions of queries it gets every day. (Google)

~1 billion: The total number of devices where Google Assistant is now built into. (Google)

~2 trillion: The estimated number of searches Google is handling per year worldwide. (Search Engine Land)

40–60 billion: The estimated number of searches happening on Google in the U.S. each month. (Moz)

89%: The difference between Google's total worldwide search engine market compared to Bing's. (StatCounter)

Under 1 minute: The all-in time of the average Google search session (from the time of the initial query to the loading of the search results page and the selection of any results, plus any back button clicks to those SERPs and selection of new results.) (Moz)

66%: The percentage of distinct search queries that resulted in one or more clicks on Google's results. (34% of searches get no clicks at all.) (Moz)

3.4%: The percentage of distinct search queries in Google that resulted in a click on a Google ad (paid). (Moz)

0.9%: The percentage of Google.com search results that get a click on Google Maps. (Moz)

~0.5%: The percentage of clicks on Google search results that go to links in the Knowledge Graph. (Moz)

3%: The percentage of clicks on Google search results that go to image blocks. (Moz)

~0.23%: The percentage of clicks on Google search results that go to Twitter block results. (Moz)

1.8%: The percentage of clicks on Google search results that go to YouTube. (Moz)

0.16%: The percentage of clicks on Google search results that go to personalized Gmail/Google Mail results. (Moz)

0.55%: The percentage of clicks on Google search results that go to Google Shopping results. (Moz)

11.8%: The percentage of clicks from distinct Google searches that result in a click on a Google property, i.e., YouTube, Google Maps, Gmail, Google Books, the Google Play Store on mobile, etc. (Moz)

~25% of all searches are distributed across the top 1MM queries, with the top 10MM queries accounting for about **45%** and the top 1BB queries accounting for close to **90%.** (Moz)

25%: The percentage of all search volume that happens outside the top 100 million keywords. (Moz)

40.9%: The percentage of Google searches done on mobile devices that result in an organic click, **2%** in a paid click, and **57.1%** in no click at all. (Moz)

62.2%: The percentage of Google searches done on desktop devices that result in an organic click, **2.8%** in a paid click, and **35%** in no click. (Moz)

SEO VS. OTHER MARKETING CHANNELS

15%: The percentage of all trackable traffic that comes from paid search. (BrightEdge)

5%: The percentage of all trackable traffic that comes from paid social. (BrightEdge)

15%: The percentage of all trackable traffic that comes from all other sources. (BrightEdge)

27%: The% of the global online population using voice search on mobile. (Google)

~20: The number of times SEO has more traffic opportunity than PPC on both mobile and desktop. (Moz)

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MEET THE 7 MOST POPULAR SEARCH ENGINES IN THE WORLD

AUTHOR

DAVE DAVIES
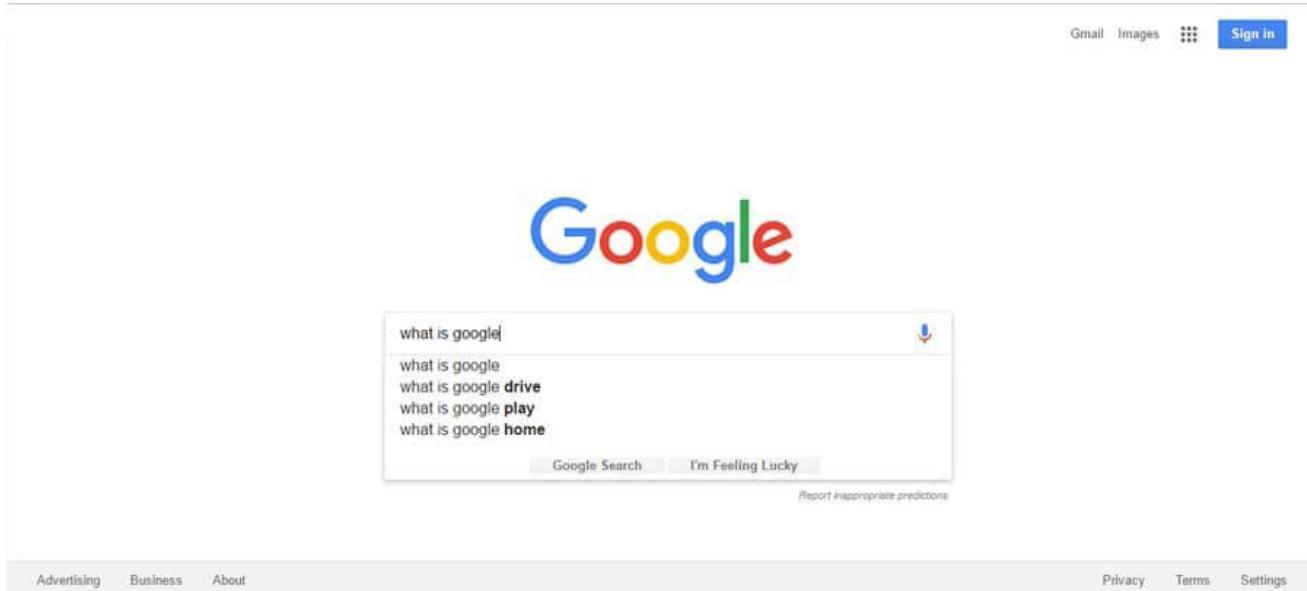
While we battle daily to create an uptick in our analytics when reviewing our "google / organic" or "google/cpc" traffic, there can be a lot of missed opportunities.

Sometimes it pays to take our blinders off and look at the myriad of other opportunities around us that can create bigger improvements in traffic and/or conversions with less work.

Here's a look at seven of the top search engines (that's right, there's more than one), a brief exploration of the ins-and-outs of each, and some links to some of the best articles on how to market to and monetize them.

1. GOOGLE

With **over 86%** of the search market share, one hardly needs to introduce readers to Google. However, it clearly needs to head up any list of search engines.

Created as a research project in 1996 by Sergey Brin and Larry Page, they offered to **sell their engine in 1999 to Excite for a whopping $750,000.** The offer was rejected, putting Google at the top of my list of "bad business calls" as well. Google's parent company Alphabet is now worth about **$1.012 trillion** as of this writing.

Apart from powering their own search results, Google also provides the search results for a wide array of other engines, including the old favorite Ask.com.

Pros & Cons

The big appeal to ranking on Google is clearly the massive potential traffic.

The downside is that everyone else wants this traffic, making organic search the most competitive and paid search often much more expensive than on other sites.
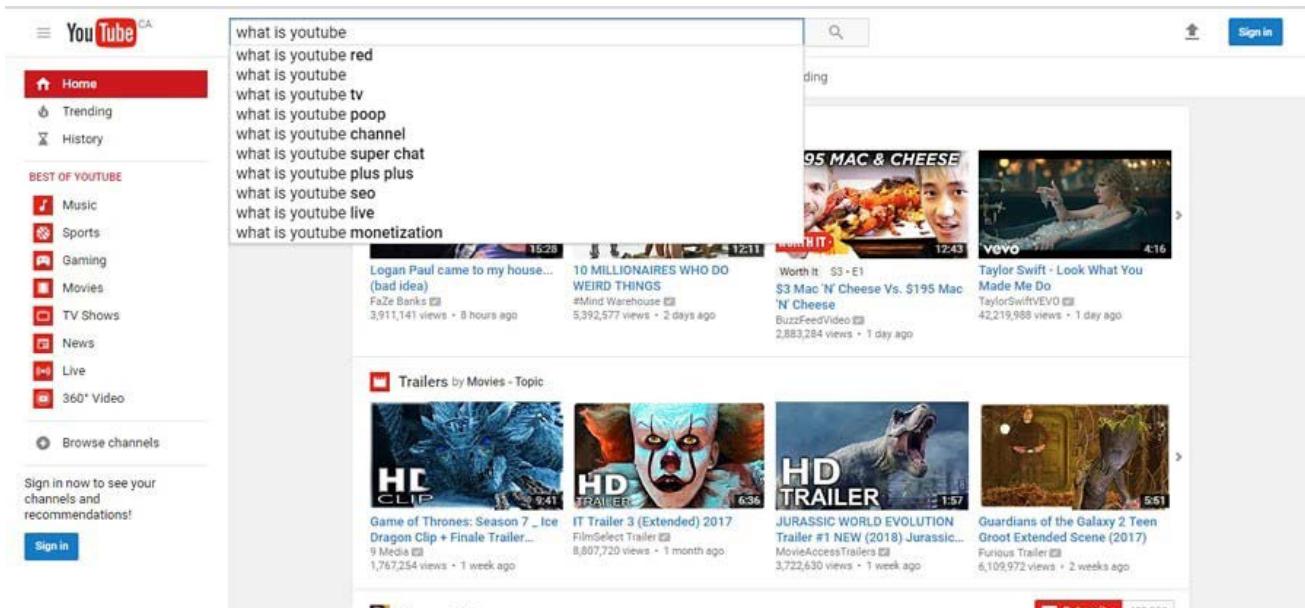
Further, many argue that Google is moving searchers away from clicking through to websites and toward fulfilling their needs and intents directly on the Google website via featured snippets, reduced numbers of organic results on the first page, increases in paid search results, etc. making the competition more costly with less potential reward.

Optimization Tips

A few valuable resources on marketing on Google can be found at:

- **Search Engine Journal's PPC 101 Guide**
- **Google Webmasters** on YouTube

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2. YOUTUBE

YouTube was founded in 2005 by veterans of PayPal and was purchased just over a year later by none other than Google, giving it control over the top two search engines on this list.

YouTube receives **more than 2 billion** logged-in users per month and feeds **over 1 billion** hours of video each day to users (that's right... billion).

If you're curious about the first video uploaded (which has over 41 million views), it's a 19-second clip of co-founder Jawed Karim **at the zoo.**

Not exactly **MTV playing "Video Killed The Radio Star,"** but it got the job done.

Pros & Cons

As with Google, it's easy to see the allure of such massive traffic, but that's also the pitfall for marketers.

Using YouTube as a vehicle for traffic cannot be underestimated in its impact if successful.

However, considering that over 500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute, it can be challenging to stand out.

With paid opportunities under the Google Ads system, it can also get pricey to compete on that front.
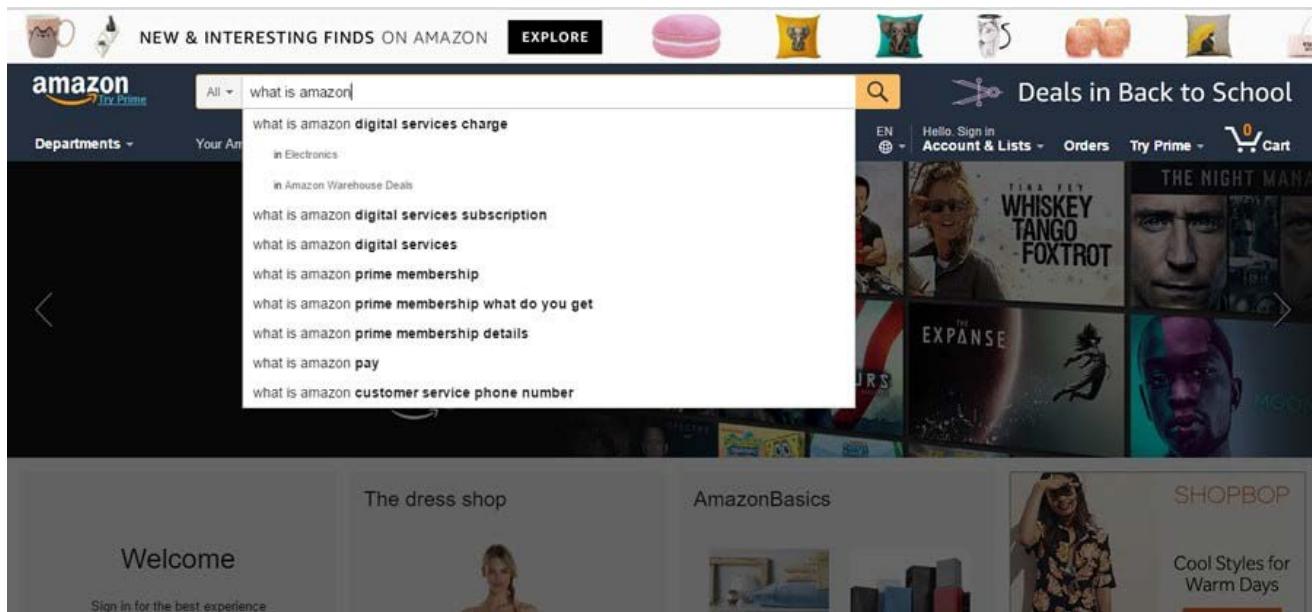
That said, if you can get the attention of your target demographic on YouTube with amazing campaigns such as those by **Geiko** or **Blendtec,** you can get incredible exposure inexpensively.

Optimization Tips

A few valuable pieces on marketing on YouTube can be found at:

- **How To Rank YouTube Videos In 2020** by Brian Dean
- **YouTube SEO: How to Rank Your Videos From Start to Finish** by Sam Oh

3. AMAZON

Amazon was launched in 1995 and, thus, is considered as one of the first large companies to sell goods online.

They started out selling books online but expanded rapidly. In 1999, founder Jeff Bezos won **Time's Person of the Year** for making online shopping popular and accessible.

So successful is Amazon that last year that almost half of all online shopping searches began not at Google (22%) but **at Amazon** (49%).

Combine this with their acquisition of Whole Foods, which gives them access to fresh foods, and one can be pretty sure we'll see this number continue to climb.

Anyone want a Bluetooth adapter with their organic avocado?

Pros & Cons

The positives, as with Google, are obvious – scale. If you sell blue widgets and you want to be where people search for them, then you want to be on Amazon.

In fact, some can argue, based on the numbers, that having a ton of great and useful content might help you rank on Google and get all those folks trying to figure out what blue widgets are and which one they need, but unless you're on Amazon, you won't be where they are when they're actually looking to convert.

The downside is that the competition is fierce, the pricing and other details are easy to compare vs. competing products, and the cost for selling there can get pretty costly at times. Your unique value-adds are difficult to convey in a product-centric system.

Entering early can be difficult if you don't have a unique product, as sales and reviews are important for rankings. For the same reason, well-established companies with good products and reputations can hold their placements well.

There are also CPC options for product promotion. It can be pricey, but you're also getting the searcher at the buy end of the cycle, so what engine isn't?
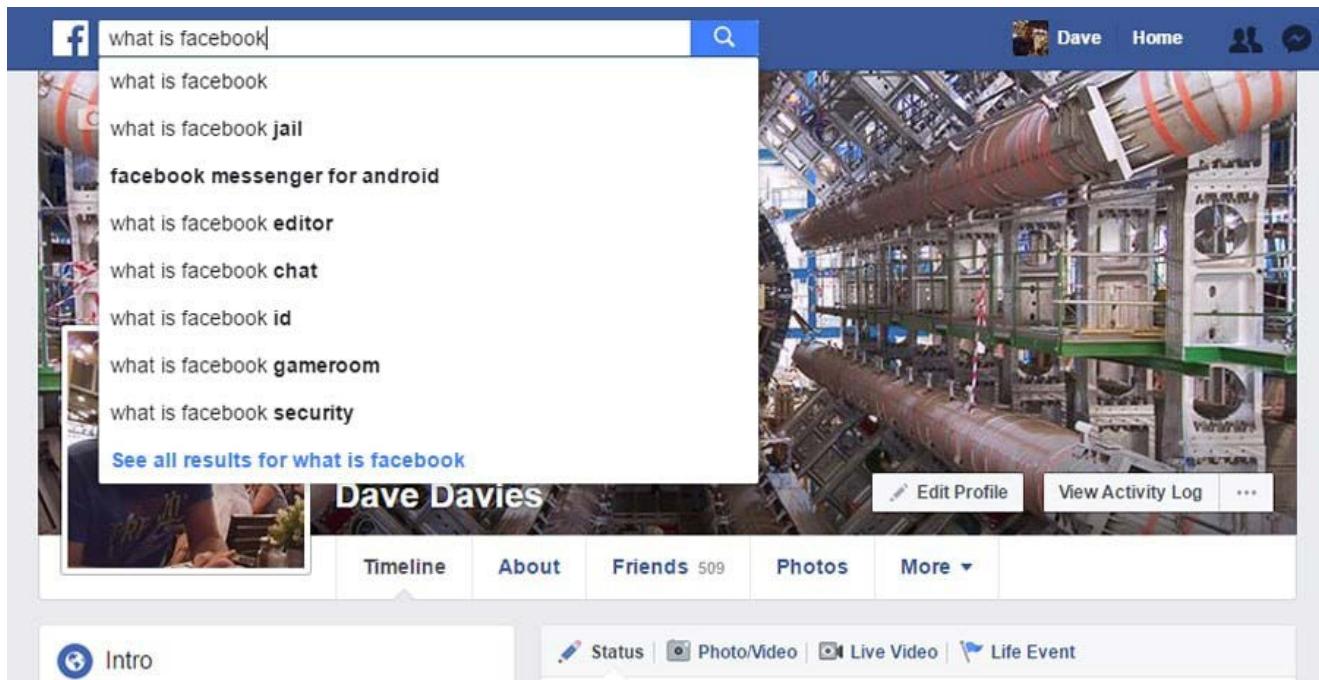
It's too early to tell right now how Alexa will impact searches and sales, but this is an area to watch. To prepare yourself for the possible scenario where Amazon wins (or at least does well in the personal assistant race), the third article below discusses it further.

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Optimization Tips

A few valuable pieces on marketing on Amazon can be found at:

- **An Advanced SEO Guide to Top Rankings on Amazon** by Robyn Johnson
- **Amazon SEO Isn't Google SEO: 6 Differences That Matter** by Travis Jamison

4. FACEBOOK

In 2006, **Facebook** (as we know it) was born. From 2004 until then, it was accessible only by students, and in 2006, it was opened up to the world.

It's not a natural go-to when thinking of search engines. However, it has well surpassed **2 billion** searches/day, putting it ahead of Micosoft Bing.

With **more than 1.62 billion** logged-in visitors per month, Facebook also gives businesses and advertisers incredible market access and tends to be where people are when they're not working (present company excluded obviously), meaning they may be in a better situation to follow their nose and get side-tracked by your offering if it's of interest.

Pros & Cons

It's probably becoming pretty obvious how this story plays out. The biggest "pro" is the user base, but as is true with almost all platforms. With that user base comes the biggest "con" – the price.

Depending on your target demographic, the price can run up to many dollars per click, making it cheaper than Google Ads but still pricey. Some can argue that the traffic isn't as targeted.

Therein is another pro-and-con: while traffic via the Google Ads search system revolves around search queries (on Google at least) lending an inherent relevancy, a lot of Facebook advertising revolves around job titles, locations, interests, and other demographic data. You tend to lose a bit of relevancy. However, it's a great medium for getting in front of people when they aren't looking for you.

Want to launch a new product?

Get your new ebook in front of a bunch of SEO professionals who might not be searching for "seo ebook"? Facebook lends a lot of flexibility in this area.

While their organic reach has tended to drop dramatically in the past few years, Facebook also can be a solid source of unpaid traffic.
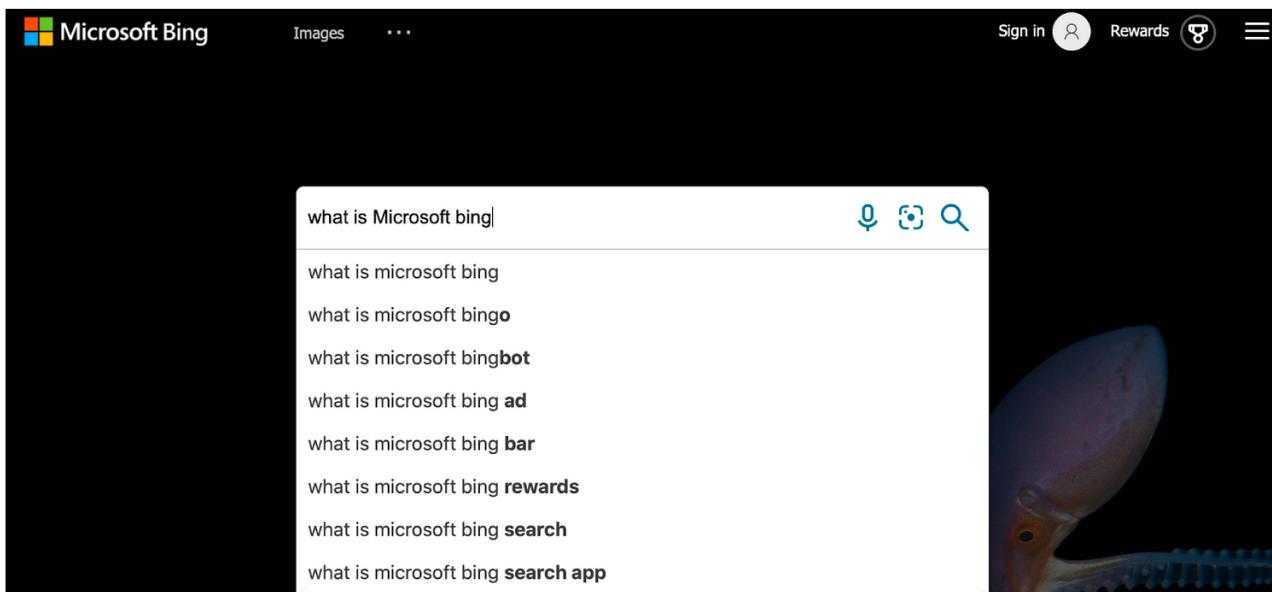
This involves ensuring you have brand loyalty and are consistently producing good content as consistent engagement is the key to ranking organically.

Optimization Tips

A few valuable pieces on marketing on Facebook can be found at:

- [How to Completely Optimize Your Facebook Page](#) by Victoria Edwards
- [7 Fundamental Facebook Advertising Tips for Small Business Marketers](#) by Michelle Morgan

5. MICROSOFT BING

Bing replaced MSN Search as Microsoft's answer to Google in 2009. Launching with just 8.4% of the search market share, they quickly crossed 10 percent, and in a deal, later that year to power Yahoo search rose to **28.1%.** In 2016, they **added AOL** to the sites they provide search results for.

These additions made them a real contender, and across all Microsoft products and properties, their market share gets closer to **25.7%.**

Bing has been making a lot of plays in the advertising space in their effort to catch up with Google, adding a number of features to Microsoft Ads – though they are generally all in efforts to play catch up or bring their system in line with Google's for import ease and manager familiarity. In October 2020, Bing officially **rebranded** to Microsoft Bing.

Pros & Cons

While Microsoft Bing doesn't have the market share that Google has, it is respectable in many markets, including the U.S. and U.K.

Organically their algorithms aren't as sophisticated as Google's though they're making big moves in the AI space.

This gap in sophistication tends to make them easier to understand, predict, and optimize for. While this won't be an indefinite state, it's likely to be true for the short-term future.

Due to the lower traffic, there are fewer SEO pros vying for the top 10 positions and studying the algorithms providing good ROI for those who do.

On the ad side, there are less sophisticated systems to work with. Due to the lower volume and ease of setup from existing Google Ads campaigns, the lower traffic can easily be made up for by the lower CPC.

Though from experience, I do have to warn, their understanding of close variants would be laughable if it didn't bleed so much money. That aside, the ROI can often be better on Microsoft Bing, though the number of conversions far lower.

Note: This isn't to say to simply copy your Google Ads campaigns into Microsoft Ads and be done with it. Each engine needs to be managed individually for its CPC and demographics (resulting in different conversion rates, etc.). However, copying campaigns can greatly speed up the setup process.

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Optimization Tips

A few valuable pieces on marketing on Bing can be found at:

- **Bing Webmaster Guidelines**
- **Bing Ranking Factors Revealed in Update to Webmaster Guidelines** by Matt Southern

6. BAIDU

Baidu was founded in 2000 and is the dominant search engine in China, with **over 69.55%** market share where Google comes in at 3.76.

They're making huge investments into AI, expanding their core offerings in ways very similar to Google, and are right now (as of this writing) **deploying their computer for self-driving cars** (sound familiar?).

Outside of China, Baidu holds little influence. Within the country, Baidu powers 3.3 billion searches per day.

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Pros & Cons

The downside to Baidu is that it only gives access to one market.

The upside is that the market it gives access to is huge.

That said, it's critical to understand that accessing the Chinese market is not like accessing any other (such is the curse of international SEO).

The visuals, verbiage, and customs are entirely different, and Google Translate isn't going to help you win any customers over.

To access the Chinese market via Baidu, you need someone on staff who speaks the language and understands marketing to the culture (not just "someone on my team who took two years of Mandarin in high school").
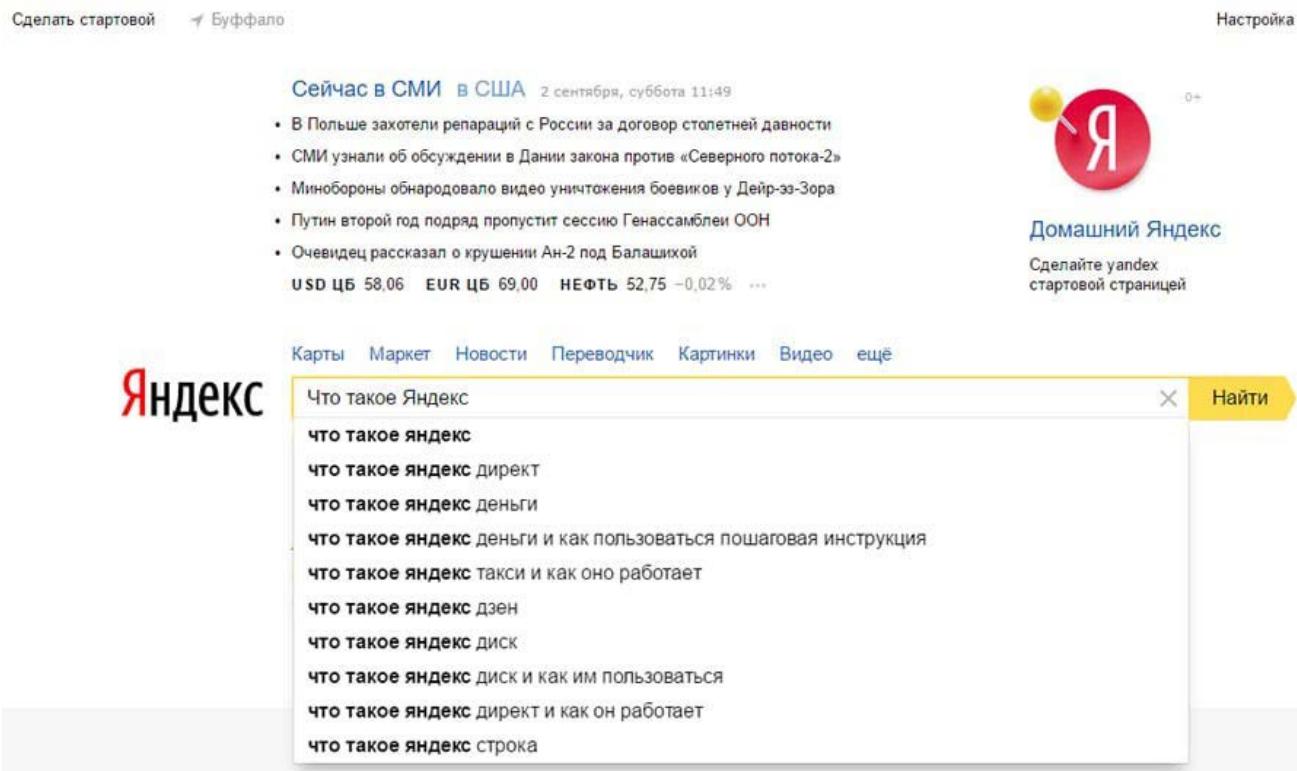
Overall, the organic algorithms are more simplistic than Google's, and their paid systems can be easier once you're setup, but that setup is more difficult if you reside outside China.

Optimization Tips

A few valuable pieces on marketing on Baidu can be found at:

- **Baidu SEO: How to do SEO in China. An interview with SEO Zac – #CrawlingMondays 20th Episode** by Aleyda Solis
- **25 Things You Didn't Know About Baidu** by Julia McCoy

7. YANDEX

Yandex has its roots in a project started by two Russian developers to aid in the classification of patents in 1990 under the company Arkadia.

The term Yandex was adopted in 1993, standing for "Yet Another iNDEXer." The Yandex.ru domain was launched in 1997.

In 2011, they went public on the New York Stock Exchange with an IPO of $1.3 billion, making it the second-largest at the time (right after Google).

Yandex currently powers about **42.35%** of all searches in Russia.

Pros & Cons

As with most smaller engines (compared to Google at least), there is less traffic on Yandex, but the competition is lower both organically and in paid.

The algorithms used by Yandex are less sophisticated than Google's and, thus, easier to assess and optimize for.

Now the bad news: While Yandex's algorithms are less sophisticated than Google, they have elements that make it difficult for outsiders – including a higher weighting on geolocation.

The paid system is obviously more flexible in this regard, and compared to Google, Facebook, and Microsoft Bing, it tends to be less expensive per click. For example, ranking #1 for "casino" would cost over $55 per click in the U.S. and only $0.82 on Yandex. Of course, that's an English word, but even the Russian *"казино"* is only $1.54.

Optimization Tips

A few valuable pieces on marketing on Yandex can be found at:

- [The Ultimate Guide to Yandex SEO](#) by Dan Taylor
- [Revealing The Secrets To Russian SEO – Yandex SEO Made Simple](#) by Matthew Woodward

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SEO STRATEGY VS. TACTICS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? A LOT!

AUTHOR

STONEY DEGEYTER

In early 2019, my company was absorbed by another digital marketing agency.

One of the first things my team and I noticed about our new home is that our new co-workers used the word "strategy" differently from the way we had.

That got me thinking about how we use the terminology altogether, and if the SEO community, in general, uses it correctly.

If I were to boil down the essential difference between strategy and tactics, I would say that:

- Strategy focuses on the why.
- Tactics on the how.

And then I asked my new teammates for their thoughts and got back some great responses:

- Strategy is made up of multiple tactics.
  – **Patrick Willoughby**
- The strategy is the planning … and the tactics are the concrete actions you take to carry out the strategy. – **Claudia Miller**
- Strategy is the plan, and tactics are the actionable items to carry out that plan. – **Megan Mars**
- Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat. – **Sun Tzu**

That's word-for-word what I meant.

Think of strategies and tactics like trying to bring traffic to your website versus bringing in targeted traffic.

A tactic can deliver traffic, but a tactic borne out of a strategy will drive targeted traffic.

You cannot have tactics without a strategy — Scratch that.

You can, but those are tactics grown in a science laboratory via test tube, without any real guiding parental direction.

And as we like to say about science, just because something can be done doesn't mean it should.

Tactics without a strategy are more likely to lead to some strange amalgamation of Frankensteinian results rather than anything that resembles a successful offspring of digital performance.

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STRATEGY COMES BEFORE & AFTER TACTICS

Digging into this idea deeper, though, I realized that there isn't always a cut and dried distinction between tactics and strategies.

When you realize that tactics often require strategies of their own, things start to get a bit muddled.

I'll give you an example.

When I started at the new company, I realized that they look at **SEO,** social media, usability, and **PPC** as digital marketing tactics to support the overarching strategy.

My team, however, considered each of those "tactics" as individual strategies that need to be fleshed out. They are not just something we do; we do them with a purpose.

Who's right?

Both.

Depending on how you look at it, digital marketing is merely a single tactic for a larger business growth strategy.
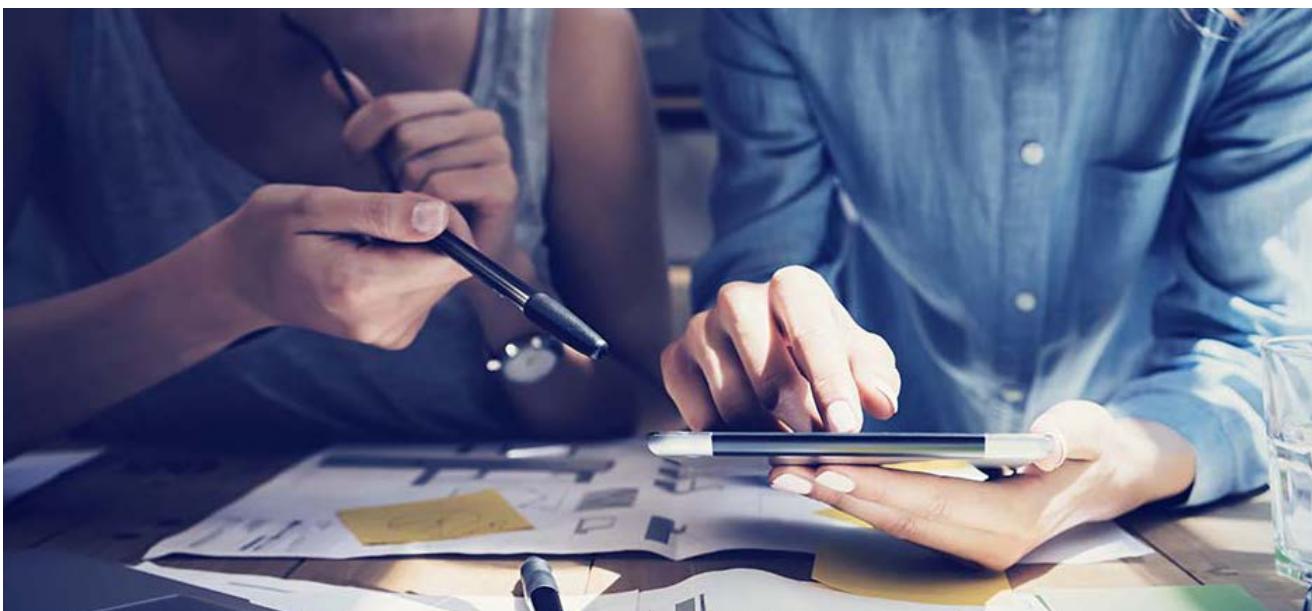
Within that tactic, there are a lot of options. This means you need a new strategy to determine which options are best suited to help the business achieve its goal through the digital marketing tactic.

Out of that strategy might be a new tactic of SEO.

But SEO requires a strategy of its own because implementing SEO without any framework for achieving your goals isn't going to get the results you want.

Optimizing title tags, navigation optimization, and schema implementation are all solid SEO tactics, but they can also be failed tactics if they don't support a strategy that lays out why those tactics are being used.

STRATEGY BEGAT TACTICS BEGAT STRATEGY

If I were to put the correlation of strategy to tactics into biblical terms – particularly, the King James English – it would be: Goals begat strategy, which begat tactics, which begat more strategy, which begat more tactics, which begat so on and so forth.

Let's say a website has a goal of increasing sales by 10% over the next 12 months. The first step is to develop a strategy to achieve that goal.

That might include these tactics:

- Organic optimization
- Paid advertising
- Site UX optimization
- Social media marketing

But that is by no means the complete strategy. You have to look at each tactic and ask how you will use it to achieve the established goal.

For example, the tactic of organic optimization requires its own strategy, which might include the following additional tactics:

- Site architecture improvements
- On-page optimization
- Local optimization
- Link building

From here, we need to then look at the strategy for each of these tactics and see if yet another strategy may be needed.

Take on-page optimization. What does the execution of that look like?

Well, lo and behold, here come more tactics which include optimizing:

- Titles
- Descriptions
- URLs
- Breadcrumbs
- Content

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And yet again, some of these tactics also require a strategy of their own:

- What format will your titles and descriptions follow?
- Will there be an established structure for the URLs and breadcrumbs? What is it?
- Will all the content be written with a particular voice? How will calls to action be integrated?

If you don't build a strategy for each tactic then you may find yourself "optimizing" without having any type of uniformity.

That might work well for a single page, but it will likely fail to help you achieve the broader goal. Or, in more common parlance: tactics without strategy can win a battle, but they won't win the war.

In the end, the actions you take may turn out to be the same with or without having taken the time to develop a strategy. But the result will be different.

Without a strategy, you have nothing for which to measure your success. Sure, you got traffic, but is it the right traffic? And was it profitable?

You've probably heard it said, "if you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time." This is the essence of digital marketing without a strategy. Anyone can implement SEO tactics. But without a strategy, they're aiming at nothing.

It might look the same, and you might be charged the same, but, believe me, it isn't the same. It's more like work for the sake of work. You might stumble upon a few wins here and there, but there isn't any guiding principle that ensures that the tactics are directing you to the greatest possible success.

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STRATEGY ALWAYS COMES FIRST

If you ask me now what the difference between a strategy and a tactic is, I'd say a strategy is an accumulation of evolving tactics used to achieve a stated goal for the best possible ROI.

That strategy should always drive the tactics (as well as the strategies for those tactics).

You can choose to implement tactics without starting with a solid strategy, but you'll never get the result you want.

GOOGLE WEBMASTER GUIDELINES:
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW & UNDERSTAND

AUTHOR

BRIAN HARNISH

Google's Webmaster Guidelines are fundamental to achieving sustainable SEO results using techniques that are in line with Google's expectations.

If you don't follow their guidelines, you can expect to experience either an algorithmic devaluation or an outright manual penalty.

In the most severe cases, you can expect to be banned from Google SERPs entirely.

Understanding the guidelines in full is the only way to avoid potential missteps and future harm to your site. Of course, there's always more than one way to interpret their guidelines.

Thankfully, Google reps such as John Mueller and Gary Illyes are available on Twitter for most questions about these guidelines.

For the most part, the guidelines are cut-and-dry.

But, you do need to review the guidelines on a regular basis because Google does update them. They don't necessarily announce changes to them, so you must be on alert.

One of the more recent changes to the guidelines was when Google added a line about making sure you code your sites in valid HTML and CSS, and that it should be validated with the W3C.

This does not necessarily mean that it will help in search (it can through a user experience perspective due to better cross-browser compatibility).

This is a different type of guide than most.

The goal of this guide is to present potential solutions to common problems, so you are armed with actionable advice you can use on your next website issue.

Doesn't that sound like fun?

WHAT ARE THE GOOGLE WEBMASTER GUIDELINES?

These guidelines are separated into:

- Webmaster guidelines.
- General guidelines.
- Content-specific guidelines.
- Quality guidelines.

Webmaster guidelines are more general best practices that will allow you to build your site so that it's easier to appear in Google Search.

Other guidelines include those that will prevent your site from appearing in search.

General guidelines are those best practices that will help your site look its best in the Google SERPs (search engine results pages).

Content-specific guidelines are more specific towards those different types of content on your site like images, video, and others.

Quality guidelines include all those techniques that are prohibited and can get your page banned from the SERPs.

If that were not enough, using these techniques can also cause a manual action to be levied against your site.
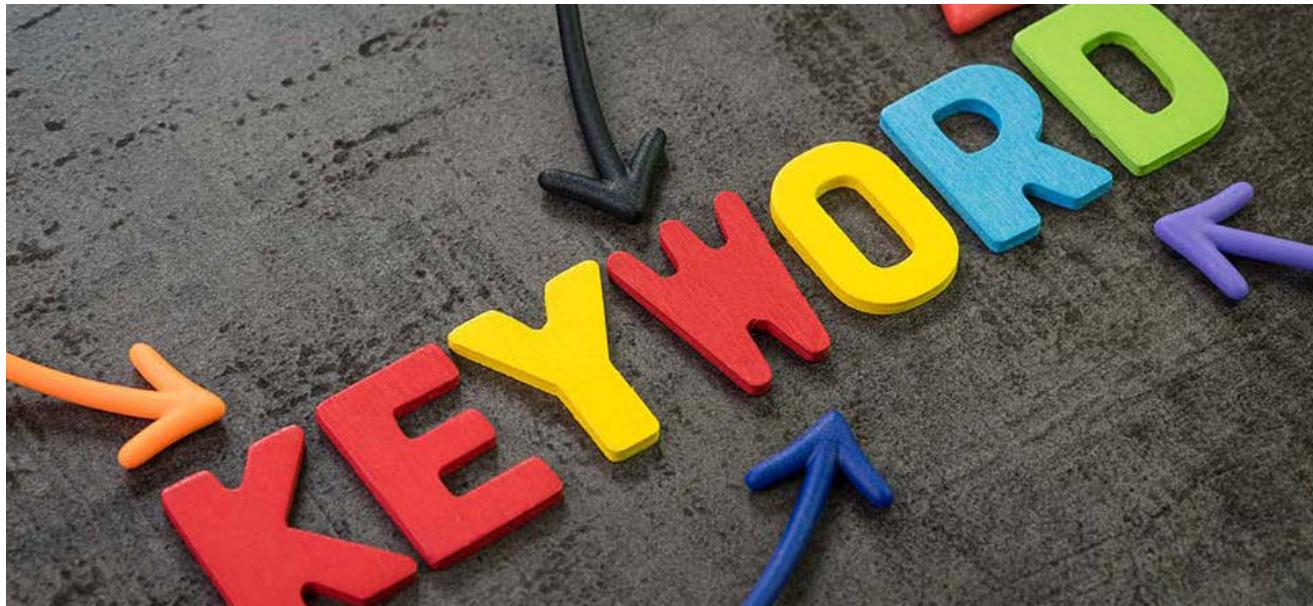
These guidelines are focused on making sure that you don't write spammy content and that you write content for humans rather than search engine spiders.

It's easier said than done, however. Creating websites that adhere to Google's Webmaster Guidelines is a challenge.

But, by understanding them completely, you have passed the first hurdle.

The next hurdle is applying them to your websites in a way that makes them compliant with these guidelines. But, as with any SEO challenge, practice makes perfect!

MAKE SURE YOUR KEYWORDS ARE RELEVANT

Your site should be easily discoverable. One way to determine keyword relevance is to examine the top-ranking sites and see what keywords they are using in their page title and meta description.

Another way is to perform a competitor analysis of the top-ranking sites in your niche. There are many tools that can help you identify how sites are using keywords on-page.

Common Issue

You have a site that has zero keywords. The client has given you a list of keywords, and you want to optimize the site for those keywords. The problem is, you have nothing but branded keywords throughout the text copy, and there has been zero thought given to the website optimization.

Solution

The solution here is not quite simple. You would need to perform keyword research and in-depth competitor analysis to find the sweet spot of optimization for keywords based on your target market.

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MAKE SURE THAT PAGES ON YOUR SITE CAN BE REACHED BY A LINK FROM ANOTHER FINDABLE PAGE

Google recommends that all pages on your site have at least one link from another page. Links make the world wide web, so it makes sense that your primary means of navigation are links. This can be done through your navigation menu, breadcrumbs, or contextual links.

Links should also be crawlable. Making your links crawlable ensures a great user experience, and that Google can easily crawl and understand your site. Avoid using generic anchor text to create these links, and use keyword phrases to describe the outgoing page.

A siloed website architecture is best because this helps reinforce topical relevance of pages on your site and arranges them in a hierarchical structure that Google can understand. It also helps reinforce topical focus.

Common Issue

You run into a site that has orphaned pages everywhere and within the sitemap.

Solution

Make sure at least one link from the site links to every other potential page on your site. If the page is not part of your site, either delete it entirely or noindex it.

LIMIT THE QUANTITY OF LINKS ON A PAGE TO A REASONABLE NUMBER

In the past, Google is on record saying that you shouldn't use more than 100 links per page.

It's better to have links that are useful to the user, rather than sticking to a specific quantity.

In fact, sticking to specific quantities can be harmful if they negatively impact the user experience.

Google's guidelines now state that you can have a few thousand (at most) on a page.

It's not unreasonable to assume that Google uses quantities of links as a spam signal.

If you want to link over and over again, do so at your peril. Even then, John Mueller has stated that they don't care about internal links, and you can do what you want.
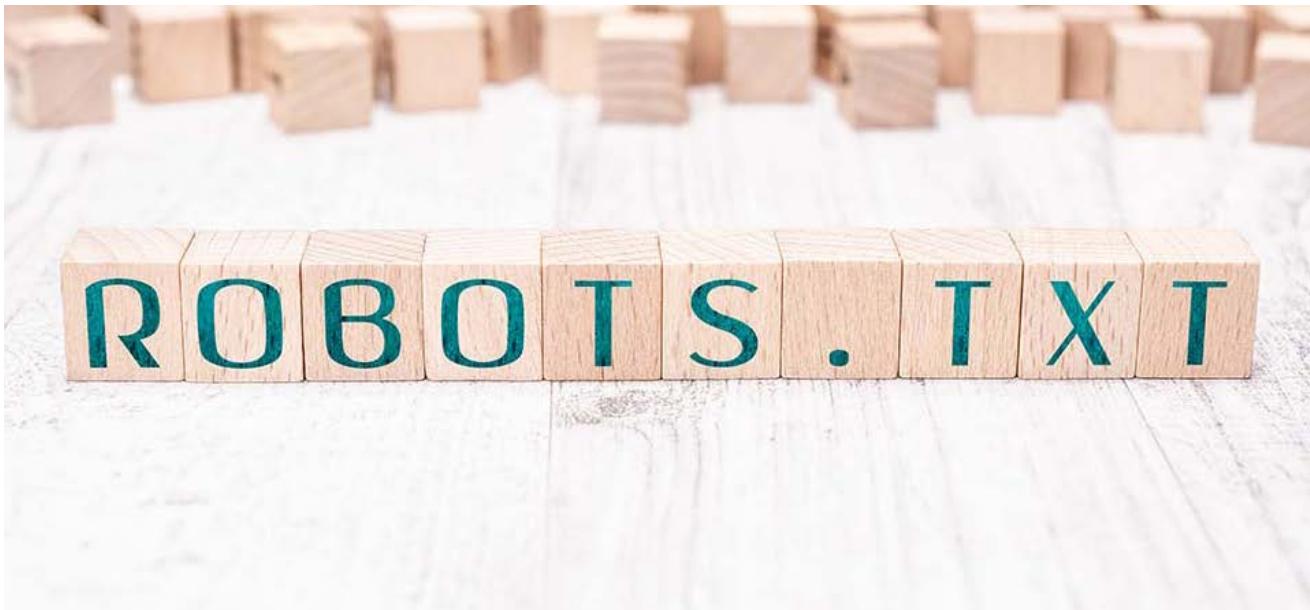
Common Issue

You have a site that has more than 10,000 links per page. This is going to introduce problems when it comes to Google crawling your site.

Solution

This depends on the scope and type of site you have. Make sure that you reduce links per page down to less than a few thousand if your site needs it.

USE THE ROBOTS.TXT FILE TO MANAGE YOUR CRAWL BUDGET

Crawl budget optimization is an important part of making sure that Google can crawl your site efficiently and easily.

You are making it more efficient and easier for Google to crawl your site through this process. You optimize your crawl budget in two ways – the links on your site and robots.txt.

The method that primarily concerns us at this step is using robots.txt for crawl budget optimization.

This guide from Google tells you everything you need to know about the robots.txt file and how it can impact crawling.

Common Issue

You run into a site that has the following line in its robots.txt file:

Disallow: /

This means that the robots.txt file is disallowing crawling from the top of the site down.

Solution

Delete that line.

Common Issue
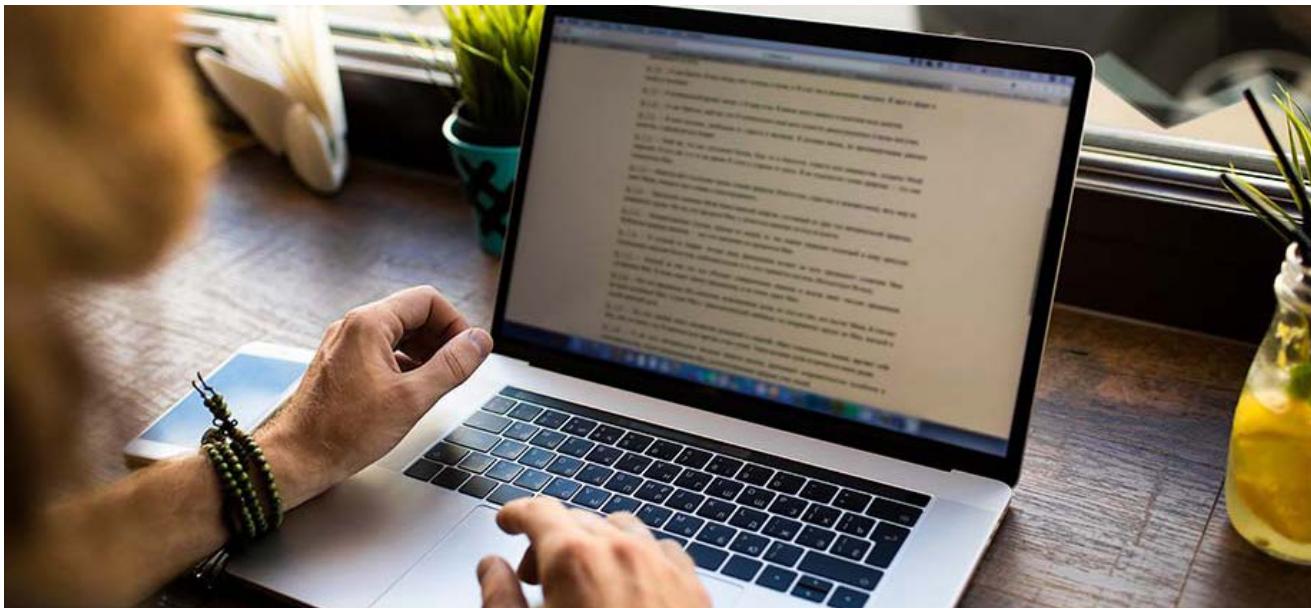
You run into a site that doesn't have a sitemap.xml directive in robots.txt. This is considered an SEO best practice.

Solution

Make sure you add in a directive declaring the location of your site-map file, such as the following:

Sitemap: https://www.example.com/sitemap.xml

CREATE A USEFUL, INFORMATION-RICH SITE & WRITE PAGES THAT CLEARLY AND ACCURATELY DESCRIBE YOUR CONTENT

As their guidelines state, Google prefers information-rich sites. This is dictated by industry, so a competition analysis is critical to finding sites that are considered "information-rich."

This "information-rich" requirement varies between industry to industry, which is why such a competition analysis is required.

The competition analysis should reveal:

- What other sites are writing about.
- How they are writing about those topics.
- How their sites are structured, among other attributes.

With this data, you will be able to create a site that meets these guidelines.

Common Issue

You have a site that is full of **thin, short content** that is not valuable.

Let's be clear here, though – **word count** is not the be-all, end-all factor for content.

It's about content quality, depth, and breadth.

Back to our site – you discover that it's full of thin content.

Solution

A comprehensive content strategy will be necessary in order to overcome this site's content weaknesses.

THINK ABOUT THE WORDS USERS WOULD TYPE TO FIND YOUR PAGES

When **performing keyword research,** it is critical to ensure that you figure out how users search for your site.

If you don't know the words that users are searching for, then all of the keyword research in the world is for naught.

This is where effective keyword research comes into play.

When you do effective keyword research, you must consider things like your potential client's intent when searching for a phrase.

For example, someone earlier in the buying funnel is more likely all about research.

They would not be searching for the same keywords that someone who is at the end of the buying funnel would be (e.g., they are just about to buy).

In addition, you must also consider your potential client's mindset – what are they thinking when they are searching for these keywords?

Once you have concluded the keyword research phase of your project, then you must perform on-page optimization.

This on-page optimization process usually includes making sure that every page on your site mentions the targeted keyword phrase of that page.

You cannot do SEO without effective keyword research and targeting. SEO doesn't work that way. Otherwise, you are not doing SEO.

Common Issue

You run into a site that has nothing but branded keyword phrases and hasn't done all that much to differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

Through your research, you find that they have not updated their blog all that much with a variety of keyword topics, and instead have only concentrated on branded posts.

Solution

The solution to this is quite simple – make sure that you use targeted keyword phrases that are of broader topical relevancy to come up with content, rather than branded keywords.

This goes back to the fundamentals of SEO, or SEO 101: include the keywords that your users would type to find those pages, and make sure your site includes those words on its pages.

This is, in fact, part of Google's general guidelines for helping users understand your pages.

DESIGN YOUR SITE TO HAVE A CLEAR CONCEPTUAL PAGE HIERARCHY

What is a clear conceptual page hierarchy? This means that your site is organized by topical relevance.

You have the main topics of your site arranged as main topics, with subtopics arranged underneath the main topics.

These are called SEO silos. SEO Silos are a great way to organize the pages on your site according to topics.

The deeper the clear conceptual page hierarchy, the better. This tells Google that your site is knowledgeable about the topic.

There are two schools of thought on this guideline – one believes that you should never stray from a flat architecture – meaning any page should not be more than three clicks deep from the homepage.

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The other school of thought involves SEO siloing – that you should create a clear conceptual page hierarchy that dives deep into the breadth and depth of your topic.

Ideally, you must create a website architecture that makes sense for your topic. SEO Siloing helps accomplish this by making sure your site is as in-depth about your topic as possible.

SEO Siloing also presents a cohesive organization of topical pages and discussions.

Because of this, and the fact that SEO siloing has been observed to create great results – it is my recommendation that most sites pursuing topically-dense subjects create a silo architecture appropriate to that topic.

Common Issue

You run into a site that has pages strewn all around, without much thought to the organization, linking, or other website architecture.

These pages are also haphazardly put together, meaning that they do not have much of an organizational flow.

Solution

You can fix this issue by creating a siloed website architecture that conforms to what your competitors are doing.

The thought behind doing this being that this website architecture will help reinforce your topical focus, and in turn, improve your rankings through entity relationships between your pages and topical reinforcement.

This topical reinforcement then creates greater relevance for your keyword phrases.

ENSURE ALL WEBSITE ASSETS ARE FULLY CRAWLABLE & INDEXABLE

You must be thinking – why shouldn't all assets be fully crawlable and indexable?

Well, there are some situations where blocking CSS (Cascading Stylesheets) and JS (JavaScript) files are acceptable.

- First, if you were blocking them because they had issues playing nice with each other on the server.

- Second, if you were blocking them because of some other conflict, either way, Google does have guidelines for this also.

Google's guidelines on this topic state:

"To help Google fully understand your site's contents, allow all site assets that would significantly affect page rendering to be crawled: for example, CSS and JavaScript files that affect the understanding of the pages. The Google indexing system renders a web page as the user would see it, including images, CSS, and JavaScript files. To see which page assets that Googlebot cannot crawl, use the URL Inspection tool, to debug directives in your robots.txt file, use the robots.txt Tester tool."

This is important. You don't want to block CSS and JavaScript.

All elements are critical to ensure that Google fully understands the context of your page.

Most site owners block CSS and JavaScript via robots.txt.

Sometimes, this is because of conflicts with other site files.

Other times, they present more problems than not when they are fully rendered.

If site files present issues when they are rendered, it is time to create a fully revamped website.
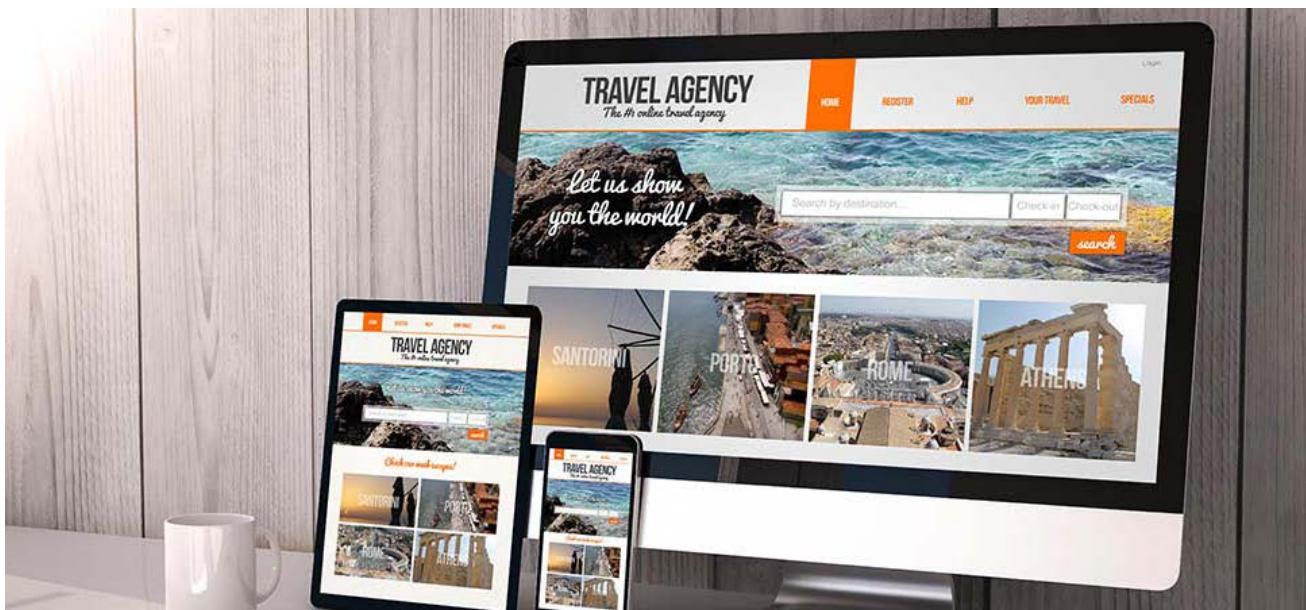
Common Issue

You come across a site that has CSS and JavaScript blocked within robots.txt.

Solution

Unblock CSS and JavaScript in robots.txt. And, if they are presenting that much of conflict (and a mess in general), you want to have as clean of an online presence as possible.

MAKE YOUR SITE'S IMPORTANT CONTENT VISIBLE BY DEFAULT

Google's guidelines talk about making sure that your site's most important content is visible by default.

This means that you don't want buttons, tabs, and other navigational elements to be necessary to reveal this content.

Google also explains that they "consider this content less accessible to users, and believe that you should make your most important information visible in the default page view."

Tabbed content – yes, this falls under content that is less accessible to users.

Why?

Consider this: you have a tabbed block of content on your page.

The first tab is the only one that is fully viewable and visible to users until you click on the tab at the top to go to the second one. And so on.

Imagine Google – they think this kind of content is less accessible. While this may be a fairly small consideration, you don't want to do this egregiously – especially on your homepage.

Make sure that all tabbed content is fully visible.

Common Issue

You get a website assigned to you that has tabbed content. What do you do?

Solution

Recommend that the client create a version of the content that is fully visible.

For example, turn tabbed content into paragraphed content going up and down the page.

GOOGLE'S WEBMASTER GUIDELINES ARE REALLY GUIDELINES

As SEOs, Google's Webmaster Guidelines are just that, guidelines. It can be said that they're just "guidelines" and not necessarily a rule.

But, watch out – if you violate them egregiously, you could be outright banned from the SERPs. I prefer remaining on Google's good side. Manual actions are ugly.

Don't say we didn't warn you.

Of course, penalties can range from algorithmic devaluations to outright manual actions. It all depends on the severity of the violation of that guideline.

And, pages and folders can be devalued when it comes to Penguin issues.

Don't forget that real-time Penguin is inherently very granular in this regard.

But, it's important to note – not all guideline violations will result in penalties.

Some result in issues with crawling and indexing, which can also impact your ranking.

Others result in major manual actions, such as spammy links back to your site.

When a manual action hits, it's important to remain calm.

You have likely brought this on yourself through link spam or another type of spam on your site.

The best you can do now is investigate and work with Google to remove the manual action.

In general, if you have spent a lot of time getting into trouble, Google expects the same amount of time to get out of trouble before you get back in their good graces.

Other times, the site's so terrible, that the only solution is to nuke it and start over.

Armed with this knowledge, you should be able to identify whether certain techniques have caused you to get into some serious trouble.

As an aside, it is definitely worth it following Google's guidelines from the start.

While results are slower when compared to other, more aggressive methods, we highly recommend this approach.

This approach will help you maintain a more stable online presence, and you don't have to suffer through a manual action or algorithmic devaluation.

The choice is yours.

HOW PEOPLE SEARCH: UNDERSTANDING USER INTENT

AUTHOR

DAN TAYLOR

In Google's earlier days, the search engine relied heavily on plain text data and backlinks to establish rankings through periodic monthly refreshes (known as the Google Dance).

Since those days, Google search has become a sophisticated product with a plethora of algorithms designed to promote content and results that meet a user's needs.

To a certain extent, a lot of SEO is a numbers game. We focus on:

- Rankings.
- Search volumes.
- Organic traffic levels.
- Onsite conversions.

That's because these metrics are what we are typically judged by as SEO professionals – and for the most part, can be measured across competitor websites (through third-party tools).

Clients want to rank higher and see their organic traffic increasing and, by association, leads and sales will also improve.

When we choose target keywords, there is the tendency and appeal to go after those with the highest search volumes, but much more important than the keyword's search volume is the intent behind it.

There is also a tendency to discount any search phrase or keyword that has a low or no, search volume based on the fallacy of it offering no "SEO value," but this is very niche dependent.

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This is a key part of the equation that is often overlooked when content is produced, it's great that you want to rank for a specific term, but the content has to not only be relevant but also satisfy the user intent.

This chapter will explain not only the different categorizations of search intent but also:

- How intent relates to the content and website experiences, we choose to produce.
- How the search engines establish user intent based on a simple query input.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND INTENT

In 2006, a [study](#) conducted by the University of Hong Kong found that at a primary level, search intent can be segmented into two search goals.

- A user is specifically looking to find information relating to the keyword(s) they have used.
- A user is looking for more general information about a topic.

A further generalization can be made, and intentions can be split into how specific the searcher is and how exhaustive the searcher is.

Specific users have a narrow search intent and don't deviate from this, whereas an exhaustive user may have a wider scope around a specific topic or topics.

The search engines are also making strides in understanding both search intent. Google's **[Hummingbird](#)** and Yandex's **[Korolyov](#)** and **[Vega](#)** are just two examples of these.

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GOOGLE & SEARCH INTENT

There have been a lot of studies conducted into understanding the intent behind a query, and this is reflected by the types of results that Google displays.

Google's Paul Haahr gave a great presentation in 2016, looking at **how Google returns results from a ranking engineer's perspective.**
The same "highly meets" scale can be found in the **Google Search Quality Rating Guidelines.**

In the presentation, Haahr explains basic theories on how if a user is searching for a specific store (e.g., Walmart), they are most likely to be looking for their nearest Walmart store, not the brand's head office in Arkansas.

The Search Quality Rating Guidelines echo this. Section 3 of the guidelines details the "Needs Met Rating Guidelines" and how to use them for content.

The scale ranges from Fully Meets (FullyM) to Fails to Meet (FailsM) and has flags for whether or not the content is porn, foreign language, not loading, or is upsetting/offensive.

The raters are not only critical of the websites they display in web results but also the special content result blocks (SCRB), aka Rich Snippets, and other search features that appear in addition to the "10 blue links".

One of the more interesting sections of these guidelines is 13.2.2, titled: Examples of Queries that Cannot Have Fully Meets Results.

Within this section, Google details that "Ambiguous queries without a clear user intent or dominant interpretation" cannot achieve a Fully Meets rating.

The example given is the query [ADA], which could be either the American Diabetes Association, the American Dental Association, or a programming language devised in 1980. As there is no dominant interpretation of the internet or the query, no definitive answer can be given.

QUERIES WITH MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Due to the diversity of language, many queries have more than one meaning – for example, [Apple] can either be a consumer electrical goods brand or a fruit.

Google handles this issue by classifying the query by its interpretation.

The interpretation of the query can then be used to define intent. Query interpretations are classified into the following three areas:

Dominant Interpretations

The dominant interpretation is what most users mean when they search for a specific query.

Google search raters are told explicitly that the dominant interpretation should be clear, even more so after further online research.

Common Interpretations

Any given query can have multiple common interpretations.

The example given by Google in their guidelines is [mercury] – which can mean either the planet or the element.

In this instance, Google can't provide a result that Fully Meets a user's search intent but instead, produces results varying in both interpretation and intent (to cover all bases).

Minor Interpretations

A lot of queries will also have less common interpretations, and these can often be locale-dependent.

DO — KNOW — GO

Do, Know, Go is a concept that search queries can be segmented into three categories: Do, Know, and Go.

These classifications then, to an extent, determine the type of results that Google delivers to its users.

Do (Transactional Queries)

When a user performs a "do" query, they are looking to achieve a specific action, such as purchasing a specific product or booking a service.

These are important to e-commerce websites, for example, where a user may be looking for a specific brand or item.

Device action queries are also a form of do query and are becoming more and more important, given how we interact with our smartphones and other technologies.

Ten years ago, Apple launched the first iPhone, which changed our relationship with our handheld devices.

The smartphone meant more than just a phone. It opened our access to the internet on our terms.

Obviously, before the iPhone, we had 1g, 2g, and WAP – but it was really 3g that emerged around 2003 and the birth of widgets and apps that changed our behaviors.

Device Action Queries & Mobile Search

Mobile search surpassed desktop search globally in **May 2015** in the greater majority of verticals. In fact, a 2017 study indicates that **57%** of traffic comes from mobile and tablet devices.

Google has also moved with the times – the two **mobile-friendly updates** and the impending **mobile-first index** being obvious indicators of this.

Increased internet accessibility also means that we are able to perform searches more frequently based on real-time events.

As a result, Google is currently estimating that 15% of the queries it's handling on a daily basis are new and have never been seen before.

This is in part due to the new accessibility that the world has and the increasing smartphone and internet penetration rates being seen globally.

Mobile is gaining increasing ground not only in how we search but in how we interact with the online sphere.

In a number of countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, China, and India, **more than 60%** of our time spent online is through a mobile device.

One key understanding of mobile search is that users may not also satisfy their query via this device.

In my experience, working across a number of verticals, a lot of mobile search queries tend to be more focused on research and informational, moving to desktop or tablet at a later date to complete a purchase.

According to Google's Search Quality Rating Guidelines:

"Because mobile phones can be difficult to use, SCRBs can help mobile phone users accomplish their tasks very quickly, especially for certain Know Simple, Visit in Person, and Do queries."

Mobile is also a big part of Google Search Quality Guidelines, with the entirety of section two dedicated to it.

Know (Informational Queries)

A "know" query is an informational query, where the user is wanting to learn about a particular subject.

Know queries are closely linked to micro-moments.

In September 2015, Google released a guide to **micro-moments,** which are happening due to increased smartphone penetration and internet accessibility.

Micro-moments occur when a user needs to satisfy a specific query there and then, and these often carry a time factor, such as checking train times or stock prices.

Because users can now access the internet wherever, whenever, there is the expectation that brands and real-time information are also accessible, wherever, whenever.

Micro-moments are also evolving.

Know queries can vary between simple questions [how old is tom cruise] too much broader and complex queries that don't always have a simple answer.

Know queries are almost always informational in intent.

Know/Informational queries are neither commercial or transactional in nature. While there may be an aspect of product research, the user is not yet at the transactional stage.

A pure informational query can range from [how long does it take to drive to London], to [gabriel macht imdb].

To a certain extent, these aren't seen in the same importance as directly transactional or commercial queries – especially by e-commerce websites. Still, they do provide user value, which is something Google looks for.

For example, if a user wants to go on holiday, they may start with searching for [winter sun holidays europe] and then narrow down to specific destinations.

Users will research the destination further, and if your website is providing them with the information they're looking for, then there is a chance they may also inquire with you as well.

Featured Snippets & Clickless Searches

Rich snippets and special content results blocks (i.e., featured snippets) have been a main part of SEO for a while now, and we know that appearing in a SCRB area can drive huge volumes of traffic to your website.

On the other hand, appearing in _ can mean that a user won't click through to your website, meaning you won't get the traffic and the chance to have them explore the website or count towards ad impressions.

That being said, appearing in these positions is powerful in terms of click-through rate and can be a great opportunity to introduce new users to your brand/website.

GO (NAVIGATIONAL QUERIES)

"Go" queries are typically brand or known entity queries, where a user is looking to go to a specific website or location.

If a user is specifically searching for Adidas, serving them Puma as a result wouldn't meet their needs.

Likewise, if your client wants to rank for a competitor brand term, you need to make them question why would Google show their site when the user is clearly looking for the competitor.

DEFINING INTENT IS ONE THING, USER JOURNEYS ANOTHER

For a long time, the customer journey is a staple activity in planning and developing both marketing campaigns and websites.

While mapping out personas and planning how users navigate the website is important, it's necessary to understand how a user searches and at what stage of their own journey they are at.

The word journey often sparks connotations of a straight path, and a lot of basic user journeys usually follow the path of landing page > form or homepage > product page > form.

We assume that users know exactly what they want to do, but mobile and voice search has introduced a new dynamic to our daily lives and shape our day-to-day decisions in a way like no other. These micro-moments directly question our understanding of the user journey.

Users no longer search in a single manner, and because of how Google has developed in recent years, there is no single search results page.

We can determine the stage the user is at through the search results that Google displays and by analyzing proprietary data from **Google Search Console,** Bing Webmaster Tools, and Yandex Metrica.

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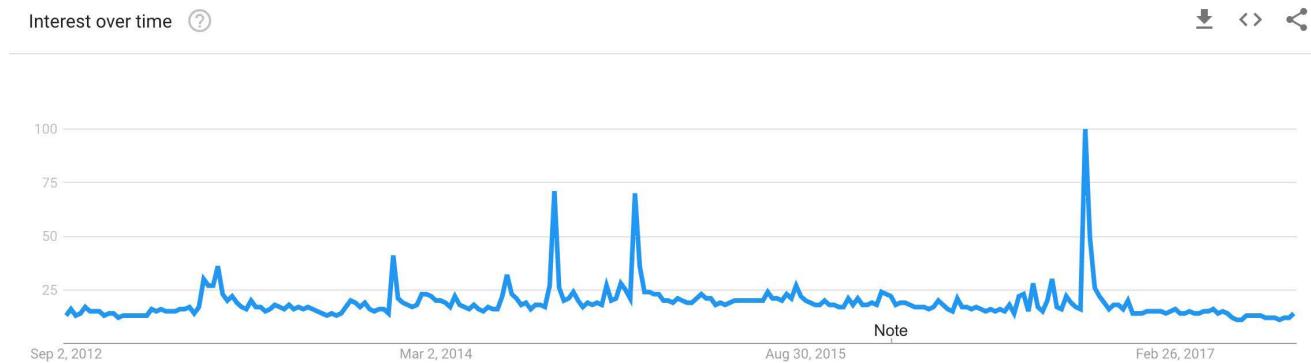
THE INTENT CAN CHANGE, RESULTS & RELEVANCY CAN TOO

Another important thing to remember is that search intent and the results that Google displays can also change – quickly.

An example of this was the **Dyn DDoS attack** that happened in October 2016.

Unlike other DDoS attacks before it, the press coverage surrounding the Dyn attack was mainstream – the White House even released a statement on it.

Interest over time ?

100

75

50

25

Note

Sep 2, 2012   Mar 2, 2014   Aug 30, 2015   Feb 26, 2017

Before the attack, searching for terms like [ddos] or [dns] produced results from companies like Incapsula, Sucuri, and Cloudflare.
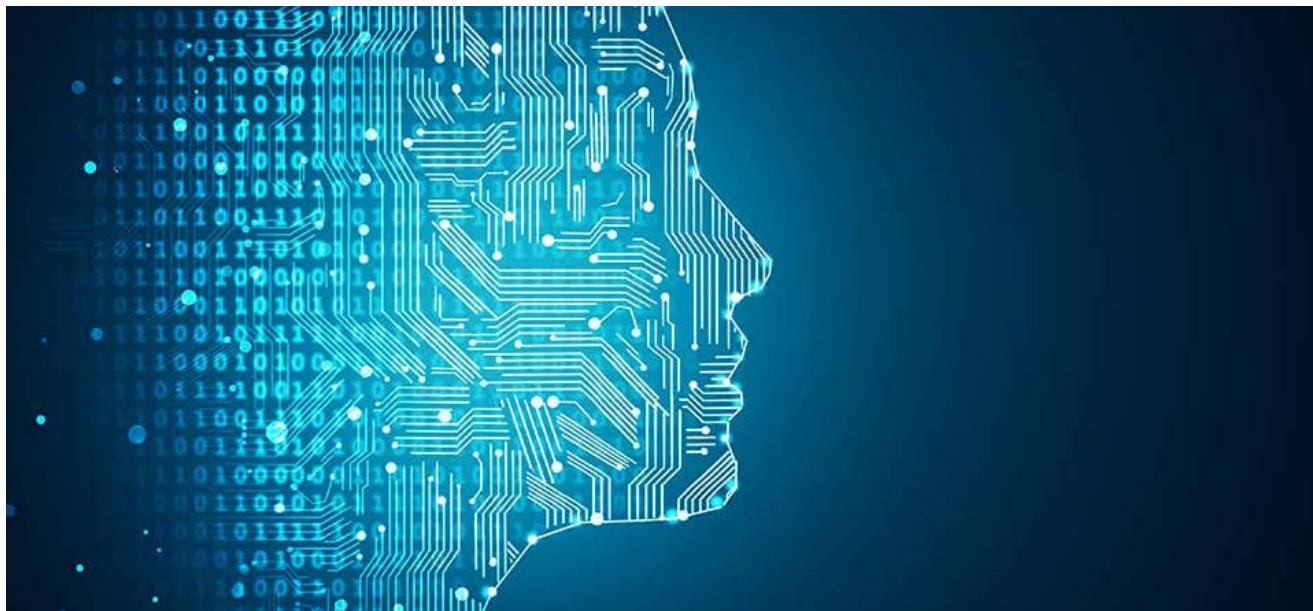
These results were all technical and not appropriate for the new-found audience discovering and investigating these terms.

What was once a query with a commercial or transactional intent quickly became informational.

Within 12 hours of the attack, the search results changed and became news results and blog articles explaining how a DDoS attack works.

This is why it's important to not only optimize for keywords that drive converting traffic but also those that can provide user value and topical relevance to the domain.

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MACHINE LEARNING & INTENT CLASSIFICATION
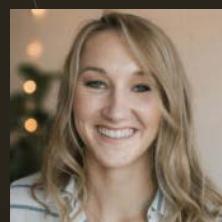
If, over time, a large number of websites produce different content and influence user search behavior through marketing and other means, then the output intent for a query will change.

Machine learning becomes more effective over time, and this, coupled with other algorithms, can change search results pages – as well as lead Google to experiment with SCRBs and other SERP features.

44 FREE TOOLS TO HELP YOU FIND WHAT PEOPLE SEARCH FOR

AUTHOR

ANNA CROWE

As thought-provoking and enjoyable as <u>keyword research</u> can be, it's also equally complicated and mind-boggling if you're a beginner just on the tipping point of actually getting it.

Sure, you've perused through Google's Keyword Planner and tinkered with Google's Autocomplete. But, honestly, keyword research is intimidating when you're just starting.

Getting into the groove of keyword research doesn't just happen overnight. You need to know how people search and what they search for before you can even start to think about mapping your keywords.

And with more than **6 billion** searches a day worldwide, how do you know where to start?

It's about finding the deepest, darkest, secret corners of the user's search intent to find "the right stuff" in a bowl full of "meh's."

That's where this article comes in. I'm spilling my top tool picks for those looking to improve their SEO repertoire.

If you're starting from square one and don't want to look like you stumbled out of 1997 with keyword stuffing, read on.

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WHAT PEOPLE SEARCH FOR

Where do you look for news stories or trending topics?

There are so many excellent tools that help SEO marketers make sense of what people search for and why.

They can help answer questions like:

- When should I write an article?
- Would this article perform well?
- Who would read this article?

How do I find these answers?

With some ah-mazingly awesome free tools.

Here are 45 of my favorite tools that can help SEO noobs (or any-
one really) discover what people are searching for and why.

1. BUZZSUMO

BuzzSumo is one of my favorite tools because of its **Content Discovery** solution. It enables you to search by topics Trending Now.

And you can filter by 1 hour, 3 hours, 6 hours, 12 hours, and 24 hours. Plus, you can filter by topics.
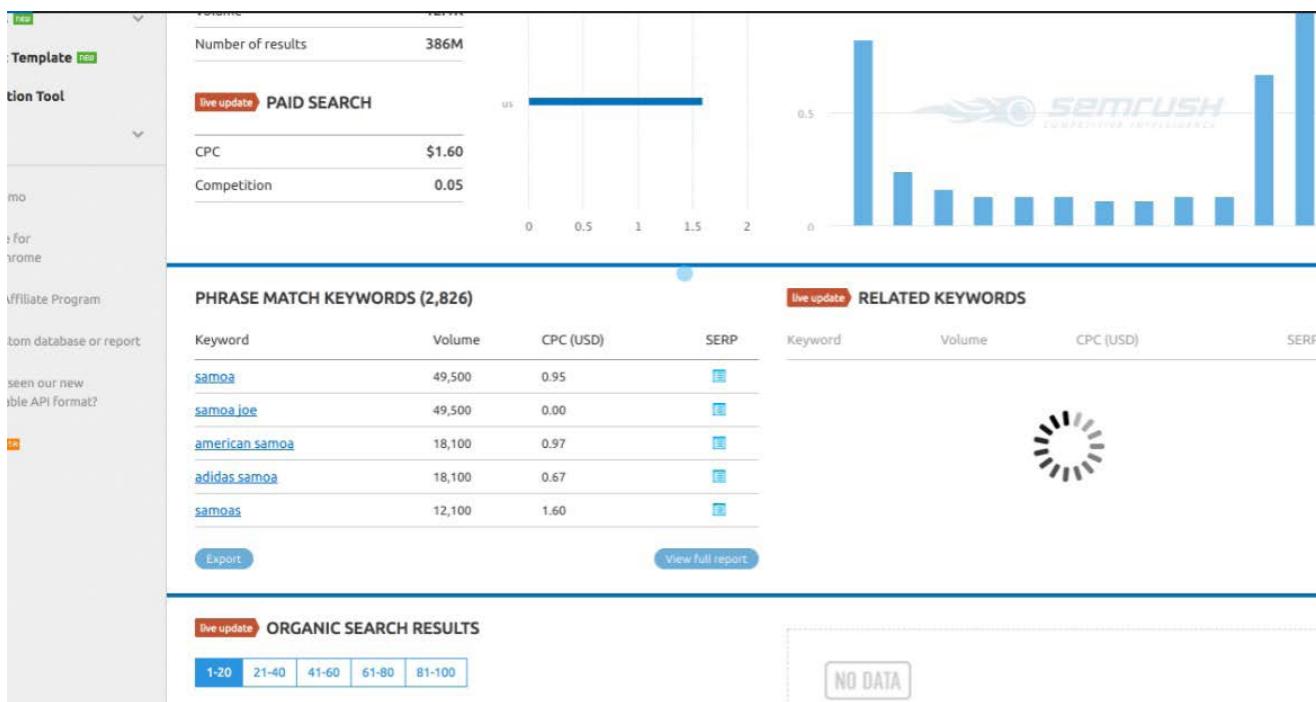
So, if the usual government hoopla isn't something you want to tie your keyword research tool, just filter it out.

Or, you can use BuzzSumo like **Kelsey Jones,** Editor-In-Chief at Neil Patel, who uses BuzzSumo, says:

"I love using Buzzsumo because it not only shows me what type of content is popular on social media, it also shows me what publishers and my clients' competitors are writing. The interface is also really to use, and I like being able to sort by date and number of social shares. To me, BuzzSumo is worth the cost for both content marketing and keyword research."

BuzzSumo does offer a free version, but you can upgrade for $99 a month if you want to get alerts on specific topics and all the other goods Jones mentioned.

2. SEMRUSH

To help you find what people are searching for around a particular topic, just type in your keyword or phrase and watch the magic happen.

SEMrush will pull phrase match keywords, related keywords, and organic search results.

Hung Nguyen, Marketing Manager at SmallPDF, shares:

"My favorite free SEO tool is SEMrush – specifically the Organic Research tool. As a standard SEO tool, you can quickly pop in a URL, and SEMrush will show all the keywords ranking for that one page. However, what makes it unique is the "SERP" option (under the Positions tab), which is available for every single keyword. This option displays a "snapshot" of the SERP page for that keyword,

under one specific country. It's crucial to not only tracking the rankings of your keywords but also analyze how Google displays your page on SERPs. For instance, you may have a Featured Snippet, but the image attached is of a competitor. You may be ranking in the top 10, but Google only displays the first eight results. Sometimes, FAQs may bump your page down even further. Google is also testing out how to view pages, e.g., with our without brand logos. And this is why this tool is so great – you can then go back to the drawing board and reprioritize fixes for your SEO cleaning."
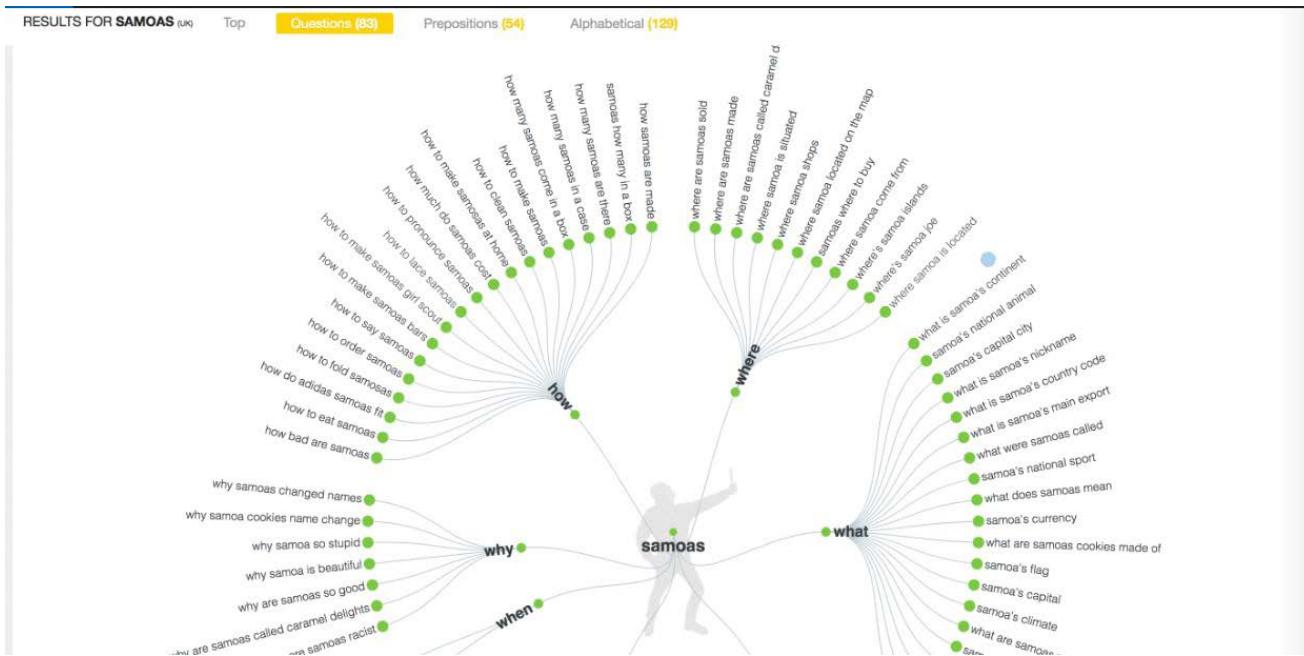
The founder of Call Outdoors, Laurie Wilkins, shares:

"Using the Keyword Gap Tool lets me see how my website is ranking against other competitors who are targeting the same keywords. By doing so, I can see keywords they're ranking for that I'm not so I can focus my efforts on targeting the same. This information is extremely useful in creating campaigns and content strategies so my website can rank higher in SERPs.

Furthermore, I can use Keyword Gap to identify which keywords top competitors rank highly but with little advertising competition. I can leverage that by creating an ad campaign to gain more traffic on my end. One thing I love about the tool is it shows mobile and desktop keyword results. If we're trying to rank more for mobile users, we can shift our focus on that information to get better rankings."

Paid users have more features, and the pro version starts at $99 per month. But, you can still use the tool for free when searching for ideas.

3. ANSWER THE PUBLIC

Answer The Public is another favorite of mine and relatively new to the scene compared to other tools. It uses searches from Google and Microsoft Bing and has a massive database that can predict what searchers are going to ask.

The interface is what makes this tool one of my favorites. While it is a keyword research tool, it displays a beautiful visualization of data.

I had a chance to speak with **Casie Gillette**, Senior Director of Digital Marketing at KoMarketing, about learning what type of content people search for and why. She said:

"We spend a lot of time search results, looking at the types of content and what the engines are showing. It's tough to understand
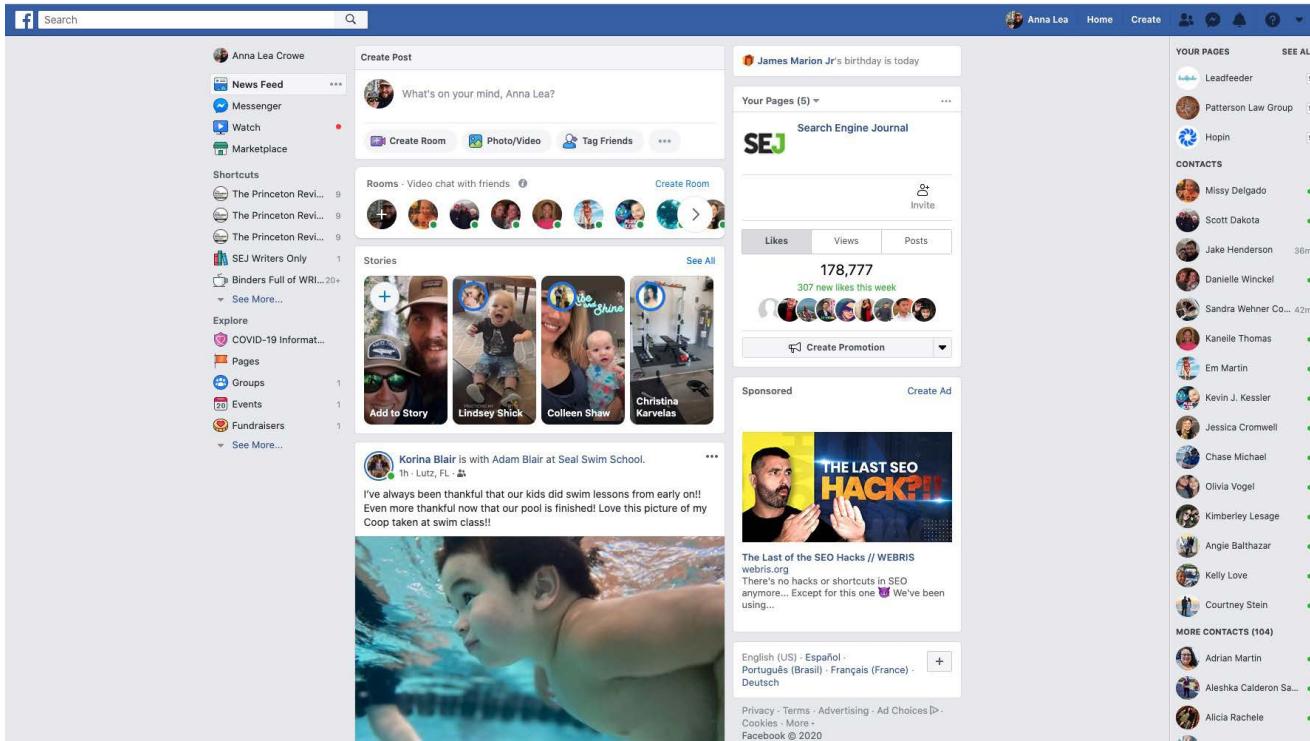
the intent and identify trends without that information. I also spend a ton of time with SEMrush and some question-based tools (e.g., Bloomberry or Answer the Public). I love the question-based tools because they scour places that people are talking about specific topics – it gives you real insights into a niche, and I always end up finding something new."

Chief Marketing Officer of Surple, Sean Oldfield, shares:

"My favorite free SEO tool is Answer the Public. You simply enter a topic of your choice, and the tool returns hundreds of awesome keyword ideas based on what people are searching for. It's especially useful when you're struggling to find long-tail keyword ideas to write about on your blog."

Answer the Public is free, and you can export the data to a CVS or Excel file.

4. FACEBOOK

Facebook is one of the most accessible free tools for discovered relevant topics.

Plus, a lot of people get their news from Facebook.

Facebook, in itself, is its search engine. In early 2013, Facebook expanded Graph Search to improve keyword research.

5. TWITTER

Twitter is another free tool I love to use before creating content.

Twitter's Explore section uses an algorithm to push trends that are determined based on your location and who you follow.

You can turn this off by choosing a trends location in two steps:
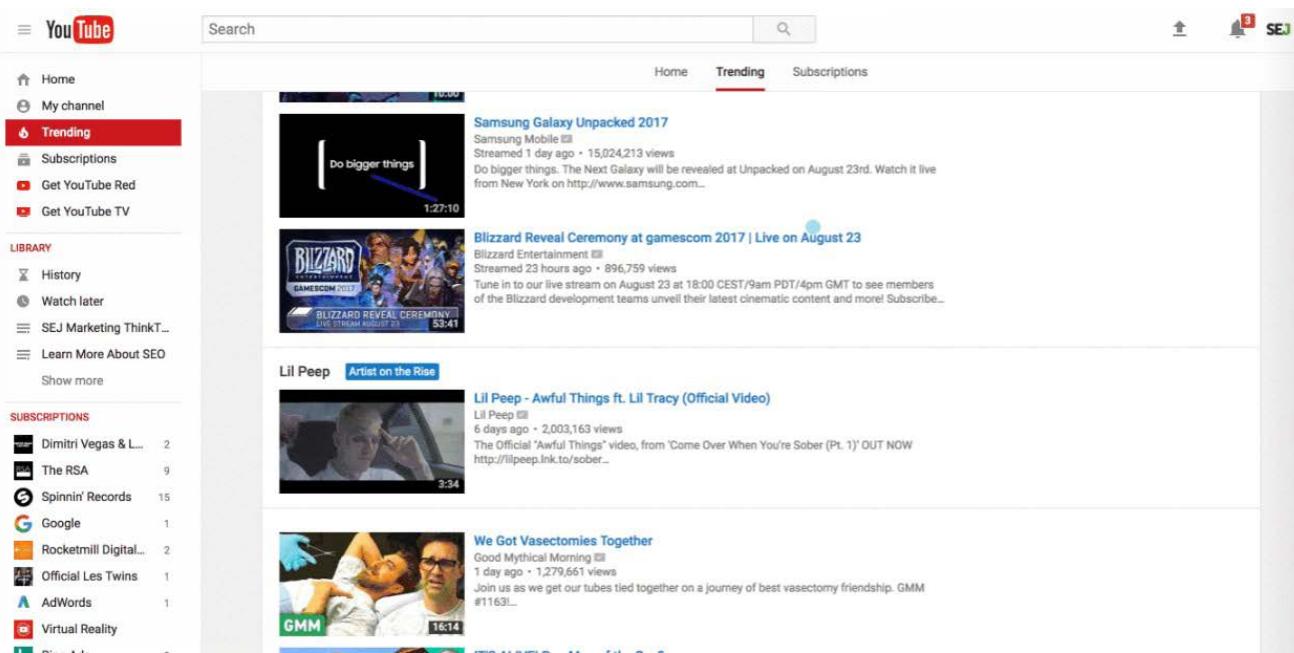
- Click Change in your trends box.
- Select Change to add a different location.

Changing your location is super helpful if you're focusing on local SEO.

Ashley Ward, the corporate speaker for SEMrush, has an interesting way to use Twitter to find trends. She says:

"When there's a trending conversation going on, there's a hashtag attached to it and can easily be found on social media networks like Twitter and Instagram. Half of the time, I'll just head to Twitter and Instagram and start researching the day's top-performing hashtags to see what all the hype is about and then follow the conversation. This type of method makes for great blog post topics and is incredibly useful for content marketing."

6. YOUTUBE

YouTube is mostly known for its **cooking videos** and workout videos, but it also provides a trending video section so that you can see what's popular on YouTube right now.

You can also check out YouTube Trends blog. It takes a look at trends happening on YouTube and what's going on in the world around us, like **tracking the solar eclipse.**

After you identify what's trending on YouTube, you can compare the topics to your YouTube analytics.

If you can tie the trending videos to your niche, it creates an opportunity for you to add a video with a strong potential to rank on YouTube.

7. PINTEREST
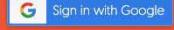
In November 2016, Pinterest launched **Explore** as a feature for Pinners to discover what's popular on Pinterest.

It uses an algorithm to create personalized pins of that day based on search trends. You can also browse up to 30 different topics.

While Pinterest created this to offer advertisers more organic options, it's a pretty excellent tool for brainstorming content ideas.

8. UBERSUGGEST

⚠ New Feature: Type in a competitor's domain to get better keyword ideas

Ubersuggest is Neil Patel's new freemium SEO tool that a lot of people are talking about.

Andrew Cunliffe, Co-founder of Second Fiddle, shares:

"Ubersuggest is by far one of our favorite SEO tools. The easy to **use Chrome extension** gives you insight into keywords that are working in your specific market to adapt and improve them while gaining an edge on your competition. This ultimately helps us

increase the visibility of our clients and drive traffic to their website. Even better is that with the reverse engineering of competitors' SEO and content marketing strategy, we spend significantly less time curating content that people won't access or even read. Ubersuggest is super easy to use, you simply type in a domain or keyword to get started, and it provides you with everything you need to know to win the game of SEO."

And, **Tess Robison** at Money Done Right, uses Ubersuggest because:

"Ubersuggest has a free version and a paid version, but the free version works perfectly fine for almost anything one would need to do. You can search tons of keywords that will show you the difficulty of the keywords and who the top ranking competitors are for those words. It also offers up suggestions of similar keywords related to the ones you're trying to target. The whole platform is super helpful for SEO and marketing purposes and is my favorite tool."

9. SCREAMING FROG

Screaming Frog has been my go-to source for technical SEO audits and on-page optimization for the last ten years.

It's a free tool that's super insightful because it crawls the entire site to look for gaps in your SEO strategy.

And I'm not alone.

**Cameron Dunn,** Director of Paid Search at SQRD Media, shares:

"Screaming Frog is the foundation for any SEO work. With Screaming Frog, I can see, in a matter of minutes, a detailed

understanding of the "nuts and bolts" of any site. I'm able to see all of the metadata that is being collected by search engines. I can quickly see what's working, but more importantly, what needs to be improved to ensure the site is optimized for search engines."

Nick Farnborough, Co-founder at Clavis Social, says:

"As SEO becomes more important for small business owners, finding great free tools becomes a higher priority every day. Screaming Frog dives into the technical side of SEO with its free SEO crawler. The SEO Spider tool can be used to find and fix all manner of Technical SEO errors, including broken links, audit redirects, sitemaps, site architecture, and more. The free plan is more than enough for most people, just starting with SEO, and it easy enough to manage after watching their tutorial videos."

10. AHREFS

Similar to SEMrush, **Ahrefs is an all-in-one SEO tool** that guides you through a site audit, monitor your competitors, build your keyword research, identify top-performing content, and much more.

Bruce Harpham, SaaS Marketing Consultant, admits that **Ahrefs is his favorite free SEO tool** stating:

"This free tool offers a snapshot of several key website metrics including domain rating, number of backlinks, number of links domains and follow vs. no-follow patterns. I use this free tool multiple times per week to assess different websites from an authority and SEO perspective. It is just a glimpse of the data that awaits you if you sign up for a full Ahrefs account."

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And, **Katie Fellenz,** Head of Marketing at Trust and Will, shares:

"This is most likely to be one of the most common tools to be recommended, but I seriously could not live without Ahrefs. It has so much functionality and useful features that other all-in-one SEO tools might not have (although others have features Ahrefs does not have). It's also very simply laid out and easy to navigate compared to other similar tools. Most notably, I find it most useful for backlink analysis, estimated traffic value, and research on competitors and our site."

11. YOAST

Yoast SEO is probably the most used SEO plugin for WordPress users. It makes the technical side of on-page SEO, not-so-technical. Yoast SEO guides you through writing meta titles and meta descriptions, but it also allows users to choose the canonical tags, build sitemaps, and so much more.

Madeleine Seah, SEO Specialist at New Age Polish, shares:

"The Yoast WordPress Plugin is a free SEO tool that helps you optimize your website and blog posts. This feature can help you improve rankings on search engine results pages and increase

traffic to your site. One of its best features is its XML sitemap generator. This feature helps generate a sitemap for your website and automatically updates it whenever a new page is added to your website. This saves you time by eliminating the need for manual updates."

12. GTMETRIX

_ is a free online SEO tool that analyzes your page speed performance.

With site speed being a top priority for SEOs the past few years, it's vital to know where your website stands.

But, the key to run multiple tests and experiment with different pages on your site. Your performance will change throughout the day depending on visitor count, so make sure to test.

13. KEYWORDS EVERYWHERE

Keywords Everywhere have become a favorite of mine the last year or so. Keywords Everywhere allow keyword research to be shown directly in the search results like below.

William Chin, a Web Consultant at **PickFu.com,** agrees with me. He says:

"It's a **free browser extension** that will append search volume for keywords on every query that you run (which is awesome). This has saved me a ton of time as I am regularly doing keyword research. It's always running in the background, so there is no configuration needed!"

And, so does **Didier Bizimungu,** Digital Marketing Director at Webtivity Marketing & Design, shares:

"It doesn't get any better than Keywords Everywhere. It's a browser add-on, so no need for me to visit a specific website to get it to work. It works right in my Google results. It includes keyword volume data as well as an estimated cost per click estimate. It's robust, and I love the number of choices in offers even for some obscure keywords."

14. SEO SEARCH SIMULATOR BY NIGHTWATCH
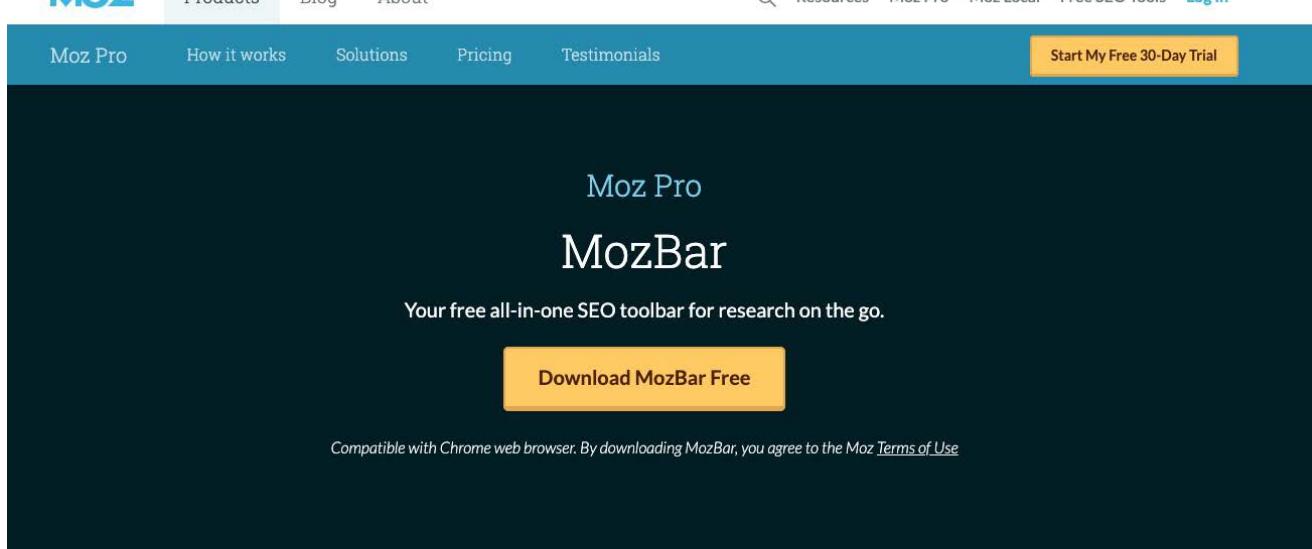
[SEO Search Simulator by Nightwatch](#) simplifies work for SEOs to see where you rank locally or globally.

[Nebojsa Radakovic,](#) Marketing Manager for Bejamas, uses it for checking multiple location rankings, saying:

"When I need to check keyword results on different local Google search properties, I use Nightwatch Search Simulator which is free to use Chrome Extension. It simulates search engine queries from any location on Google properties. Let's say you rank well on Google FR, but what about Google Belgium? Nightwatch Search Simulator helps with that."
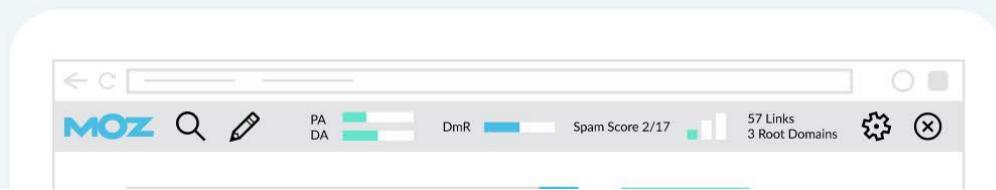
15. MOZBAR

Moz's Chrome extension, MozBar, is a free all-in-one SEO toolbar that allows you to view that page or SERP metrics.
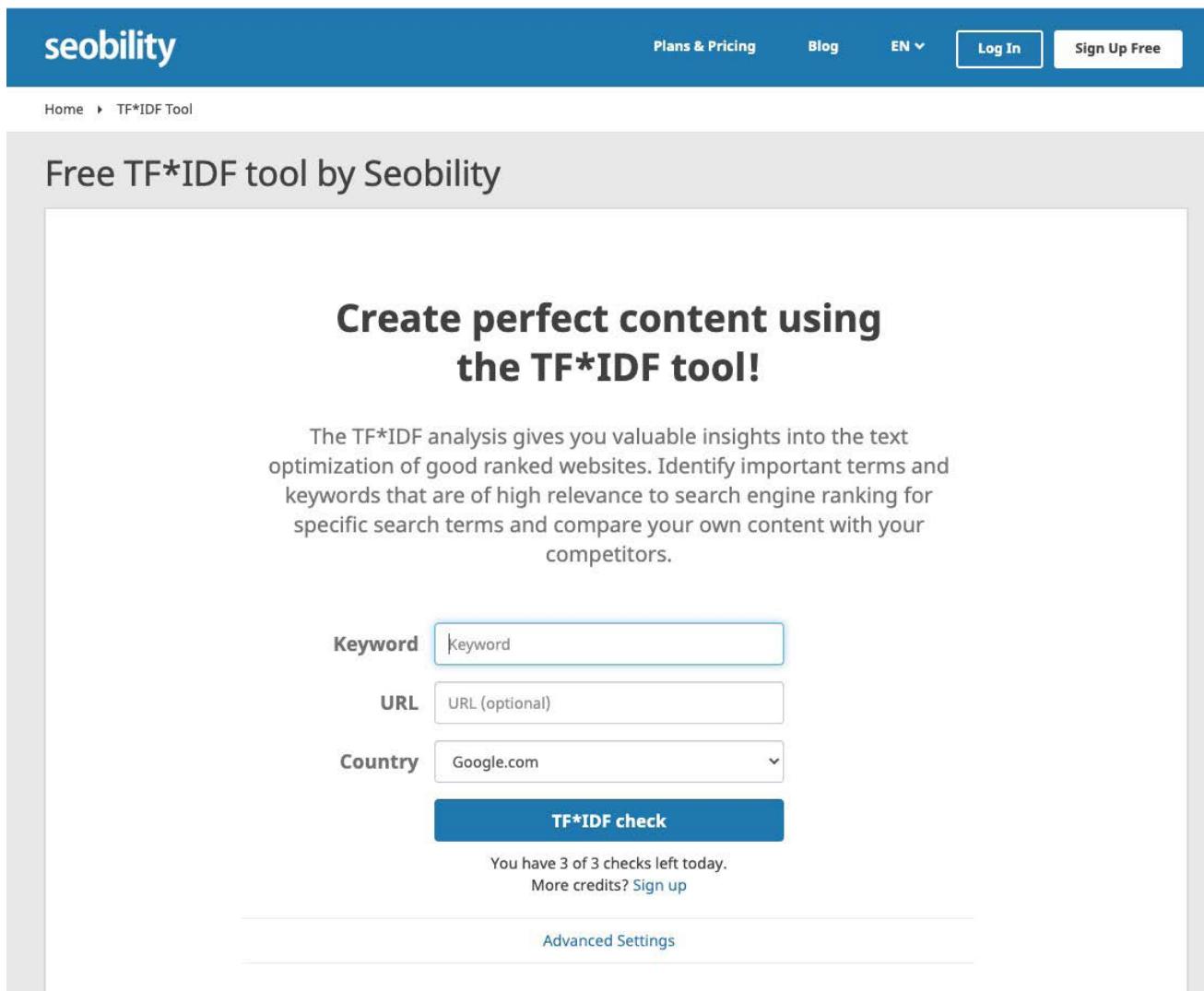
Kelly O'Hara, Founder of Copy Goals, uses the Mozbar daily, sharing:

"The MozBar is a free Chrome extension that you can use to quickly check domain and page authority. This makes it handy when performing link building or guest post outreach to determine the quality and authority of prospects."

Carol Archebelle, Digital Marketing Manager, Foundations Wellness Center, also uses the Moz stating:

"TheMozBar Chrome extension is a must-have. There is both a free and premium version, but the free version gives you plenty to start with. Using this extension, you can see the domain authority, page authority, spam score, link metrics, and page load times (just to name a few) of any page you view. My favorite feature is how it works on SERPs. The metrics of each result's page are viewable, right from the SERP itself. This gives you an idea of what you'll have to do to rank on page one for a particular keyword."

16. TF*IDF TOOL BY SEOBILITY

TF*IDF tool from Seobility shares insights from the text by identifying keywords of high relevance to help you rank and compare your content against competitors. You get three free checks a day.

Anastasiia Khlystova, Content Marketing Manager at HelpCrunch, uses this free tool for her content creation, stating:

"After collecting all the keywords for the new text, you discover what other contextual words you should use it to write an exhaustive piece in the eyes of Google. You can do that with the help of Seobility. The tool allows you to research three keywords per day for free. What it does is scraping the top10 results for your keywords and showing which words are most often used. These words must be present in your future article so that Google will consider it full and comprehensive."

17. SERP SIMULATOR
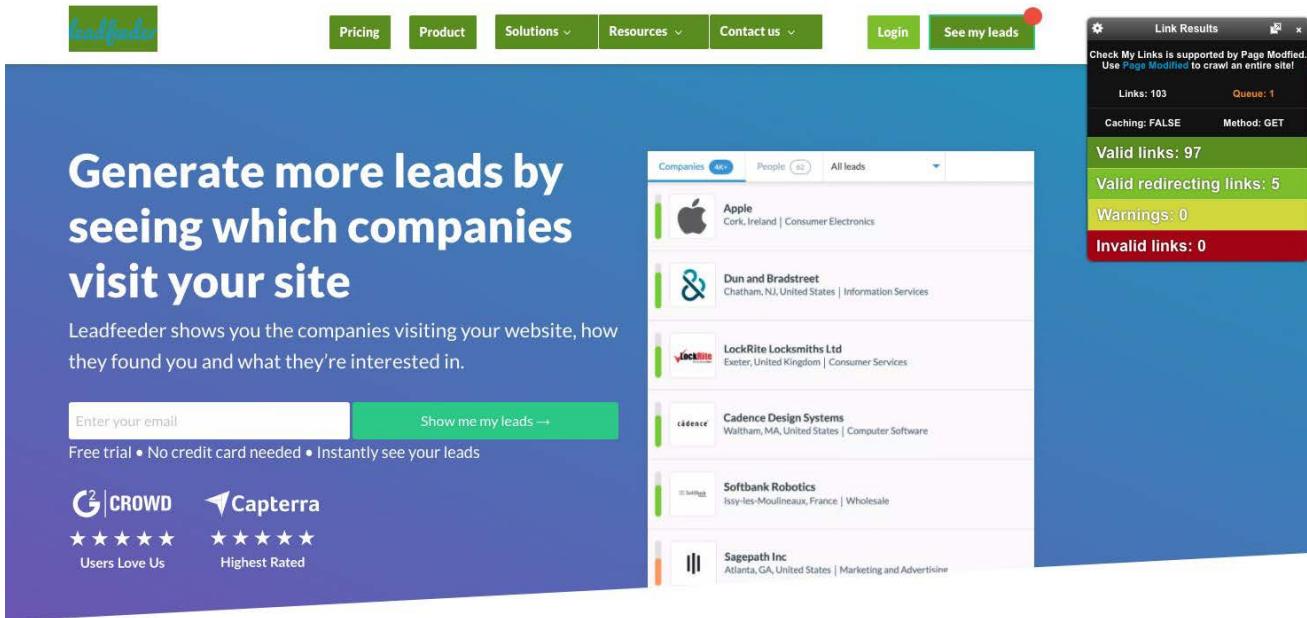
Mangools's Google SERP Simulator is an excellent free SEO tool that allows you to view your meta title and meta description in a SERP snippet preview. So, you can see if your metadata is getting truncated.

Chris Fernandez, CEO of Women's Health Interactive, has the same love for this tool. He says:

"My favorite SEO tool is a visual title and description Search Engine Results Page (SERP) length simulator. It allows my writing team and I to test titles and descriptions of articles while being edited and test SERP length on all screen sizes. If your title and description can't be seen on a mobile device, for example, you're losing valuable click-throughs! It's a simple, clean, effective, and handy tool that should be a part of EVERY marketer's toolkit!"

18. CHECK MY LINKS

Check My Links is another Chrome extension that I have stashed away in my SEO arsenal. I use this as a way to identify where the broken links are on a page. Then you can begin your broken link building outreach.

Dolce Lindsey, Digital Marketing Specialist at The Childress Agency, shares the same love. She says:

"If you're an SEO Specialist, the Check My Link Chrome extension is necessary to effectively perform broken link building strategies. By installing this extension, you can crawl through any webpage and find broken links with automation and ease. This is one of my

favorite free SEO tools because it enables users to identify 404 pages without clicking through multiple links and suggesting that your web pages replace the broken link. It's a great way to gain more backlinks, and the best part is you don't have to give anything in return."

19-31*. OTHER SOCIAL NEWS SITES

19. **Digg**

20. **Reddit**

21. **Hacker News**

22. **Product Hunt**

23. **Growth Hackers**

24. Instagram's Explore

25. Snapchat Discover

26. **Flickr**

27. **Quora**

28. **Wikipedia**

29. **Medium**

30. **Zest**

31. **Pocket**

If you're interested in learning more about using social media for keyword research, you might like this guide on SEO & Content Strategy.
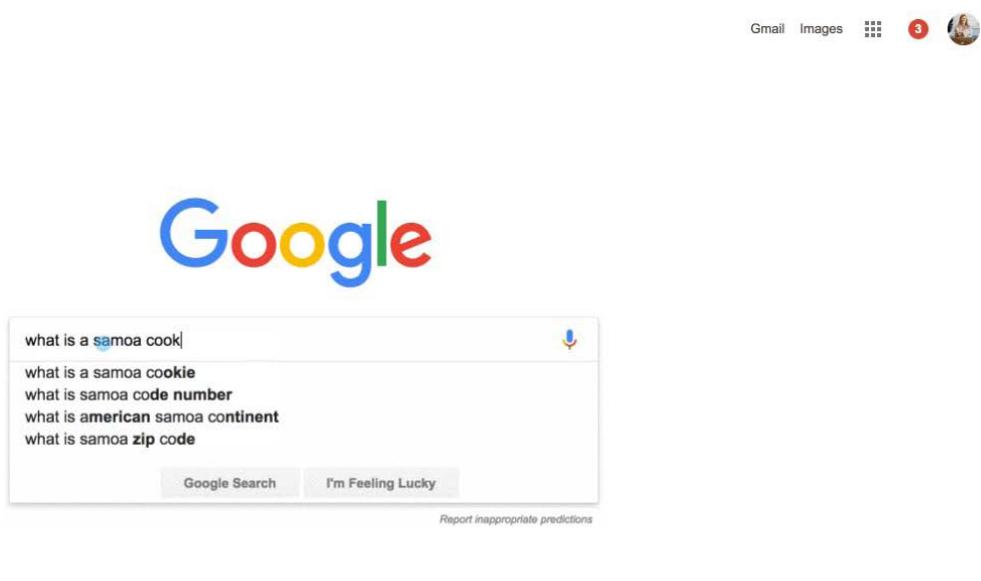
32. GOOGLE AUTOCOMPLETE

Now, I want to give in to some Google-related tools. Google has done well to give you little hints of what people search for.

I spoke with **George Freitag,** the SEO Growth Manager at Indeed.com, and he explains:

"Some of the best tools to research topics for SEO are from Google itself. Google Seach Console lets you know what topics people are already looking for when they arrive on your site. In contrast, Google Trends, AdWords, and even the related topics and autocomplete searches found right in Google search pages can give you insight on the kinds of topics people are looking for elsewhere on the web."

So, with that said, let's take a look at some of Google's free tools.

First up, Google Autocomplete. Google Autocomplete is a great tool for finding the best variations of your primary keyword phrase. Just type in the Google search box, and related terms will display in a drop-down list.

You can then manually select the long-tail keyword phrase you want to use or pick a combination of phrases.

33. GOOGLE PEOPLE ALSO ASK

The People Also Ask section is another free tool to use when beginning your keyword research.

After you type in your keyword term in the Google search box, scroll down to see different variations of your keyword term.

You can select the drop-down feature to expand the content. I often use these phrases as Headers in my body copy, which is useful if you aim to achieve Featured Snippet status.

34. GOOGLE SEARCHES RELATED TO

Google also offers a section at the bottom of Google search results called Google Searches related to.

If you scroll down to the bottom of the search results, you'll receive up to 8 suggestions that are ideal to use for keyword variations in your content and keyword research.

35. GOOGLE NEWS

Google News pulls in headlines from news sites worldwide and displays content tailored to your interests like many of the other search engines.

I like using Google News because it presents local interests and global news in an easy-to-use interface. You just click on the headline and go directly to the website that published the story.
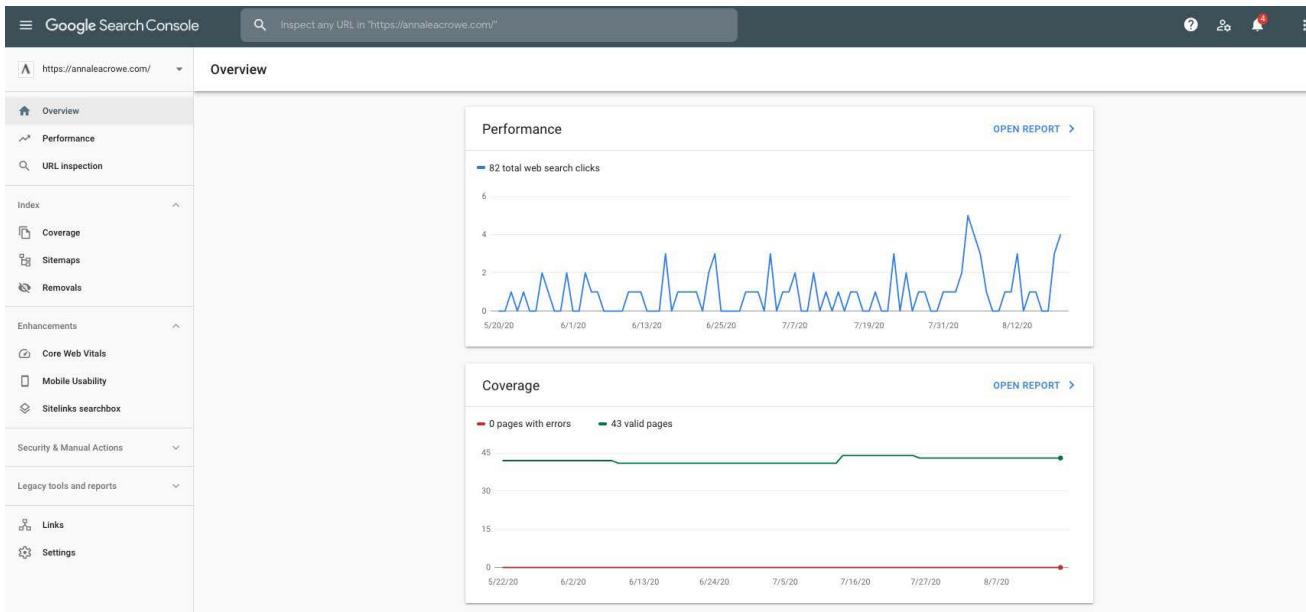
36. GOOGLE ALERTS + IFTTT

Google Alerts is similar to Buzzsumo, except you can have unlimited alerts for free. If you're searching for a particular topic or competitor, you can set-up Google Alerts to come to your inbox as it happens, once a day, or once a week.

I like to pair my Google Alerts with IFTTT recipes. I use **this recipe** to add my Google Alerts to a spreadsheet. And, **this one** to push Google Alerts to Slack.

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37. GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

If you're lucky enough to have access to Google Search Console, you can find a whole heap full of keyword research and content marketing ideas.

To see what type of **keywords users are searching** for to find your website, pop over to Google Search Console > Search Traffic > Search Analytics. Once you're here, you'll see a list of keywords that are getting some traction.

Borislav Yordanov Ivanov, Senior Technical SEO at Best Response Media, uses Google Search Console because "it provides information directly from the source (Google) for the most important aspects of a project: current penalties, page speed, mobile adaptability, inaccessible pages and resources and many more."

Want to dig a little deeper? You can check out my **Google Search Console guide.**

![SEJ Search Engine Journal]

38. GOOGLE KEYWORD PLANNER

I like to use this tool when starting to move into my keyword mapping, but some marketers want to start brainstorming with Google's Keyword Planner.

Like **Katy Katz,** Director of Account Strategy at Marketing Fresh. She says:

"I use a combination of tools to find popular, relevant search terms for content. There are so many great ones now it's impossible to pick one! I still like starting with the Keyword Planner to get an idea of search frequency. Once I have that, I dig into how people are using those terms and work to identify related opportunities."

Whenever you decide Google's Keyword Planner is best for you it will help you clarify which keywords are attainable. You want to find that sweet spot of high search volume with low competition.

39. GOOGLE DATA STUDIO
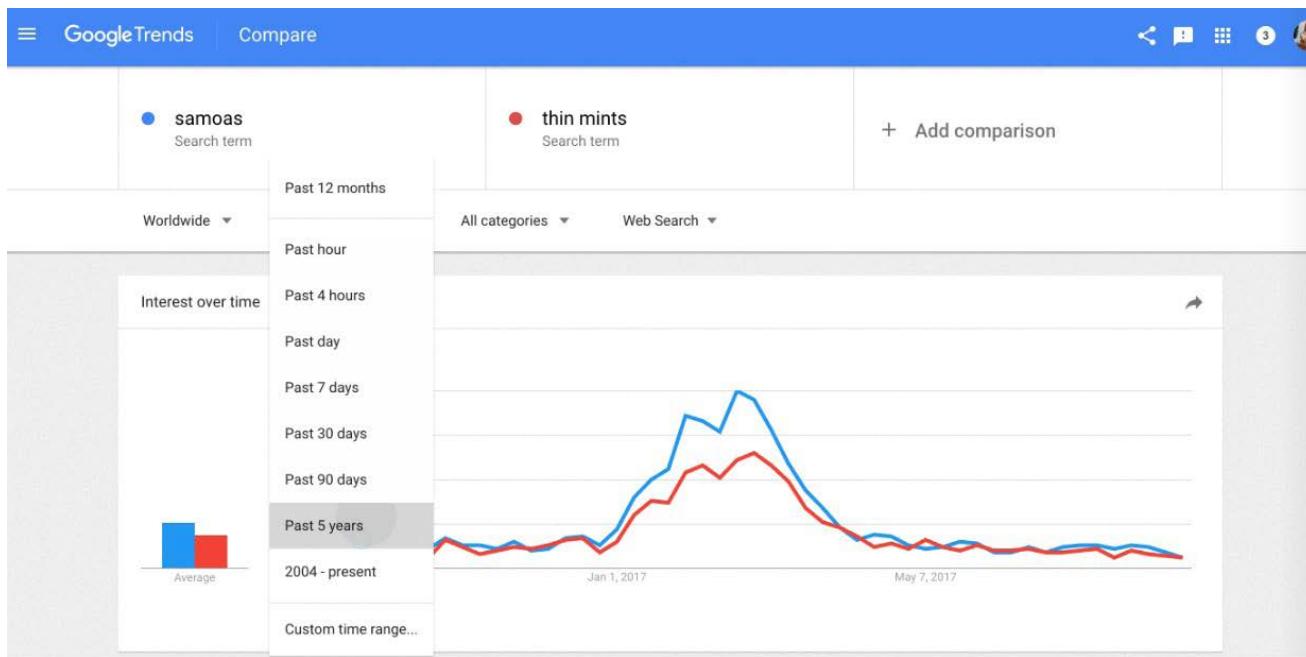
Google Data Studio is a reporting tool that connects to Google Analytics, Google Search Console, and other **resources like SEMrush.**

Casey Dawson, Content Specialist at Online Optimism, shares:

"Google Data Studio is one of the best free SEO tools available. Through Data Studio, you can build a fully interactive SEO dashboard for tracking organic traffic and search trends in real-time

to make more accurate forecasts for your business or clients. You can also upload information and files from over 200 data sources (including various Google platforms and partner connectors like Moz), allowing you to easily compare data from different sources. If you're uncertain of how to start using Data Studio, there are also free templates made specifically for tracking SEO with this tool."

40. GOOGLE TRENDS

With **Google Trends,** you can quickly view top stories or charts.

And, you can search and compare specific keywords in three quick steps:

- Type in your keyword in the search box at the top.
- Click compare, then type in your second keyword.
- Adjust the dates if needed.

Google Trends also helps you find country data and related queries, which will help guide your keyword strategy.

Dan Morrison at Aimclear says:

"I frequently turn to Google Trends to understand more about the changing landscape of search behavior. Google Trends provides real-time data that helps marketers understand trends for keywords, and also serves as a place to source related keywords and concepts for deeper content development. Also, Google Trends provides a historical view for analyzing dips and valleys in interest, filters based upon location, and compares different terms and concepts."

And, **Adam Lumb,** Site Manager at Cashcow, shares:

"My favorite free SEO tool is Google Trends as it provides you with insights that most other SEO apps don't. Instead of focusing on search volume, Google Trends tells you when a keyword is popular over the year. This is great for finding keywords that people are searching for then and there (such as viral content), but it's also beneficial for finding seasonal keywords that other SEO tools can struggle with. Thanks to these insights, I make sure to use Google Trends as part of my keyword research strategy."

41. GOOGLE SHEETS
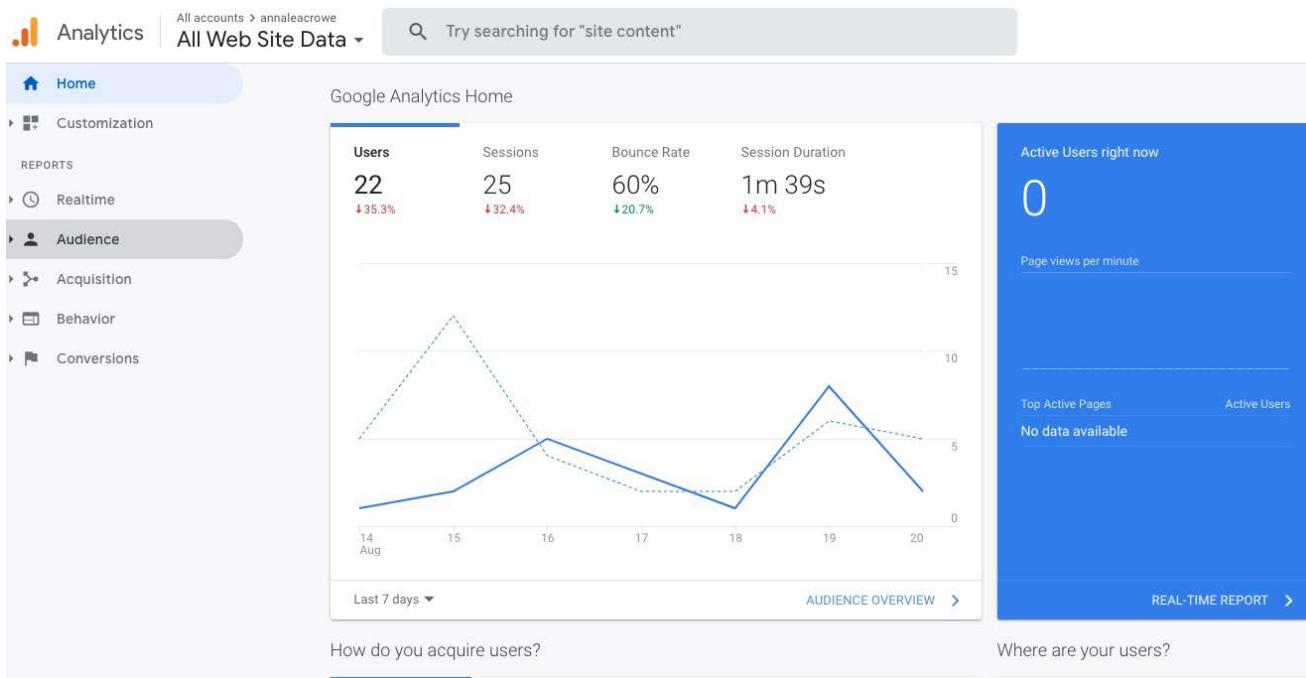
Google Sheets is my favorite tool for SEO audits. The best part? It integrates with Add-Ons like **Search Analytics for Sheets.**

Steven Jaenke, Founder & CEO of Digimark Australia, shares:

"While not strictly an SEO tool, my favorite tool for SEO is Google Sheets. Most of SEO is about execution and keeping track of that execution is essential – that where Google Sheets comes in. We record the technical issues and mark them off once they are resolved. We record on-page issues and market them off as well. We record each link that has been created, keeping details about URL, Anchor Text, and Focus Keywords. It's so versatile that we can mold it into anything we need it to be."

42. GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Google Analytics is one of the most valuable assets you can use to find what people are searching for on your website. Google Analytics has a site search functionality to track what users type into your website search.

[Caitlin Pyle,](#) Owner, and Founder of Proofread Anywhere, loves Google Analytics:
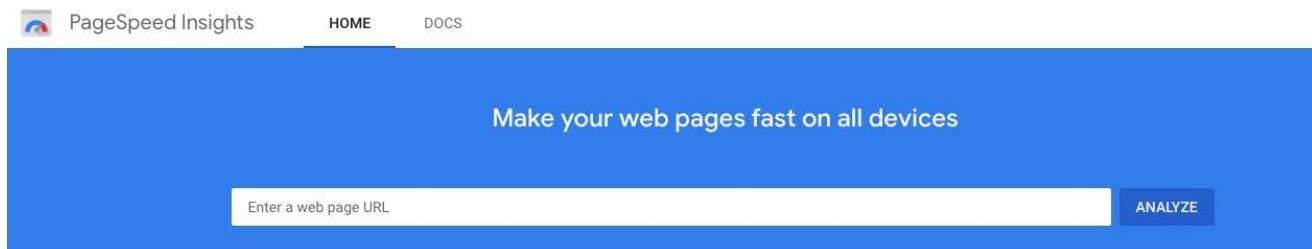
"Obviously, I love that it's completely free! I also love that it's very user-friendly and that I'm able to view the data in various forms that's easy for me to understand. The detailed, customizable reporting tools are also great for helping me see what's going well and where I need to improve."

John Howard, CEO at Coupon Lawn, agrees with Caitlin, stating:

"My favorite free SEO tool is Google Analytics. The reason why Google Analytics is my favorite is that this SEO tool makes it possible for me to know how the visitors of my website were able to find my website and which pages and links are accessible to those who visit my site. Knowing this information can help me better improve my strategies to increase the traffic my website gets.

If you want to learn more, check out my **guide on Google Analytics.**

43. PAGE SPEED INSIGHTS

Google has done a lot to improve their Page Speed Insights. In 2018, they **incorporated Lighthouse into Page Speed Insights** data to help add more performance metrics. It's THE choice for my page speed insights and mobile optimization.

44. LIGHTHOUSE

Lighthouse is free to use if you're using Chrome and Chrome's DevTools. It's an open-source automation tool to view the performance, quality, and correctness of your website. It's ideal for mobile site speed audits.

TRENDING TOPICS

As a beginner, you'll also want to stay up-to-date on the latest trending keywords. So, I've put together a list of some of the best articles on top searches.

- [**SEO for Beginners: An Introduction to SEO Basics**](#)
- [**Ask An SEO**](#)
- [**How Google Improves Search Results**](#)
- [**17 Great Search Engines You Can Use Instead of Google**](#)

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WHY LINKS ARE
IMPORTANT FOR
SEO

AUTHOR

BENJ ARRIOLA

In the early days of SEO, even before Google existed, web ranking was heavily based on keyword usage within the page's content.

Without sophisticated **search engine algorithms,** keyword usage was the easiest way to rank pages.

The logic was simple: the more a keyword phrase was used on a webpage, the more likely that was what the page was really about.

Unfortunately, SEO practitioners of the time took advantage of this system and used keywords unnaturally by overusing the targeted keyword phrase to rank higher.

This method is known nowadays as keyword stuffing.

This causes sites to rank for keyword phrases even when the site doesn't have much to offer on a topic.

A new way to look and evaluate sites on what ranks and what doesn't was needed and should go beyond analyzing content alone.

ALONG CAME GOOGLE: THE EMERGENCE OF GOOGLE & PAGERANK

Google started in 1996 through a partnership between its founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin.

The search engine's early ranking algorithm was based on the PageRank algorithm, developed by and named after Page while he was studying information retrieval at Stanford University.

The main idea was to use links between webpages as a ranking factor.

Google's archived About page states that:

"PageRank works by counting the number and quality of links to a page to determine a rough estimate of how important the website is. The underlying assumption is that more important websites are likely to receive more links from other websites."

Feel free to read all about the **PageRank algorithm.** This is all public information, and the **PageRank patent** is viewable for free online.
It is a very technical document, and readers may need more advanced programming and mathematical knowledge to comprehend it in its entirety.

Instead of reading through all of the details behind how Google analyzes and evaluates links, it may be more worthwhile to understand why this algorithm even looks at links in the first place.

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INTERNAL, INBOUND, & OUTBOUND TYPES OF LINKS
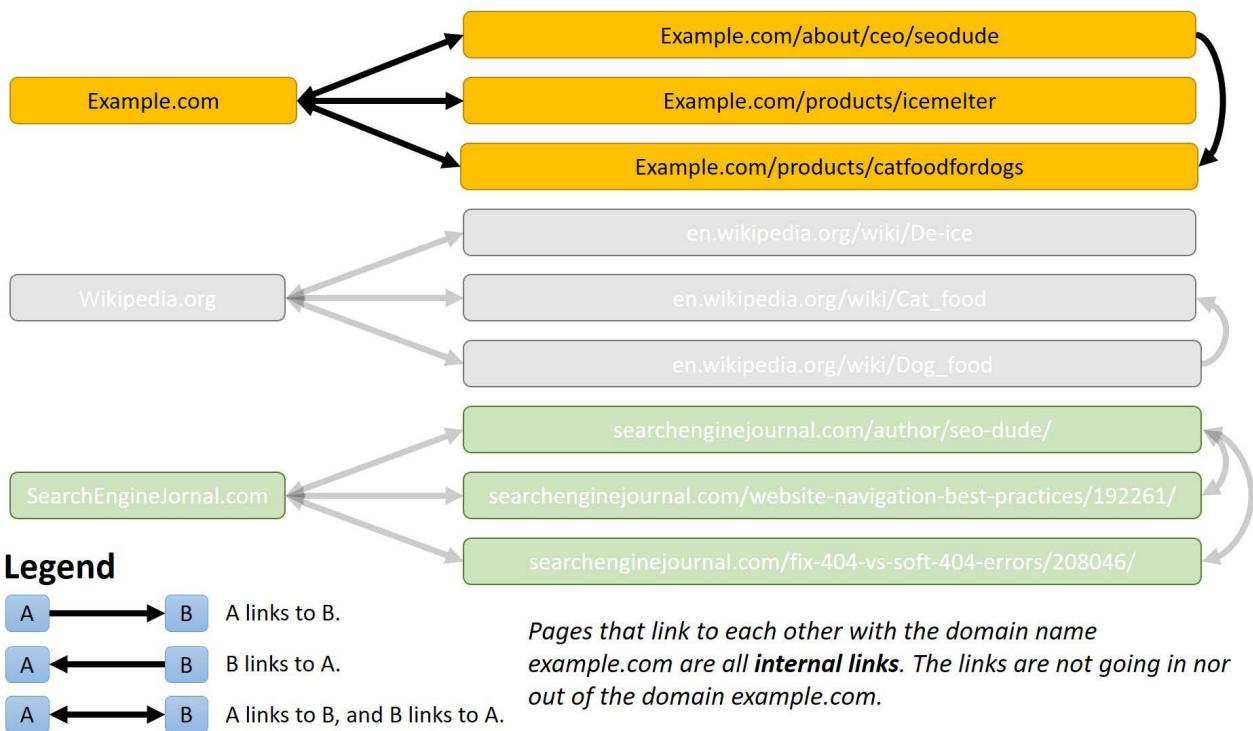
A link or hyperlink is a clickable object on a webpage that leads from one page to another. Links may visibly appear as text, images, or buttons.

We can classify links based on the destination of the link, whether it leads users to another page on the same site or a different website.
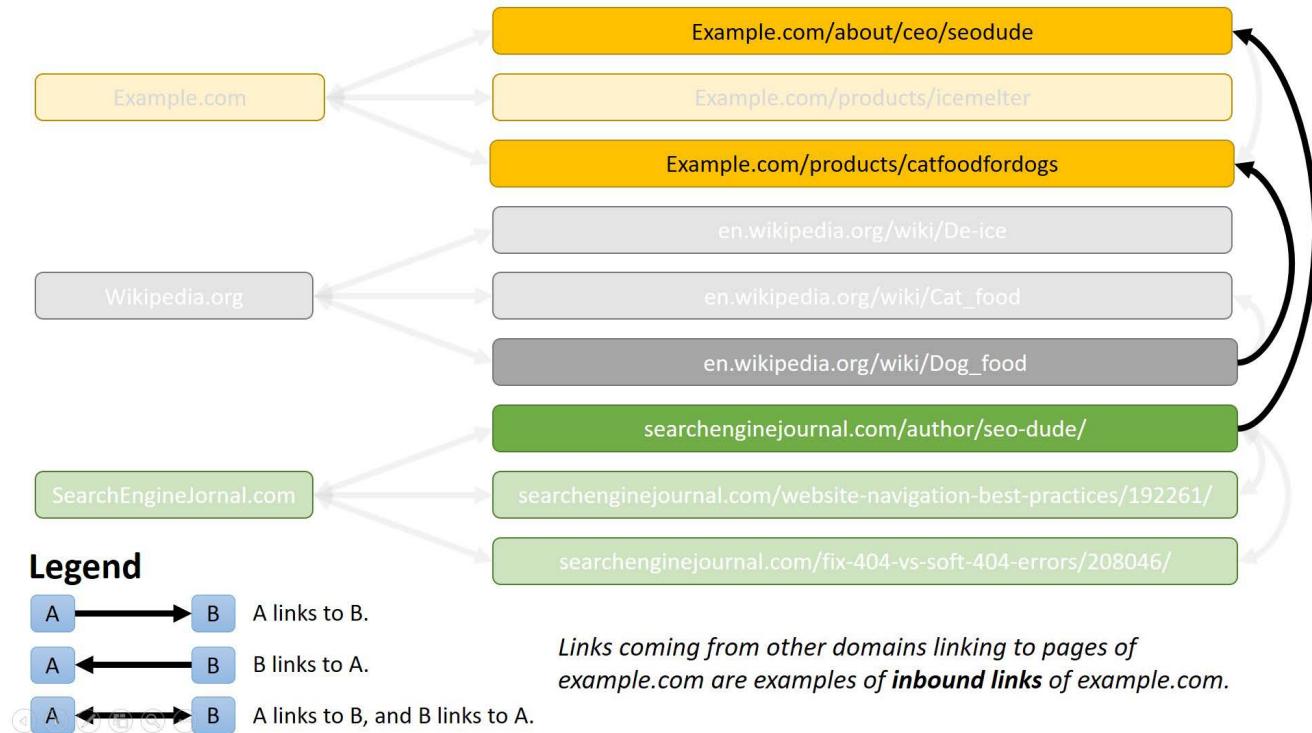
Internal links are links between the pages within your own website.

Search engines determine this by looking at the domain name; if the links on a page link to other pages within the same domain, they are considered internal links.

If for some reason, your website was built to have more than one domain, search engines will view this as an external link.

Example.com/about/ceo/seodude

Example.com

Example.com/products/icemelter

Example.com/products/catfoodfordogs

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De-ice

Wikipedia.org

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat_food

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_food

searchenginejournal.com/author/seo-dude/

SearchEngineJornal.com

searchenginejournal.com/website-navigation-best-practices/192261/

searchenginejournal.com/fix-404-vs-soft-404-errors/208046/

Legend

A ──────▶ B   A links to B.

A ◀────── B   B links to A.

A ◀─────▶ B   A links to B, and B links to A.

*Pages that link to each other with the domain name example.com are all **internal links**. The links are not going in nor out of the domain example.com.*

Inbound links are links that come from other websites or a different domain name.

Example.com/about/ceo/seodude

Example.com

Example.com/products/icemelter

Example.com/products/catfoodfordogs

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De-ice

Wikipedia.org

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat_food

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_food

searchenginejournal.com/author/seo-dude/

SearchEngineJornal.com

searchenginejournal.com/website-navigation-best-practices/192261/

searchenginejournal.com/fix-404-vs-soft-404-errors/208046/

Legend

A ──────▶ B   A links to B.

A ◀────── B   B links to A.

A ◀─────▶ B   A links to B, and B links to A.

*Links coming from other domains linking to pages of example.com are examples of **inbound links** of example.com.*

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Outbound links are those links on your website that link out to websites with a different domain name.

	Example.com/about/ceo/seodude
Example.com	Example.com/products/icemelter
	Example.com/products/catfoodfordogs
	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De-ice
Wikipedia.org	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat_food
	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_food
	searchenginejournal.com/author/seo-dude/
SearchEngineJornal.com	searchenginejournal.com/website-navigation-best-practices/192261/
	searchenginejournal.com/fix-404-vs-soft-404-errors/208046/

Legend

A ⟶ B   A links to B.

A ⟵ B   B links to A.

A ⟷ B   A links to B, and B links to A.

Links going to other domains from example.com are examples of **outbound links** *of example.com.*

INBOUND LINK FOCUS: NATURAL LINKS FROM HIGH-QUALITY PAGES FOR GREATER SEO BENEFITS

Out of the three types of links, inbound links are the ones with the greatest SEO benefit, but they are also the hardest to obtain.

High-Quality Pages Are Like Friends You Go to for Advice: They're Trustworthy, Credible & Have Some Sort of Authority on the Topic

Whenever any webpage links to another webpage, the creator of the content that used the link did it for a reason.

Often, they like the page they are linking to because it has information that supports or builds on the information on the first page.

On the other hand, some authors link to pages for the opposite reason; they may be linking to a page they want to criticize or don't agree with.

However, both of these links are good for the page being linked to. Whether the content is loved or despised, it has provoked a strong reaction, which indicates quality content.

If the content of a page makes someone talk, it indicates authority, credibility, and/or trustworthiness.

Thus, links on pages are like votes of trust, credibility, and authority. The more links a page gets, the more votes they are getting, which can improve their ranking.

However, the quantity of links that a page gets is not all that matters.

Google also evaluates the **quality of the links.**

Nobody Likes Fake Friends

Sometimes you identify fake people right away. Other times, it isn't so easy.

The same is true when Google looks at webpages.

Links that seem like votes of trust can easily be faked using things like:

- Online forums.
- Blog comments.
- Guestbooks.
- Wikis.
- Social media profiles.
- Article directories.
- Q&A sites.
- Social bookmarking.

These are called **artificial links.**

Sometimes, Google identifies that the links are fake right away, but not always. It can take Google a while to identify artificial links.

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These artificial links have negative consequences for the pages.

The rank of these pages with artificial links can be hurt by various ranking factors monitoring link quality, as well as **algorithm updates,** or even **manual actions from Google.**

In order to have good, **natural links,** a site needs quality content that is trustworthy, credible, and authoritative.

This allows the pages to gain quality, natural links from other websites, which will help their ranking.

Inbound Links Are Still Important Even After Google's Penguin Update

Over the past decade, Google has implemented a series of important algorithm updates. One of these important updates was **Penguin.**

Google's Penguin update has now become an essential **part of the core algorithm.**

The Penguin update allows Google to evaluate the quality of links more effectively.

Right after this update, some **SEO professionals** were initially under the impression that links no longer mattered; however, this is not the case.

SEJ Search Engine® Journal

Links are important in ranking and still indicate the same values as before.

Links serve as a reflection of the quality of a page's content as long as they are natural links.

The Penguin update made it easier for Google to identify artificial links.

Links have always been important **ranking factors;** however, the methods of obtaining links have evolved, especially after the Penguin update arrived.

After the Penguin update, there is now a stronger emphasis on natural links, which made many SEOs in the industry focus a lot more on content marketing.

Creating link-worthy content and promoting the content to the world to gain users that would be naturally willing to share and link to the content promoted.

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Not Everyone Thinks Like an SEO, Don't Over Do Anchor Text

One of the important aspects of inbound links that search engines pay attention to is the anchor text of a link.

Anchor text is the clickable text of a link or the alternative text of an image in image links.

The anchor text helps give search engines an idea of the topic of the destination page.

Historically, this was abused and made **link bombing** possible, which is simply using the exact phrase you want to rank for in all the inbound links' anchor text from thousands of webpages, regardless of the quality or relevancy of the page.

Many previous Google updates addressed this issue, including the Penguin update, where overdoing keyword-focused anchor text can appear unnatural and may negatively affect ranking.

Ever since the Penguin update, there has been a strong focus on having natural anchor text in your inbound links.

Here are a couple of things to look out for that may jeopardize your link building efforts:

- Naturally, when people add a link on a page going to your website, often the anchor text will be your brand or company name. Thus, if your keyword-focused anchor text is more in quantity than your branded anchor text, this might cause problems. It is best to have more branded anchor text.

- Not everyone thinks the same, and it is highly unlikely that a lot of people will use exactly the same anchor text. If you keep optimizing for the same anchor text when trying to gain links from other sites and it starts to become the majority anchor text and it is not your brand name, this is highly unnatural. It is important to see some diversity in anchor text, even including generic anchor text like click here, visit here, website, etc.

INTERNAL LINK FOCUS: DISTRIBUTE PAGERANK WELL ACROSS YOUR SITE

Inbound links are the most beneficial because PageRank gets passed on from other sites to your site.

The more inbound links you get, the more PageRank you receive. As the chain of links hops from one page to another, the flow of PageRank gets weaker and weaker.

In almost any website, the page with the most inbound links is the homepage of the site. Therefore, if a page within your site is too far from the homepage, the PageRank will decrease significantly before reaching the page.

This causes pages that are linked really far from the home page to rank poorly. Since not all pages will get inbound links, your internal links should serve two purposes:

- Help users navigate to the different pages of your site.
- Help search engines crawl your entire site with fewer hops as possible from page to page.

Here are the common areas where you will find internal links:

- Normal Site Navigation: Links that are usually located in a top bar menu, sidebar menu, and in the footer that exists on all pages. This is usually built upon your site architecture and how topics are categorized and subcategorized to build out topics and subtopics from general to specific pages.

- Related Pages: A section of a page that points out other pages that are related to the topic of the page. This is beneficial to users because it helps suggest pages that the user was probably looking for.

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- User Sitemaps: A sitemap is a single page that links out to all other pages of the site. Based on usability studies, there are three types of people that navigate a site: those who use the normal site navigation, those who immediately use the search box, and those who go straight to the sitemap. For very large sites, sitemaps can be overwhelming, and in cases like this, the sitemap may just contain the main category areas and not necessarily every page of the site.

- In-Content Links: Within the content of a page, links can be added to the words within a paragraph. This is under-utilized by many websites, but in other cases, it can also be over-optimized, which can have negative effects on SEO. Just link naturally, and have the user in mind when building links like these.

Even if we're emphasizing to use internal links in the distribution of PageRank, always make sure the users are the highest priority.

Always design sites, and think of internal links for users first, then search engines second, and learn all **best practices on internal site navigation.**

OUTBOUND LINK FOCUS: JUST APPEAR NATURAL

Over the years, SEO pros have evolved how they use outbound links.

Some believed that outbound links took away PageRank, decreasing its potential to rank.

For some number of years, this may have been correct.

This is where terms like "PageRank hoarding" and "PageRank channeling" came from.

Any outbound link was the equivalent of a leak. But if an outbound link was necessary for users, you could add the nofollow link attribute.

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The nofollow was like telling search engines, "don't follow this link and give my PageRank to that page."

However, many SEO practitioners abused this until Google came up with an update in 2009 on PageRank evaporation.

In a nutshell, PageRank hoarding just didn't work like it used to. Multiple theories and best practices have sprung out of this, such as:

- Don't have too many outbound links: In theory, the whole reasoning of PageRank leaking still holds up to today. However, every once in a while, you may find sites with tons of outbound links, and yet the page still ranks high. Thus the rule here is just doing what seems to make sense.

- Don't always nofollow all outbound links: Adding a rel=nofollow attribute to links on the <a> tag tells search engines to not credit that link for ranking purposes. It makes sense to always add the nofollow to avoid PageRank leaking to other sites. However, overdoing or over-optimizing it just doesn't appear natural, and the intent appears to really be hoarding PageRank.

- Good quality sites tend to link to good quality sites: Giving links is just as important as getting links. Good quality sites are maintaining a level of quality that made them who they are, and thus if these sites are going to link out to other sites, they'd choose a good quality destination, too. Since this is a common behavior on good quality sites, it might as well replicate that behavior to help show signals to search engines that you are a good quality site too.

In all these three bullet points, the rules may appear conflicting.

No outbound links preserve PageRank, but no links at all look fishy.

Adding a nofollow should help preserve PageRank. However, if links are all nofollow, they look more unnatural.

Conventional wisdom taught us that outbound links leak out PageRank, and that is still true today, but it is recommended to link to good quality sites.

The guidelines here don't seem to be set in stone and are somewhat flexible, but the main rule that is valid and applies to all rules above is to appear natural.

Link out to other sites if it is the natural thing to do.

SUMMARY

Links have been an important part of SEO. They still are. And it looks like it will still be important in the years to come.

However, like many other things in SEO, how optimization was done in the past is much different compared to how it is done today.

We classify links as inbound links, outbound links, and internal links.

- Inbound links provide the largest impact since they are like votes of trust, credibility, and authority that help out in ranking, but it is important that these inbound links are natural links and come from high quality, relevant sites.

- Internal links help distribute PageRank from the inbound links to other pages of the site to help improve ranking on many other pages. Furthermore, internal links aren't only about search engines. Always serve the users first.

- Outbound links should just be used in a way that appears natural to the user. Linking out to high-quality sites will help show these signs and also help associate your site with higher quality sites.

If there is one single theme across all these types of links, it is to link naturally.

If it looks bad to humans, most likely, it looks bad to search engines.

You're halfway through this guide.
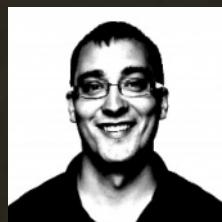
Make sure to take our SEO 101 quiz at the end of the ebook to review what you've learned.

WHY KEYWORDS ARE STILL SO VERY IMPORTANT FOR SEO

AUTHOR

TYLOR HERMANSON

Are keywords still important for <u>search engine optimization (SEO)</u>?

Do keywords even matter to Google anymore?

The short answer: Absolutely.

The longer answer: Keep reading.

WHAT ARE SEO KEYWORDS?

SEO keywords range from single words to complex phrases and are used to inform website content to increase relevant organic search traffic.

Your audience uses them when searching for something related to your brand.

When effectively researched and optimized, keywords act as a conduit to connect your target audience with your website.

BUT AREN'T KEYWORDS IN SEO 'DEAD'?

Whether you've heard this a few times already or your first is yet to come, "Keywords are dead" is a phrase that continues to barge its way into SEO circles.

Rather than tiptoe around this recurring, binary, often-click-bait motivated assertion, let's confront it head-on.

Several developments in the SEO world have caused this claim to be stirred from hibernation, but there are four major ones that come to mind.

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1. "Keywords are (not provided)."

If you're brand new to SEO, you may be surprised to know organic keywords were once easily accessible in Google Analytics, Adobe Omniture, or any other analytics platform.

However, things started changing in 2010 when Google began **quietly taking steps to remove keyword data.** In late 2011 through the following year, a significant amount of organic keyword visibility would be stripped.

It wouldn't take long for the top keyword driver for every site to be "(not provided)."

	Source / Medium ?	Keyword ? ⊗	Acquisition		
			Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?
			12,848 % of Total: 29.10% (44,153)	76.76% Avg for View: 84.23% (-8.86%)	9,862 % of Total: 26.52% (37,188)
☐	1. google / organic	(not provided)	12,601 (98.08%)	76.53%	9,643 (97.78%)
☐	2. google / organic	▬▬▬▬▬	10 (0.08%)	100.00%	10 (0.10%)
☐	3. google / organic	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	8 (0.06%)	100.00%	8 (0.08%)
☐	4. google / organic	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	5 (0.04%)	100.00%	5 (0.05%)
☐	5. google / organic	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬	5 (0.04%)	60.00%	3 (0.03%)

Once we lost our SEO keyword visibility and were seemingly flying blind, many were quick to write the obituary for keywords.

But what really was different?

After all, people were still searching the same, and Google hadn't changed how it was interpreting our content.

We've all heard, "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"

This is the same thing.

Nothing was different; we just weren't around.

Bottom line: Keywords aren't dead. The old way of tracking them is.

2. "AI and NLP made keywords obsolete."

Another time the validity of keywords was challenged was when **Google rebuilt its algorithm in 2013.**

Receiving its name for being fast and precise, Hummingbird helped Google better understand search intent, particularly with complex and conversational searches.

In 2015, Google incorporated the AI-driven ranking factor, **RankBrain,** into the mix to further improve its query interpretation abilities.

Before, a search for "what pizza places near me deliver?" would send Google off looking for content that matches those terms.

After RankBrain, Google would use these keywords as contextual signals to learn what we really want and often rewrite our query behind the scenes (e.g., "pizza delivery 66062").

Knowing Google may revise our search queries could make it seem like their usefulness is all but obsolete.

But really, Google just got smarter with what we provided.

In fact, as Google understands greater nuance and is more equipped to connect the language we use with our true search intent, one could argue, **keywords become even more important.**

This is certainly true with BERT.

BERT was baked into Google's algorithm in late 2019.

Within the year before its rollout, BERT became the NLP industry standard due to its ability to effectively perform a wide variety of linguistic calculations.

Gone are the days where Google ignores "stop words."

Now, every single word in your search (and the exact order you use each one) matters.

And since it's important to Google, shouldn't it be important to us?

Bottom line: Keywords aren't dead. Google's former way of interpreting them is.

3. "Voice search rendered keywords useless."

As voice search grew from being an occasionally-used novelty to a staple in our search behavior, many wondered what that meant for keywords.

We all knew voice search impacted keywords, but did it kill them?

We've Become Long-Winded

Between us (subconsciously) picking up on Google's heightened interpretation skills and our communication tendencies when talking versus typing, we have become very conversational and detailed searchers.

In the old days, if we wanted to know who Brad Pitt's first wife was, we would translate our thoughts into a search-friendly query, like "Brad Pitt's wives."

Now, we simply tell Google what we want: **"Who was Brad Pitt's first wife?".**

This is one of the main reasons why **15% of searches have never been heard of** before by Google every single day.

So, while it's been a huge win for searchers, it's posed challenges to SEO professionals.

For instance, it's hard to know which keywords to keep an eye on if a significant chunk of traffic is driven by those that had rarely, if ever, been searched before.

But this goes back to the "(not provided)" argument.

Just because our tracking is imperfect doesn't mean the significance of keywords lessens in any way.

We Omit Important Keywords

Did you know through voice search, you can **find out when Scarlett Johansson's first album** was released from a query that doesn't include her name or the name of her album? (Side note: Did you know Scarlett Johansson had an album?)

Google understands context matters, not only within a search but between strings of them as well.

So, do keywords actually matter if you can leave out crucial bits and still get what you want?

Of course!

This just forces us to step back and look at the bigger picture, rather than examine each individual search in a vacuum.

Bottom line: Keywords aren't dead. Typing as our only way to search them is.

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4. "Keyword Planner proved keywords aren't all that different."

Starting in 2014 and kicking things up a notch **two years later,** Google's Keyword Planner tool began grouping volumes for similar terms.

Instead of showing keyword A gets searched 100 times per month, and keyword A1 gets searched 50 times per month, both would show 150.

Google said the reason for this to make sure "you don't miss out on potential customers" and to "maximize the potential for your ads to show on relevant searches."

That explanation certainly implies searcher intent doesn't vary much between closely related terms.

The move seemed to reinforce the notion that topics, not keywords, are all SEO professionals need to worry about.

However, this doesn't explain why **Google search will often significantly shake up its results** for keywords that Google Keyword Planner deems synonymous enough to lump together.

Ultimately, Keyword Planner is a PPC tool.

You don't have to be a conspiracy theorist to understand how forcing PPC bidders to expand their keyword targeting could be a financially-motivated decision.

Bottom line: Keywords aren't dead. But Google's keyword metrics might as well be.

WHY ARE KEYWORDS SO IMPORTANT TO SEO?

Keywords matter to Google and SEO professionals for several reasons, but here are two big ones.

- Keywords give us clues to who people are and what they want, allowing us to better meet their needs.
- Keywords can provide a "bullseye" towards which marketers can aim their content.

Keywords Are Clues

The importance of keywords in SEO is in part due to their importance outside of it.

Forget about keywords, rankings, traffic, or even your website for a minute.

If you knew your customers' true feelings, how would you operate your business differently? How influential would those insights be to your marketing strategy?

In his book, "Everybody Lies," **Seth Stephens-Davidowitz shares his findings** of what search behavior tells about human psychology.

When in a focus group, taking a survey or responding to something on Twitter, we all tend to let our answers be impacted by how others may perceive them.

What about when we're searching?

The combination of anonymity and immediate access to a wealth of information paves the way for an unadulterated look into what we truly want.

It's Data-Driven Truth Serum

At its core, keyword research is a powerful market research tool that can be leveraged in many different ways, not just informing website content.

To get the most out of keywords, you must look beyond the explicit, literal translation and also pick up on the implicit clues to gain the true intent of each keyword.

As an example, let's look at the query [safest baby cribs 2020].

Explicit vs. Implicit Searcher Intent

Explicit information	Implicit information
Concerned about safety	Likely first-time parents
Wants more than one crib to choose from	Wants to know what makes cribs safe/unsafe
Looking for article published in 2020	Understands safety standards change over time
	In research phase with future intent to buy
	Possibly in process of buying other items for nursery
	Safety may be more important than cost or aesthetics
	Likely looking for a list of cribs ranked by safety measure

Keywords Are Like Personas

Personas act as bullseyes.

They aren't all we're after but by aiming for them, we're setting ourselves up for success.

It's not as if I only want to market to 54-year old women named Betty who have a 401(k) and are soon to be empty nesters.

But that level of granularity and focus helps ensure I'm attracting the right group of people.

Conversely, if you have no focus and try to appeal to everyone, you will likely come away empty-handed.

It's a beautiful paradox, really – the exclusivity of your target audience often is directly related to the size of your actual audience, and vice versa.

SEO Tylor	Demographics
	• Age: 30 and counting • Gender: Male • Status: Married • Education: more or less • Income: wouldn't turn down more
Motivators	**Profile**
• Chocolate • Donuts • Chocolate donuts • Uninterrupted sleep • A chip and a chair	• Doesn't know how bowling scoring works • Still listens to an iPOD every day • Used to have a pet pig • No, seriously.

It's the same with keywords.

A quick peek into Google Search Console's search query data will tell you it's never just about one keyword.

However, having a primary keyword target for each page will give you the right direction and perspective to capture the right audience from a plethora of related searches.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON SEO KEYWORD TYPES? (WITH EXAMPLES)

Keywords can be categorized and tagged in multiple ways for a variety of reasons.

Here are the most common types and examples of SEO keywords.

Branded vs. Unbranded Keywords

Branded search terms contain the brand in the query.

This could include the official brand names, misspellings, branded acronyms, branded campaign names or taglines, parent companies, or anything else with obvious branded search intent.

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Unbranded, or non-branded, terms are all other keywords you may consider.

Unbranded terms often describe the customer problem or your business offering.

Some businesses have non-distinct names that can make this delineation more difficult.

For instance, is a search for "Kansas City Zoo" branded or unbranded when the name of the zoo is… Kansas City Zoo?
Branded terms generally bring in the highest converting traffic because the searcher already has a certain level of brand familiarity and (often) affinity.

Examples:

- Branded: Houston Rockets
- Unbranded: the unequivocal greatest basketball organization of all time

Seed vs. Page-Specific Keywords

Seed words are the obvious, initial list of words you start with in the keyword research process.

They act as the seeds you "plant" to grow your list.

Seed words are often relevant to most of your website, if not all of it.

Page-specific keywords are generally found later in the keyword research process and are applicable to only a single page or set of pages.

Examples for Home Depot:

- Seed: home improvement store
- Page-specific: deck building supplies

Head vs. Long-Tail Keywords

Those with the highest search demand are called head terms.
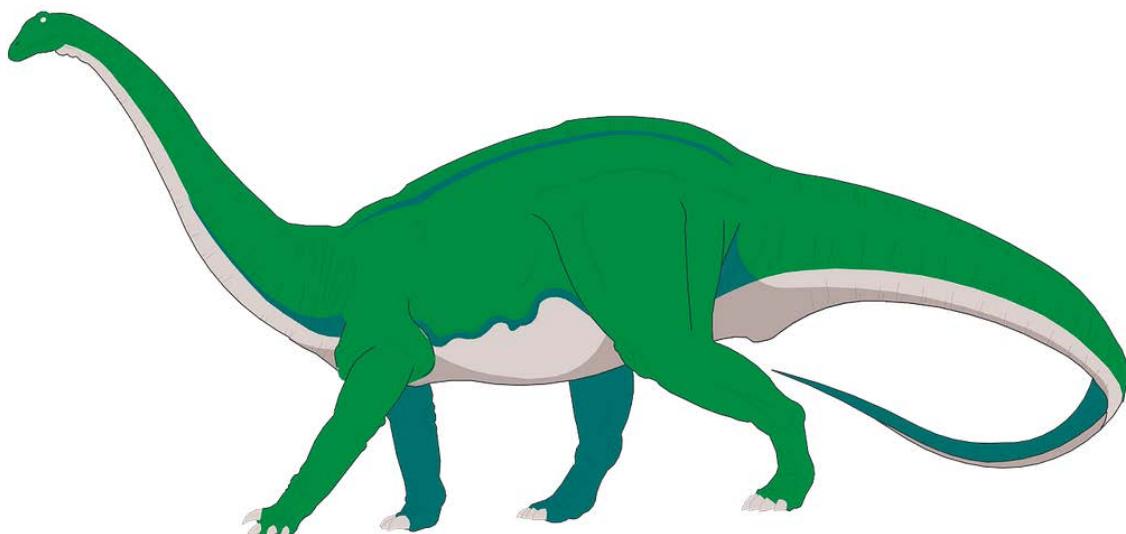
Conversely, those with a relatively low demand are considered long-tail.

Why?

When you graph them out, head terms fall off quickly in terms of the total number of keywords, whereas lesser searched terms seem to go on forever like a tail.

The middle of the graph is often aptly named "middle" or "chunky middle" (or torso).

With 15% of searches being new to Google each day, it shouldn't be surprising that most search queries are considered long-tail, even if each individual long-tail query gets searched very few times.

Head and long-tail keywords tend to have the following contrasting characteristics.

However, besides volume, none of these are absolute.

Correlative Differences Between Head & Long-Tail Keywords

Head	Long-tail
High search volume	Low search volume
High ranking competition	Low ranking competition
Low converting traffic	High converting traffic
Few words	Many words
Best for top-level pages	Best for lower-level pages
Multiple search intents	Singular search intent

Examples:

- Head: Bob Dylan
- Long-tail: Who is Jakob Dylan's father?

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Primary vs. Secondary Keywords

Also labeled "targeted" or "focus", primary keywords are used to describe your most important keywords.

These terms can be used in the context of your entire site or a single page.

Secondary (also called "tertiary" or "supporting") keywords include all other keywords you are targeting and/or incorporating.

In some contexts, secondary terms are those you are loosely optimizing for, but they're just not considered a high priority.

In other scenarios, secondary keywords act as the semantic or long-tail support to help you get the most out of your primary keyword targeting.

Examples for a subscription shaving kit product page:

- Primary: shaving kit subscription
- Secondary: monthly, razors, free trial, custom

Step, Stage, or Phase-Based Keywords

SEOs often recommend categorizing your keywords according to a marketing funnel or customer journey.

This can help ensure you are targeting customers at each critical point.

Some sets of categories have the brand in the center (e.g., awareness, consideration, conversion, retention) while others are more customer-centric (e.g., unaware, problem aware, solution aware, brand aware).

Similarly, some simply determine the action-oriented mindset of the consumer (e.g., navigational, informational, transactional).

Examples:

- Awareness: 30th birthday party ideas
- Consideration: Las Vegas travel reviews
- Conversion: flight and hotel packages to Las Vegas
- Retention: Mandalay Bay loyalty program

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Global vs. Local Keywords

Depending on its usage, a local keyword can mean one of two things:

- The searcher is looking for something geographically nearby: This can be very straightforward like "library near me" or "2-bedroom rentals in Phoenix", or it could be more subtle like "restaurants" or "What time does Whataburger close?".
- The searcher has a high probability of being in a certain area: For instance, "Why did Oklahoma Joe's change their name?" could be considered a local term because there's a good chance the searcher is from Kansas or Missouri. Why? Those are the only two states where this exceptional barbecue establishment calls home. By the way, it is now called Joe's Kansas City BBQ if you ever happen to be coming through town.

Depending on its usage, a local keyword can mean one of two things:

- Local: 2-bedroom rentals in Phoenix
- Global: Is renters insurance worth it?

Audience Type Keywords

Rarely does someone self-identify themselves in a search.

When's the last time you started a search with "I'm an XX-year-old, college-educated digital marketer looking for [rest of your search]"? I'm going to go out on a limb and guess this has never happened.

However, the 'who' behind the searcher can often be found in the implicit information of the query.

While almost no queries are exclusively searched by one group, many heavily skew towards a single audience.

One of the best ways to find out who is searching for a term is Google it and look at the results. Then ask yourself who the top results seem to be talking to.

Examples:

- Patient: Is diabetes hereditary?
- Doctor: T2DM treatment algorithm

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Evergreen vs. Topical Keywords

Evergreen keywords have steady search volume with little variance over time.

On the other hand, topical keywords are either seasonal (e.g., valentine's day gift ideas), flashes in the pan (e.g., covfefe), or consistently relevant (e.g., Taylor Swift).

Some evergreen keywords can switch to being topical when an event makes them culturally relevant, like searches for a celebrity immediately after their unexpected death or a city when it's hosting the World Cup.

Google often favors new content for topical keywords because the "query deserves freshness".
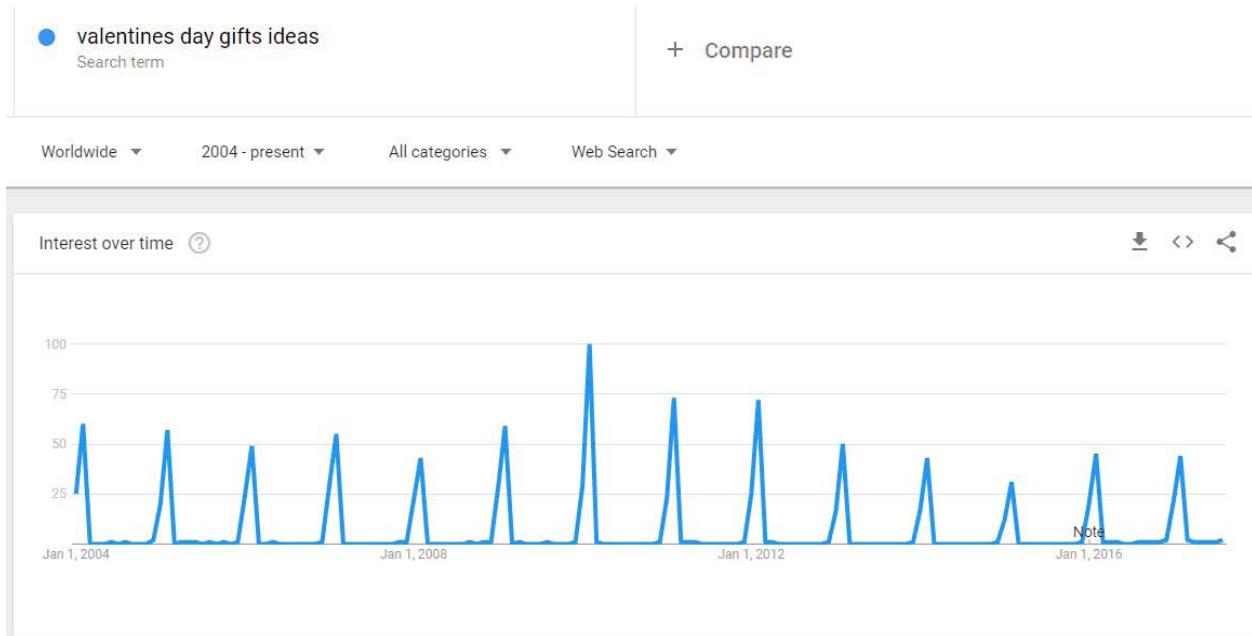
People like to create evergreen content because it can be a low investment relative to the long-term value it produces.

However, the competition and initial cost are often steep.

Conversely, topical content is attractive because it has a lower cost of entry, weaker competition, and provides immediate value – but that value has a short shelf life.

Examples:

- Evergreen: how to know if you're pregnant
- Topical: movie showtimes this weekend

Keywords vs. Carewords

When my wife and I were in the market for a one-time house cleaning, our criteria were probably what you would expect:

- What's the cost for how much work?
- Do they use natural products?
- Did they get good reviews?
- Are they flexible on timing?

However, how the companies made us feel certainly played a key role, even if it was mostly subconscious.

In this instance, content that made us reflect on all the time we were going to save, how this would be one less thing we had to stress about, even the smell of a fresh house when we walked in the door – likely played a role in our final decision.

We search with our Neocortex but our **reptilian and paleopallium brains often make the decisions.**

Sara Howard describes carewords using an example of buying a car.

Would you include "reliable warranty" in a search for a new vehicle? Probably not.
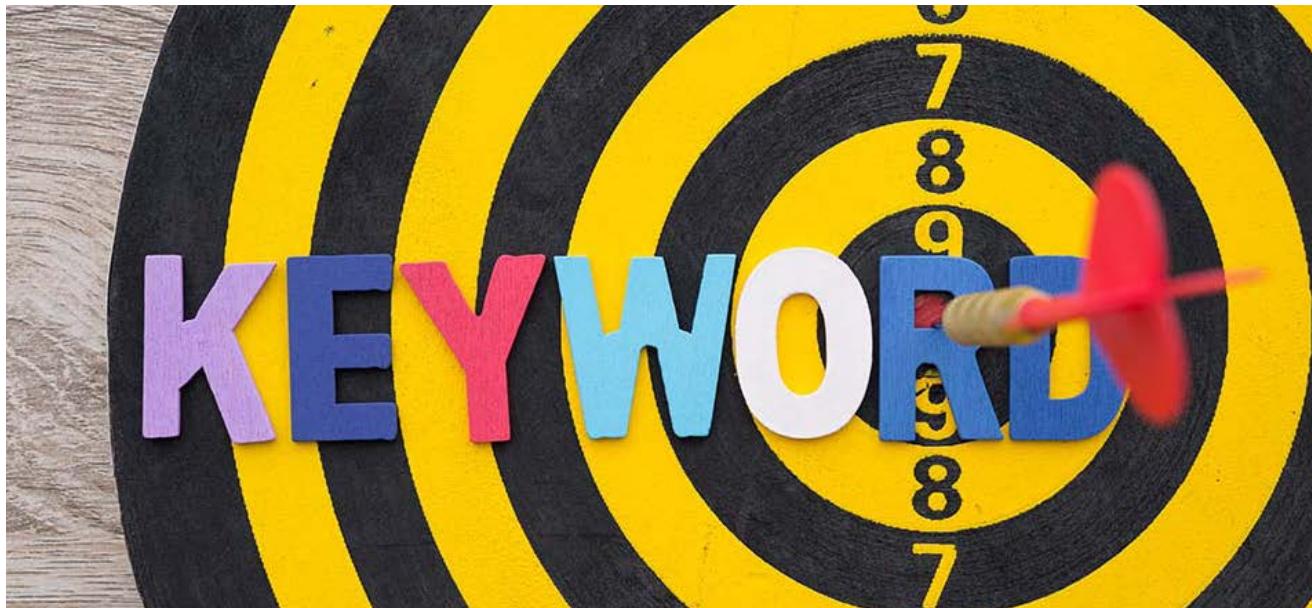
Do you want to know the warranty is reliable once you're on the page? Absolutely.

In short, carewords are low-to-no-traffic-generating terms that increase on-site engagement and conversions for existing traffic.

Examples:

- Keywords: wet bar ideas for basement
- Carewords: wine enthusiast, ample storage, simple, hosting, durable, conversation piece, vintage, cozy

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT KEYWORDS?

This topic could live in a post on its own, which it has many, many times.

Here are a couple of my favorites:

- [How To Do Keyword Research — Ahrefs' Guide](#)
- [The Beginner's Guide to Keyword Research](#)

This process is highly scalable based on your needs and limitations. It can take four hours or forty hours, and you can spend over $250 on tools or nothing at all.

While I highly suggest researching and experimenting with this topic in great detail if you're serious about honing your craft, here's a quick introduction to finding the best keywords for SEO.

1. Don't start with keywords: Before you put on your SEO hat or even your marketing hat, just be human. Learn about your customers from your customers. Before diving into tools and spreadsheets, try to gain some real empathy and understanding for the customers you're serving and the perspectives they hold.

2. Build a seed keyword list: Using what you gained in step one, along with what you know about where your customers' needs and your business' solutions intersect, brainstorm an initial list of words and phrases that effectively describe your core offerings.

3. Gather current keyword data (if your site already exists): Generate a list of what is currently (and nearly) driving traffic to your site. Here are some keyword ranking tools that can help with this phase:

    • **Google Search Console**
    • **Ahrefs**
    • **SEMrush**
    • **Moz Keyword Explorer**
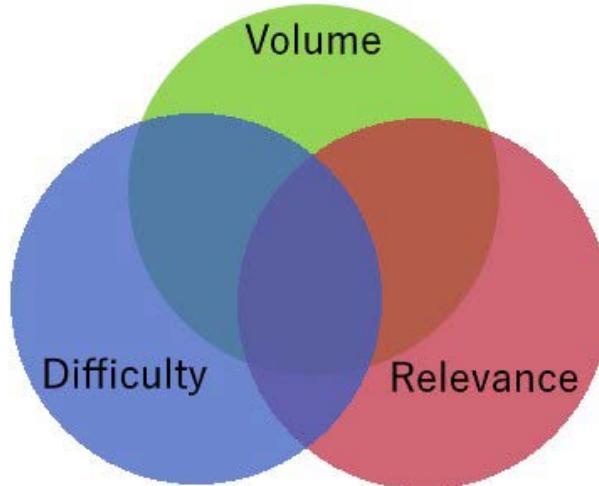
4. Expand the list using various keyword tools: Expand on the list you've built from steps 1-3 by looking for new keyword groups, synonyms, common modifiers, and long-tail permutations. Beyond those listed above, these SEO keyword tools are perfect for suggestions to expand your list:

    - **KeywordTool.io**
    - **AlsoAsked**
    - **Answer The Public**
    - **Keywords Everywhere (within Google search results)**
    - **Infinite Suggest**
    - **KWFinder**

5. Group terms by search intent: Categorize your keywords in a way that will be simple and useful for you and anyone else who might look through them. This can be done by audience-type, topic, phase of the funnel, or any other way that makes sense to you.

Keyword	Category
test keywords for seo	Optimization
keyword terms	Define
keyword(s	Define
search engine words	Define
google keyword statistics	Research
seo google keywords	Define
google keywords seo	Define
keyword keyword	Define
searching a website for keywords	Research
keywords for search engines	Define
the keywords	Define
what advantage does near in your search term give you	Research
organic phrases	Define

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6. Map keywords to content: Choose 1-4 primary keywords to target on each page based on a careful balance between keyword difficulty, relevance, and search volume (while considering organic click share). Once those are determined, find semantically-related and long-tail modifying terms to help support your primary keywords.

7. Do it all over again: Once your keyword strategy has been implemented, Google has had time to react and you've been able to collect enough data, rinse and repeat. They don't call it search engine optimization for nothing.

HOW DO YOU USE KEYWORDS TO OPTIMIZE YOUR SITE?

Much like choosing keywords, effectively optimizing your website for keywords could live on its own blog post.

However, here are a few tips to get started.

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Where to Add Keywords on a Webpage

- **URLs:** URLs rarely change, are highly visible and describe the entire page. For those reasons, Google places some value in what they say.

- **Static content:** Search engines are getting much better at crawling dynamic content. Static content is a near-guarantee for indexing.

- **Title tags:** Title tags influence rankings and click-through-rate (CTR) and if written effectively, keywords can help with both.

- **Meta description tags:** Unlike title tags, meta descriptions do not influence rankings in Google. However, including them can increase CTR.

- **Most visible content:** Google's job is to understand content the way we do. An H1 tag at the top of the page gets far more eyeballs than boilerplate content at the bottom. Whether it's a heading tag, early body copy or a bolded phrase, the most visible content is generally the most influential for SEO.

- **Internal links and surrounding content:** Incorporating keywords into the **anchor text** of links pointing to your page helps show Google what your page is about. Similarly, content nearby anchor text pointing to your page also matters to Google and, to a lesser degree, is used to describe the destination page.

- **Image and video file names:** Instead of letting your phone give your image or video a default name that usually contains something random and nonsensical, give it a descriptive name using a relevant keyword.

- **Image alt attributes:** Alt tags not only make your site more inclusive for your visually impaired audience, they give Google a better idea of your picture. Incorporate keywords when appropriate.

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- **Image title attributes:** Image titles don't work on all browsers the same way, which is why Google may not put much weight into this content. However, if there is an opportunity to gracefully include keywords, go for it.

- **ARIA tags:** [ARIA tags](#) are similar to alt attributes in that they help make website content more accessible to those with disabilities. You can use ARIA tags on certain types of dynamic content, interactive content, background images, and more.

- **Video closed captioning and/or transcripts:** Some videos contain extremely relevant keywords, but Google has no clue. Make sure what is heard and seen gets included in your indexable closed captioning or transcript.

- **Schema markup:** Schema helps add context to content. When applicable, mark your keywords up with the most appropriate schema properties to remove some of the guesswork for Google.

Where to Add Keywords on a Webpage

- **Don't overdo it: Over-optimization** (or "keyword stuffing") is a real thing. It can turn away your customers and send you to Google's dog (or **Panda**) house. Each one of the areas above has been automated, exploited, and tarnished. Ask yourself if it helps or hurts user experience. Make your decision based on that answer.

- **Ignore the meta keywords tag:** The meta keywords tag gets little, if any, attention from the main search engines. Don't waste your time here.

- **Don't optimize each page in a vacuum:** Unless you have a **one-page site,** you need to look at your keyword targeting by taking all pages into context. This will guard against any gaps or **keyword cannibalization** that can happen when you work on each page in a silo.

- **Test everything:** If you have the opportunity to work on sites with a massive number of pages, you have a perfect opportunity to set up some worthwhile tests to polish your techniques.

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WHEN WON'T KEYWORDS MATTER?

How do we know keywords will always matter?

In reality, there's no way to know, but many of the root arguments shared in this guide have been the same for over a decade, and they show no signs of pivoting.

With that said, I do think I can tell you the next time "keywords are dead" will ferociously bounce around the SEO echo chambers. Larry Page didn't just want Google to be at the level of a human, **he wanted it to be superhuman.**

The introduction of Google Discover (formerly Google Now and Google Feed) has given us a glimpse of what is to come: Google searching for what we want without us having to ask.

If Google does our searching for us, would keywords still matter? Yes, and here's why.

Do me a favor and take a peek at your **search history.**

Start by looking at searches you made a month ago.

Now, look at last year.

What about 5 years ago?

My mom always has said "no one new moves in", and while our ability to change over time may be debatable, what we're interested in undoubtedly evolves.

Google Discover only works because of the real-time inputs we give it, especially what we search.

Otherwise, the prediction relevance would atrophy.

So, when won't keywords matter?

I'm not sure, but it's not today.

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WHY CONTENT IS
IMPORTANT
FOR SEO

AUTHOR

JULIA MCCOY

If you want organic search visibility, rankings, and traffic, you have to commit yourself to the grind of consistently creating optimized content.

Content and SEO.

At their best, they form a bond that can catapult any website to the top of search engine rankings.

But that's only when they're at their best. Because, when they're at their worst, they can cause Google penalties that are near impossible to recover from.

The purpose of this chapter is simple; to provide you with an understanding of why content is important for SEO and show you what you can do to make sure they work together in harmony.

As we dive in, we'll gain a better understanding of what content means, what its SEO value is, and how to go about creating optimized content that lands you on the search engine radar.

Let's get started.

WHAT 'CONTENT' MEANS

Providing an exact definition for content, and one that is agreed upon by all marketers would be near impossible.

But, while it is a challenge, TopRank Marketing CEO Lee Odden gathered some **definitions of content** from marketers around the world that give us a solid starting point.

Actionable marketer **Heidi Cohen** describes content as:

"High quality, useful information that conveys a story presented in a contextually relevant manner with the goal of soliciting an emotion or engagement. Delivered live or asynchronously, content can be expressed using a variety of formats including text, images, video, audio, and/or presentations."

While Cohen's description is right on point, it's important to understand that content found online isn't always high quality and useful.
There's a lot of bad content out there that doesn't come close to providing any type of relevancy or usefulness to the reader.

In a more simplified but similar definition, Social Triggers founder **Derek Halpern** says:

"Content comes in any form (audio, text, video), and it informs, entertains, enlightens, or teaches the people who consume it."

Once again, Halpern is describing content that is, at the very least, relevant and useful to its intended audience.

If we avoid a description of "quality" content, we can take a more direct approach by looking at the dozens of different types of digital content.

At this point, you should have a pretty good idea of what content is while also understanding some of the different formats where it can be presented.

But what exactly is its value to SEO, and why is it so important that the two work together?

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WHAT IS THE SEO VALUE OF CONTENT?

Google, the king of search engines, processes **over 6.7 billion** searches per day.

And since we're talking about search engine optimization, that means they're pretty well suited to answer this question.

Larry Page and Sergey Brin co-founded Google in 1998 with a **mission:**

Our mission: Organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

SEJ Search Engine® Journal

That mission remains the same today. The way in which they organize that information, however, has changed quite a bit over the years.

Google's algorithms are constantly evolving in an effort to deliver, as they say, "...useful and relevant results in a fraction of a second."

The "useful and relevant results" that Google is attempting to deliver are the pieces of content that are available throughout the web.

These pieces of content are ranked by their order of usefulness and relevancy to the user performing the search.

And that means, in order for your content to have any SEO value at all, it needs to be beneficial to searchers.

How do you make sure it's beneficial? Google helps us with that answer too.

Their recommendation is that, as you begin **creating content,** make sure it's:

- **Useful and informative:** If you're launching a site for a restaurant, you can include the location, hours of operation, contact information, menu and a blog to share upcoming events.

- **More valuable and useful than other sites:** If you write about how to train a dog, make sure your article provides more value or a different perspective than the numerous articles on the web on dog training.

- **Credible:** Show your site's credibility by using original research, citations, links, reviews and testimonials. An author biography or testimonials from real customers can help boost your site's trustworthiness and reputation.

- **High quality:** Your site's content should be unique, specific and high quality. It should not be mass-produced or outsourced on a large number of other sites. Keep in mind that your content should be created primarily to give visitors a good user experience, not to rank well in search engines.

- **Engaging:** Bring color and life to your site by adding images of your products, your team, or yourself. Make sure visitors are not distracted by spelling, stylistic, and factual errors. An excessive amount of ads can also be distracting for visitors. Engage visitors by interacting with them through regular updates, comment boxes, or social media widgets.

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When these elements are in place, you maximize the potential of the SEO value of your content. Without them, however, your content will have very little value.

But, creating great content isn't the only piece of the puzzle. There's a technical side that you need to be aware of as well.

While we'll talk about that later in this chapter, Maddy Osman put together a comprehensive resource on **How to Evaluate the SEO Value of a Piece of Content** that further elaborates on the topic.

For now, we can conclude that the SEO value of content depends on how useful, informative, valuable, credible, and engaging it is.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OPTIMIZING CONTENT

The reason optimized content is important is simple... you won't rank in search engines without it.

But, as we've already touched on briefly, it's important to understand that there are multiple factors at play here.

On one side, you have content creation.

Optimizing content during creation is done by ensuring that your content is audience-centric and follows the recommendations laid out in the previous section.

But what does audience-centric mean, and how does it differ from other types of content?

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Audience-centric simply means that you're focusing on what audiences want to hear rather than what you want to talk about.

And, as we've identified, producing useful and relevant content is the name of the game if you're looking to rank in search engines.

On the other side of the optimization equation is the technical stuff.

This involves factors like keywords, meta titles, meta descriptions, and URLs.

And that's what we're going to talk about next as we dive into how to actually create optimized content.

HOW TO CREATE OPTIMIZED CONTENT

When attempting to create optimized content, there are a few steps that we need to follow.

They include:

Where to Add Keywords on a Webpage

This topic could live in a post on its own, which it has many, many times.

Here are a couple of my favorites:

- How To Do Keyword Research – Ahrefs' Guide
- The Beginner's Guide to Keyword Research

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1. Perform Keyword Research & Determine Your Topic

While we've already identified that your main goal should be to create audience-centric content, keyword research is necessary to ensure that the resulting content can be found through search engines.

Here are a couple of my favorites:A few things to keep in mind when choosing your keywords and topic:

- Focus on Long-Tail Keywords
- Avoid Highly Competitive Keywords With Massive Search Numbers
- Use a Proven Keyword Research Tool
- Match Your Topic to Your Keyword

2. Develop Your Outline & Format for Optimal Readability
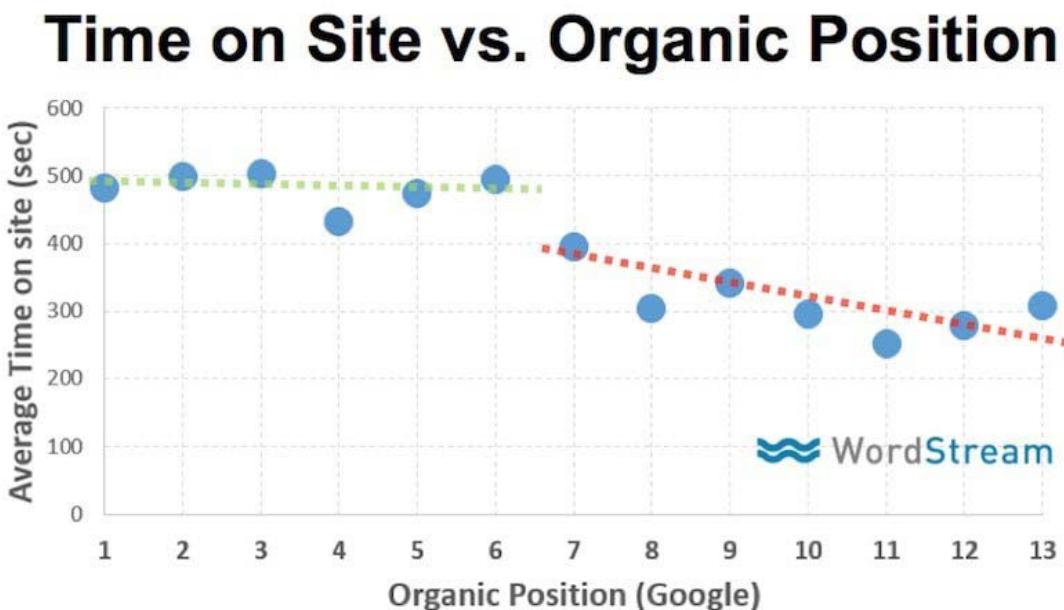
As you're creating your outline, be sure that you're formatting your core content so that it's broken down into small chunks.

Online readers have incredibly short attention spans. And they're not going to stick around if your article is just one ginormous paragraph.

It's best to stick with paragraphs that are 1-2 sentences in length, although it's all right if they stretch to 3-4 shorter sentences.

You'll also want to be sure that you're inserting sub-headers and/or visuals every 150-300 words to break up the content even further.

As you can see from the graph below, website engagement **impacts** organic rankings.

And, if you want to increase engagement, readability is crucial.

Example of Properly Formatted Content

Here's an example of a page that is formatted for optimal readability:

As you can see, most of the paragraphs are only a sentence or two long.

The text is also broken up using subheadings every 100-200 words.

How to Become an SEO Expert

Want to become an SEO expert? Awesome! Here are 21 things you need to know to truly become an SEO expert today.

Danny Goodwin / July 13, 2020 / 13 min read

548 17K
SHARES READS

How to Become an
SEO EXPERT

So you want to become an SEO expert.

I can totally understand why.

There are so many reasons to love SEO.

SEO is fascinating.

SEO is a fast-paced, in-demand field with plenty of longevity ahead of it.

But that means SEO also attracts people who just see it as an easy money grab or work-from-home job.

They read some blogs here and there, learn the terminology, and voila! They're changing their title on LinkedIn to "SEO Expert."

After only a few days.

Or worse, a matter of hours.

That's like reading a few medical books and calling yourself a doctor.

That's not how this works.

SEO expertise, like any other field, requires time, commitment, and experience.

You can't just declare yourself an SEO expert.

It's not a young field anymore.

There are experts who've been doing SEO for decades now.

Ready to follow in their footsteps?

Here are 21 things you need to know to become an SEO expert.

1. Understand the Basics of SEO

To become an expert, start with the basics. You need to understand how audiences and search engines interact, and what you can do to optimize content effectively.

Learning the basics boils down to three core components:

- The types of content that users want, expect, or need. It's all about user intent.
- The inner workings of how search engines **really** work.
- The tools and techniques needed to optimize websites.

Example of Poorly Formatted Content

On the other end of the spectrum, here's an example of a post that's likely to send readers away directly:

> If you currently have a blog, which I hope you do, then why not evaluate the performance of your blog. Who are you trying to target, how do they consume their content? This may give you a better idea of what strategy you should be taking. Will you be more successful producing a hugely detailed post once a week, or by producing a number of article length pieces a week? The only way to know is to research and to test.
>
> If you find that your blog is more successful with more regular article length posts then why not begin to produce long form content in the shape of resources. Just to clear up, when I say article length this still calls for reasonable effort, length and quality – less than 1000 words just might not cut it anymore. Creating resources that are genuinely useful is key. Understand who your audience is and who you want it to be in order to target your content to them. Create useful, insightful guides bit by bit. There is no need to instantly write 10 white papers in one go. Start and build up your collection. Distribute this information as you would usually – through social media and maybe your marketing materials. You want to build a collection of specialist information that people will come to time and time again. As you create new guides, white papers or e-books let everyone know, advertise the fact that it's free and it will not only draw people to your new content, but your evergreen content too.

In this post, the content itself is fine. The problem is the extremely long sentences and paragraphs.

With better formatting, the author could easily increase visitors' average time on site.

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3. Stick to Your Topic & Target Keyword

As you begin writing your content, keep in mind the importance of sticking to the topic, and target keyword that you've chosen.

Don't try to write about everything and anything within a single piece of content. And don't try to target dozens of keywords.

Doing so is not only a huge waste of time, but it also prevents you from creating the most "useful and relevant" content on your topic.

Focus on what you've chosen as your topic and stay hyper-relevant to that topic and the keyword that supports it.

Brian Harnish's **Local SEO Guide for Beginners** is a great example of an author staying hyper-relevant to a specific topic and keyword.

Just by looking at his title, the topic and target keyword are immediately clear.

And, due to this focus, Harnish's guide ranks on the first page of Google for the phrase 'local SEO guide.'

Local SEO Guide for Beginners | SEJ - Search Engine Journal
https://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-guide/beginners-guide-local-seo/ ▾
Jul 12, 2016 - It is so important to approach your **local SEO** strategies with a white hat, holistic, relationship-building approach in mind. Read this **guide** to ...

9) PA: 56   42 links | DA: 85   🔒 | Ⓞ Link Analysis

4. Include Backlinks Throughout Your Content

If you read the local SEO guide, you'll notice that Harnish includes several links to external sites.

Since Google has made it clear that credibility is an important SEO factor, linking to relevant, trustworthy, and authoritative sites can help ensure that search engines see your content as credible.

Be sure, however, that the words you're using for the link are actually relevant to the site the user will be sent to.

For example, take a look at this sentence:

"You need to understand how to create a compelling headline for your content."

If you were to link to a resource showing the reader how to create compelling headlines, you'd want to link the bolded portion shown below:

"You need to **understand how to create a compelling headline** for your content."

In most cases, it's recommended that you keep your links to six words or fewer.

HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR CONTENT ONCE IT'S CREATED

Now onto the "technical" part of content optimization.

The most important steps include optimizing the following:

- Title Tag
- Meta Description
- URL

Let's take a look at how to complete each step.

1. How to Optimize Your Title Tag

When a user performs a search, the **title tag** is the clickable headline that they see at the top of each result.

For reference, it's the highlighted portion in the image below:

Title tags are important for a few reasons. First and foremost, they help search engines understand what your page is about.

In addition, they can be a determining factor for which search result a user chooses.

To optimize your title tag, you'll want to be sure of the following:

- Keep it under 60 characters.
- Don't stuff multiple keywords into the title.
- Be specific about what the content is about.
- Place target keywords at the beginning

The example above is a good one.

Here's an example of a tag that fails to follow these guidelines:

writingcooperative.com › how-to-just-write-c1e613f48171 ▾
How to 'just write'. This is not about how to write well. If… | by …

The difference between the two is clear, and it shows the importance of optimizing your title tags.

2. How to Optimize Your Meta Description

Your **meta description** is the small snippet of text that appears under the title tag and URL.

When performing a search, it's the section that's circled below:

While Google has said that meta descriptions don't have a direct impact on rankings, they do affect whether a user clicks on your page.

And click-through rate can have an indirect impact on rankings as well.

As far as meta description best practices, you should:

- Keep it under 160 characters.
- Provide a short, specific overview of what the content is about.
- Include relevant keywords (they will be highlighted when a user sees search results).

The example above shows a well put together description. Here's an example of one that could use some work:

River Valley Ranch Inc. Horseback Riding & Pasture Boarding
rivervalley**horse**ranch.com/ ▾
River Valley **Horse** Ranch "Saddle Up!" RIVER VALLEY RANCH, INC. | Carver,
Minnesota 55315 | 952.361.3361. TRAIL RIDE HOURS: OPEN WEEKENDS ...
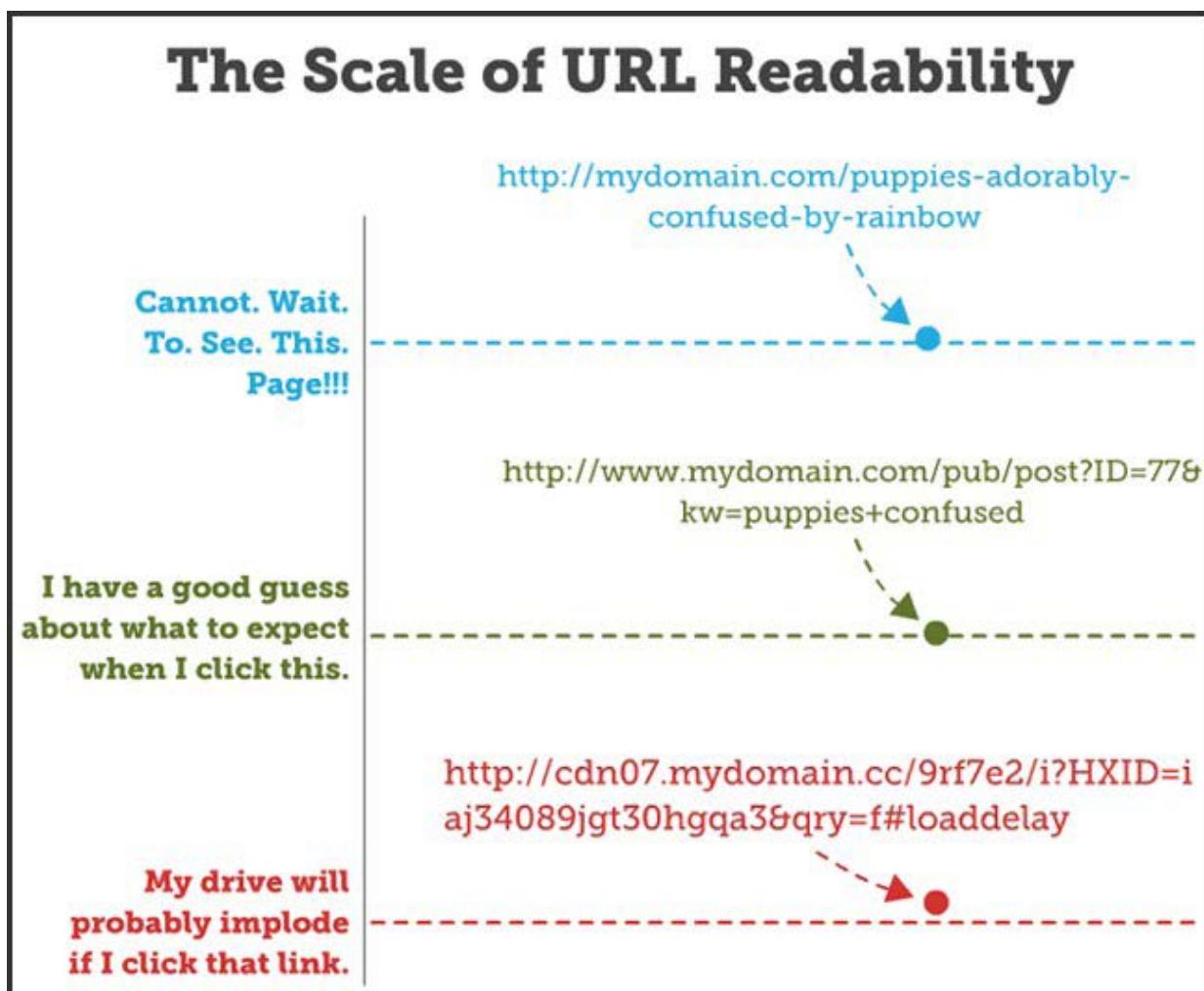
3. How to Optimize Your URL

Your **URL structure** is another component of SEO that has an indirect impact on rankings, as it can be a factor that determines whether a user clicks on your content.

Readability is most important here, as it ensures that search users aren't scared off by long and mysterious URLs.

The image below provides a great example of how URL readability can affect the way a user sees results.

The Scale of URL Readability

http://mydomain.com/puppies-adorably-confused-by-rainbow

Cannot. Wait. To. See. This. Page!!!

http://www.mydomain.com/pub/post?ID=77&kw=puppies+confused

I have a good guess about what to expect when I click this.

http://cdn07.mydomain.cc/9rf7e2/i?HXID=iaj34089jgt30hgqa3&qry=f#loaddelay

My drive will probably implode if I click that link.

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SO, WHY IS CONTENT IMPORTANT FOR SEO?

The answer?

Because when content is optimized, it drastically improves your visibility.

And without visibility and exposure, your content is just another one of the millions of articles that are posted every day on the web.

Nobody sees it.

Nobody shares it.

Nobody does anything with it.

But it's actually easy to get visible when you know what to do.

Sometimes, it can be the difference of something as small as writing optimized, unique meta descriptions for all your pages to send a huge visibility boost to Google.

If you want visibility and exposure, you have to commit yourself to the grind of consistently creating optimized content.

9 ESSENTIAL TYPES OF WEBPAGES EVERY SEO PRO NEEDS TO KNOW

AUTHOR

STONEY G DEGEYTER

Before we get into the meat of this chapter, I want to make one thing perfectly clear: When it comes to SEO, every page is a landing page.

And when I say "every page," I mean every single page that is **crawlable and indexable by the search engines.**

So if you don't want search engines indexing a page, be sure to **block them** from it. Everything else – and I mean everything – needs to be treated as a landing page.

So what then makes a good landing page? There are a lot of answers to that question that has to do with design, usability, conversions, etc.

Let me give you some quick hits that cover it all without getting outside of my scope here.

A good landing page:

- Captures the visitors' attention.
- Addresses their needs, wants, and requirements.
- Answers important/relevant questions.
- Entices them to want the solution you provide.
- Directs them to take a particular action.
- Compels them to do so.

Now with all that in mind, we realize that every page on a website requires an **SEO professional's** attention. No webpage is outside the scope and purview of SEO.

Bottom line: If the page is relevant to the visitor, it's relevant to SEO.

But not all pages are created equal. Every page on a website will:

- Have a unique purpose.
- **Attract different audiences.**
- Direct visitors to different goals.

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It's the SEO professional's job to determine which pages present the most value – the biggest opportunities for gain – at any given time in the digital marketing campaign.

With that in mind, let's look at webpages every SEO professional must pay attention to and why. These are typically the most important pages to an optimization campaign.

1. HOME PAGE

The **home page** is usually one of the single most visited pages of any website and, just as often, the first page a visitor sees.

But whether a visitor lands on your home page first or navigates there from an internal page, they have certain expectations of what they'll find.

The home page must provide a global view of what the website offers. It should give visitors the "big picture" of the products and services you offer and why they should do business with you.

Your home page acts as a doorway for the visitor to enter and begin their journey into your site where they'll find more details about what you offer.

Many SEO pros make the mistake of trying to optimize home pages for the business's primary product or service. This strategy can be just fine if you're a singular product or service company.

But the moment you offer something outside of the one product/category scope, the optimization of the home page becomes irrelevant.

The better and more sustainable strategy for optimizing a home page is to focus on the company brand name.

In that sense, that makes optimizing the home page easy because when you type in the name of the company, the home page of that business should be more relevant than any page on a competitor's website.

But rankings are not the only reason to optimize this page.
In fact, I would argue that optimizing the home page for click-throughs and engagement are far more important than anything else.

Getting rankings only presents the opportunity to get the clicks.

- What do searchers see in the search results?
- Does it compel searchers to click into the site?
- Once visitors have clicked, is the messaging they see on point, giving them a reason to dig further into the site?

Part of your job is to see how any page on the site performs. If the home page isn't doing a good job of keeping visitors on site, then more work is needed.

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2. ABOUT US PAGE

Studies have proven that visitors who have seen a site's **About Us page** are more likely to convert than those that don't. This statistic can prove either a symptom or a result.

This statistic can prove either a symptom or a result.

- Symptom: Visitors who are close to converting check out a site's About Us before they commit.
- Result: Visitors who visit an About Us page are heavily influenced by the content and become more likely to convert if the page satisfies what they wanted to learn.

Which is it? My theory is that it's both.

But either way, the page is an important part of the conversion process. And that means that the About Us page is an important page to drive traffic to.

Like any good landing page, your **About Us page** must fulfill its role in the conversion process.

The About Us page may seem like an odd one to try to optimize, but in reality, there are a lot of keywords that are tailor-made for these pages.

Any industry- or product-related keywords that are qualified with company, business, agency, firm, office, bureau, or similar types of keywords are ready-made fits for the **About Us page.** And let's face it, trying to fit these keywords anywhere else is difficult.

3. CONTACT US PAGE

There is pretty much only one reason a visitor will intentionally navigate to a **Contact Us page:** They want your contact information.

What they actually do with that information is anyone's guess.

Maybe they'll send you an email, maybe they'll call, or maybe they just want to know where you're located. And it's this last option that provides us with prime optimization fodder.

Whether you're a national or a local company, inevitably, some people prefer to do business with someone close by.

A quick bit of **keyword research** will likely prove this out for your industry.
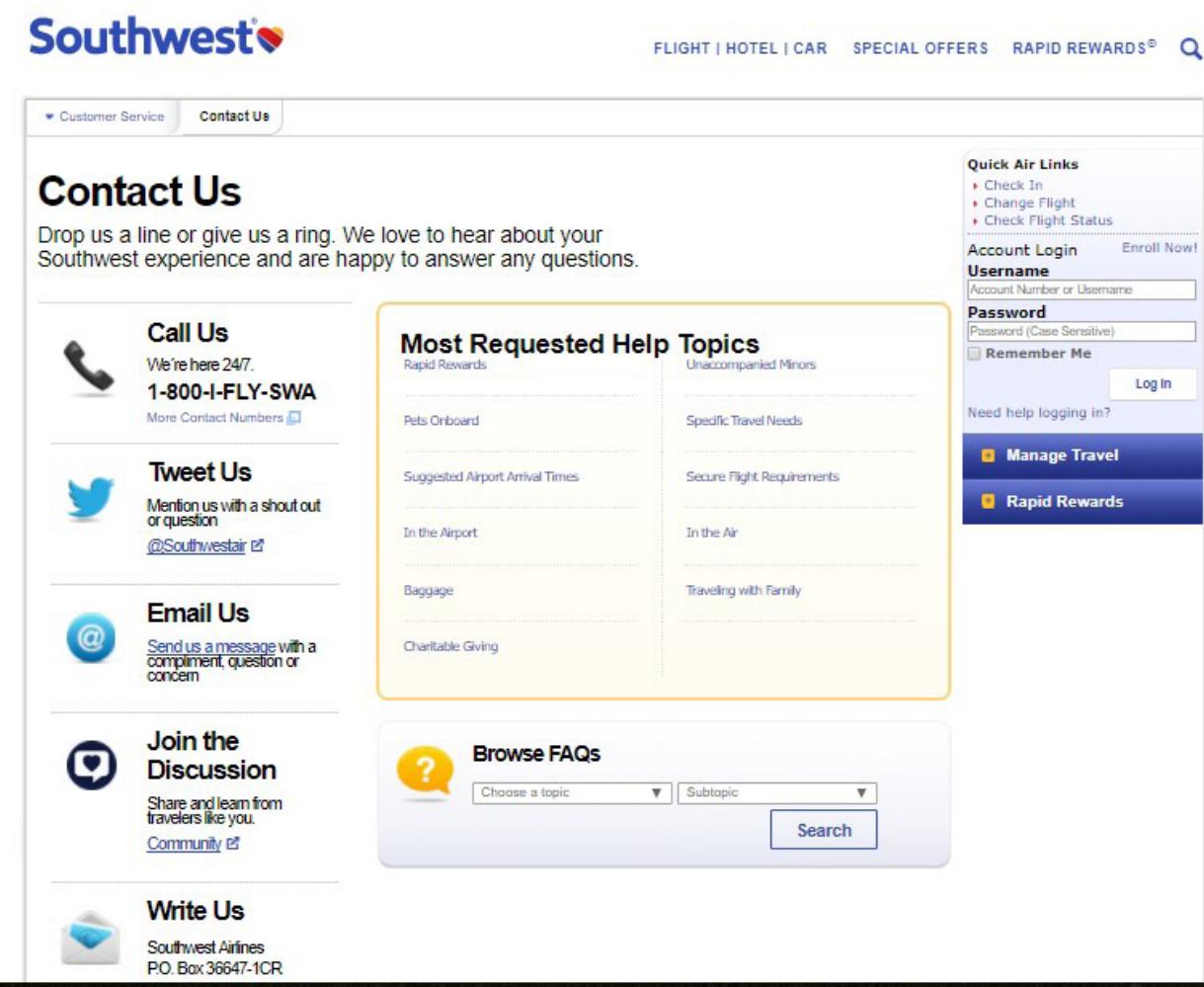
While local business may not be your bread and butter, there is no reason to ignore it either.

Focus your optimization efforts on your location:

- Find what keywords searchers use that are most relevant to your area.
- Integrate maps onto your contact page.
- Use **schema** on your address and phone number.

Most importantly: Make it easy for visitors to contact you.

This is a primary engagement page. If too many people visit your Contact Us page and don't engage, that could be a sign that you're making it difficult, demanding too much information, or simply not providing the right contact options.

Provide plenty of options so visitors can contact you in the way they feel most comfortable.

4. PRODUCT CATEGORY & SUB-CATEGORY PAGES

Product category and sub-category page optimization provide fantastic SEO opportunities.

In the buying cycle, these pages most frequently serve those who are in the shopping phase. That means those visitors have a good idea of what they want but are looking to learn more about the options available to them.

The goal of the page is to give the visitor access to those options, which are usually the actual product detail pages themselves.

For the most part, the product category pages are nothing more than pass-through pages. Visitors may revisit the page frequently, but only so you can pass them through to the products.

On an SEO level, these pages are an optimization gold mine. The keywords that these pages cover are generally not so broad that they lose all value, but not so specific that they lose all search volume. Consider them the SEO sweet spot.
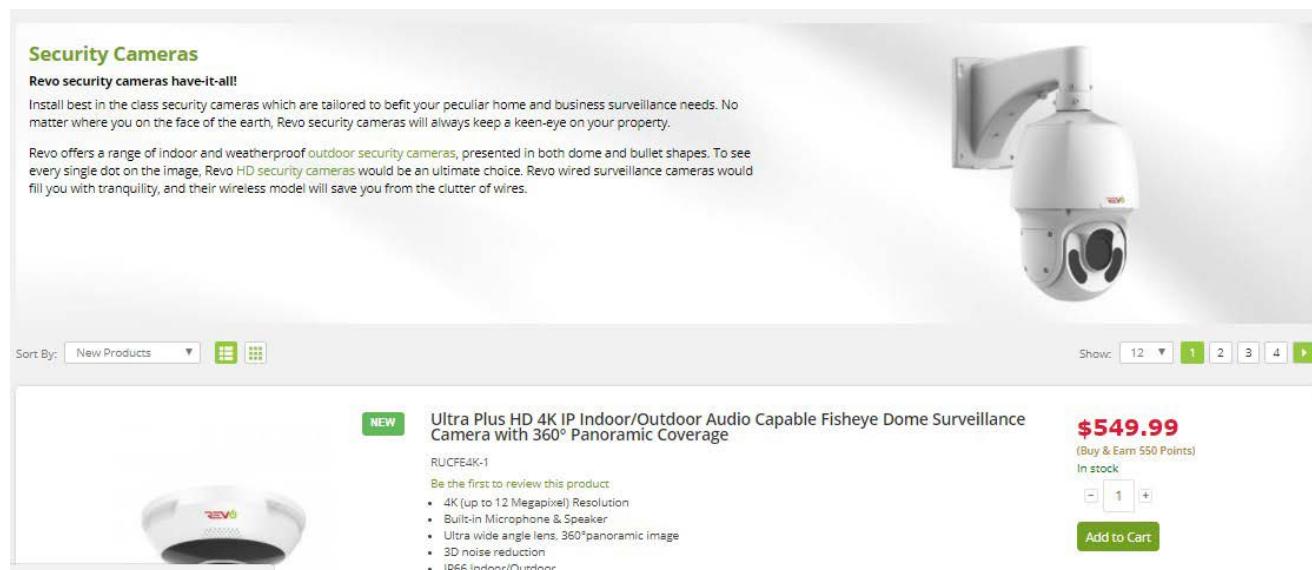
These pages do, however, present something of a problem.

Pages need content in order to be optimized, but visitors on these pages don't want content, they just want to see the products. At least that's what many believe. I, on the other hand, don't subscribe to this theory.

I agree that you don't want your content to push the products down the page. Visitors need to see the products without scrolling, so they don't assume it's an informational page.

But **content plays a valuable role** in the conversion process.

There are many ways to add content to pages without hiding it or the products. How you do it and how much content each page needs is up to you. Just make sure you're giving all visitors what they need.

Revo does a good job of describing their security cameras on the category page without taking away from products.

5. PRODUCT DETAIL PAGES

When a visitor is in the shop phase of the sales cycle, they will visit a lot of product detail pages.

When they move on to the buy phase, that means they have gathered enough information to know fairly precisely what they want.

Now they are just looking at the fine details and deciding which version of the product they want and who to buy it from.

When it comes to **optimizing product pages,** keyword research almost becomes irrelevant. That's because there are so many variables that it's impossible to focus the content of these pages on every potential variable in any traditional way.

But, as odd as that sounds, that actually makes optimization of these pages that much easier. And it has less to do with the keywords and more about the construction of the page's content. As with any page, you want to optimize the tags: title, description, alt, headings, etc. But where most other pages require a custom approach, product pages can easily be optimized en masse by using dynamic keyword insertion.

You can also write boilerplate content that can be used for all products of a specific category. Just insert the product name in the appropriate place (though unique content here is always preferred).

Beyond that, you want to make sure the page contains the relevant types of information. And this is where keyword research becomes valuable.

Not for the specific words but the information types.

- If people are searching for colors, make sure that information is listed on the page.
- If they want sizes, get that in there.
- If they search for product numbers, yep, add those as well.

See where I'm going with this?

It's not that you need to optimize for a specific product number that you see in your keyword research. It's that you need to optimize for product numbers, period.

One final bit of information:

How you make these pages **accessible** can have a huge impact on your SEO.

The more links you have to your product detail pages, the more link authority you drain from your other pages. However, that also means the more link authority you give to these pages, which are often the highest converting.

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The trade-off could mean lower rankings on category pages in lieu of higher rankings on the product pages, or vice versa. It's up to you to see what serves you better overall.

6. FAQ PAGES

In the age of Google, answer boxes, help, and FAQ pages have become more important than ever.

While you always want to make sure you are answering questions throughout your website, FAQ pages provide a good catch-all for the often requested information.

FAQ pages are ready-made for getting your content to appear in the coveted answer box.

Not sure what your most asked questions are? Your keyword research will tell you.

Search for your keyword and then pull out any phrases that start with who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Decide which questions are worth answering, and you have yourself the start of a FAQ page!

Frequently Asked Questions

⊖ Windows
  ⊕ How do I find my Windows product key?
  ⊕ My Windows 7 product key won't verify. What's the problem?
  ⊕ I bought Windows 7 through a website. After talking to the merchant, I was told I had a "system builder" product key. Why doesn't that work?
  ⊕ I purchased my copy of Windows through a university. Can I download it here?
  ⊕ I'm running a Mac and get an error message when I click Download Tool Now. What's wrong?
  ⊕ Windows came pre-installed on my device, can I use media from this site to download and install?

Make sure your FAQ pages answers questions users really ask like Microsoft does here.

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7. BLOG CATEGORY & TAG PAGES

Every blog needs to have categories that each post goes into.

You can, if you wish, take that a step further and tag your posts with keywords they are relevant for. Readers navigating your blog can use these categories and tags to find more related content.

That's just good blogging!

But now what?

Those category and tag page can be great landing pages in their own right.

Throw in some optimized text that stays at the top of those pages, and then the blog posts that fill the rest of the content takes care of the rest.

This is an additional opportunity to rank for phrases that you may not have targeted in your main site.

Just be careful not to duplicate the optimized text on the additional pages (page 2, 3, etc.) for each category or keep those pages out of the search index, so they don't devalue your optimized text.

8. BLOG POSTS

Every site has a limit to the number of pages that can be added before it gets overly cluttered and begins to interfere with the conversion process.

But there is almost no limit to the number of relevant topics you can optimize pages for. This is where **blog posts** come into play.

Any topic that you can't explore – or can't explore as in-depth – on your main site can be explored in great detail in a blog post. Or a series of blog posts.

Every blog post can be targeted for a specific searcher's need and be used to drive relevant traffic to your site.

But getting visitors to your site isn't enough.

Make sure your blog posts contain calls to action back into your site.

That's not permission to relentlessly promote your products and services with each post, but that doesn't mean you can't provide some gentle encouragement to direct readers to get more information.

Your Path to Digital Marketing Strategy Success

Your strategy document will be very individual to your business, which is why it's almost impossible for us to create a one-size-fits-all digital marketing strategy template. Remember, the purpose of your strategy document is to map out the actions you're going to take to achieve your goal over a period of time -- as long as it communicates that, then you've nailed the basics of creating a digital strategy.

If you're eager to learn more about this realm, and how you can build a truly effective strategy to help grow your business, check out our simple guide to digital marketing strategy.
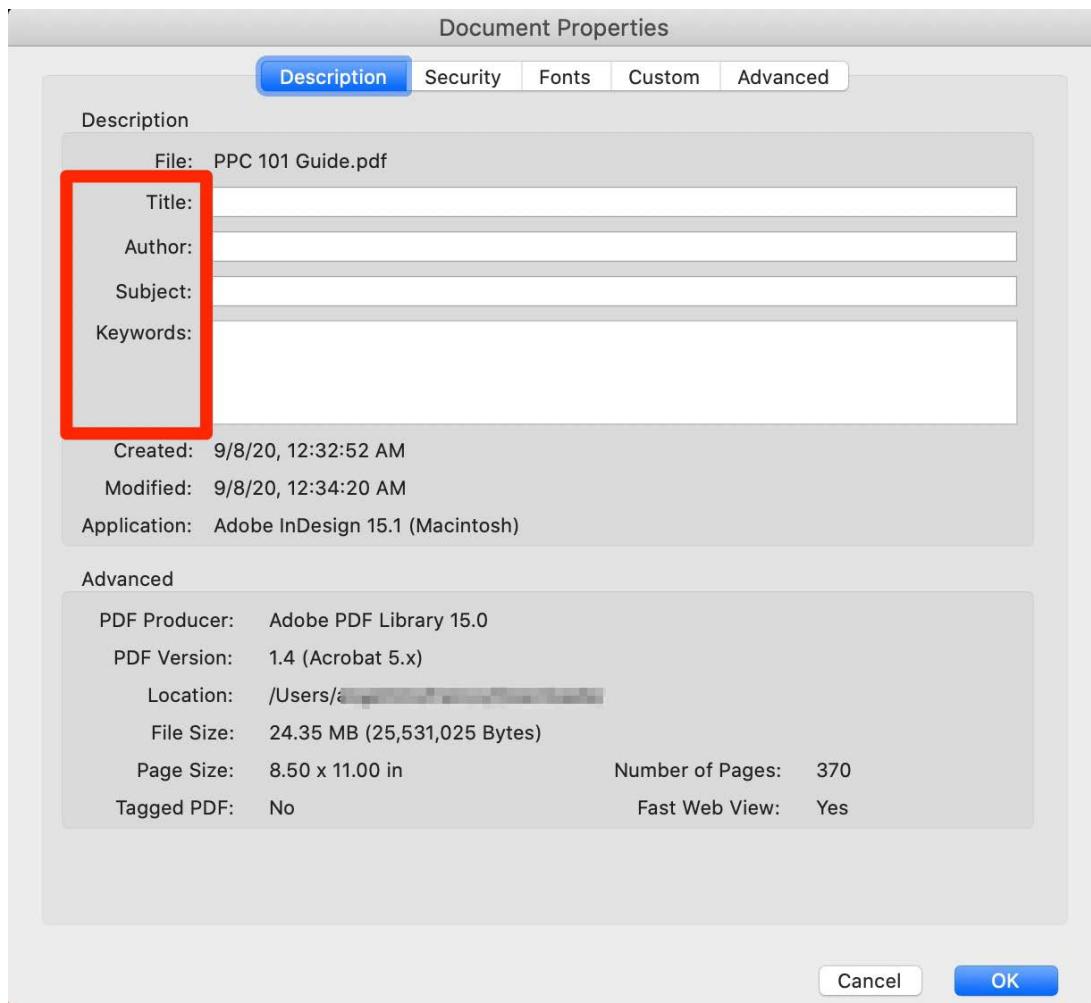
Hubspot adds a simple CTA right in the text of the blog post conclusion.

9. PDFS

OK, so technically, these aren't webpages, but **PDFs** are often a part of providing valuable information to your visitors, albeit in a different format.

PDFs should be used sparingly, but when they are used, they should be optimized, just like any other webpage.

The process for optimizing them is different, but the concepts are the same.

CONCLUSION

If your site has other pages not mentioned here, don't assume that means they're not important.

Remember, **every page is a landing page,** which means every page can and should be optimized. And not just for traffic from search engines, but for usability and conversion.

This list will get you started, but you need to create your own adventure from here.

HOW LONG DOES SEO TAKE?

AUTHOR

JEREMY KNAUFF

One of the most common questions I get as an SEO professional is, "How long does SEO take?"

It's also one of the most frustrating questions because, while clients understandably want a definitive answer, there is simply no way to provide one due to all of the variables involved.

This is because, in addition to all of the variables that play a role in the optimization of your own website, you also have to evaluate those same variables in your competitors' optimization efforts.

This can make an already complex question infinitely more difficult to answer.

To steal a line from "Pawn Stars":

"Best I can do is…"

The best I can do is give you a range of four months up to a year.

That range is based on three key variables that determine how long your SEO will take, which are:

- Competition
- Inbound links
- Content

It's important to point out that even with the data behind these variables, there is no formula to answer this question.

However, there is a lot more to answering it than simple guesswork.

Figuring out how long your SEO will take comes down to first evaluating the data behind these three variables, beginning the work and evaluating how quickly you begin to see results, and then extrapolating that to get an idea how long it might take to hit a particular position.

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THE ROLE OF COMPETITION IN HOW LONG SEO TAKES
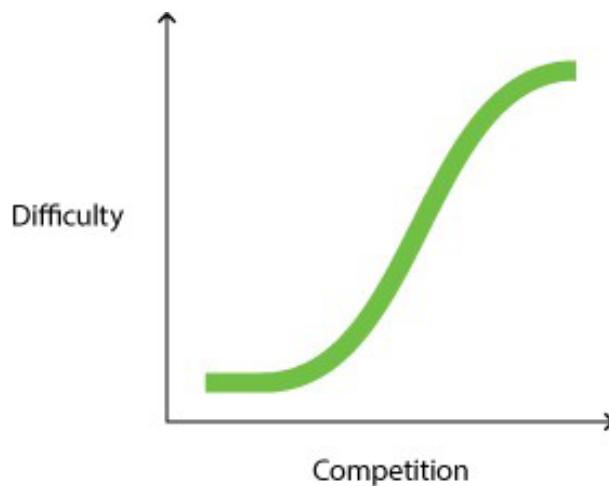
If you're selling something like salmon-flavored breakfast cereal, you probably won't face any competition.

However, those of us selling products and services that real people will actually buy are going to face varying degrees of competition based on demand.

For example, a plumber serving a small local market would face less competition than a real estate brokerage serving a large city, which would face less competition than a national mortgage company.

As you might imagine, the more competing webpages you're up against, the longer it will take to climb to the top of the search results.

This will follow a consistent pattern where it's both easier and faster to outrank the lower pages, but as you climb the search results, each subsequent step will often take significantly more effort and time.

This is both because of the volume of competitors and the fact that the top-ranking pages tend to have experienced SEO professionals behind them.

An often overlooked aspect of competition it's the correlation between the volume of competition within a niche and the competency of the SEO professionals behind the top-ranked webpages in that niche.

Think about it like this:

Demand drives companies into a niche, leading to increased competition.

That competition pushes them to offer more competitive deals, which means they must take a larger share of the market in order to remain profitable.

This is an environment that usually favors larger companies with deeper pockets – and they can afford to hire the best SEO professionals in the industry.

If you're up against this situation, you've got a longer and tougher battle ahead of you.

So we need to evaluate all aspects of our competitors' SEO, but we need to look beyond just where they stand today. That's only a starting point.

We also have to look at their activity over the previous several months, and then continue to track their activity going forward.

This is important because, in order to outrank your competitors, you need to put in more effort than they are if you want to pass them.

THE ROLE OF INBOUND LINKS IN HOW LONG SEO TAKES

It's no secret that links still play a huge role in SEO, but their impact on how long it takes depends on several deeper factors.

The first is the volume of links to your website.

Generally, more links will help you achieve SEO success more quickly, but it's not just a numbers game.

Generally speaking, fewer, high-quality links from relevant websites will have a far greater impact on your results than a greater volume of low-quality links from irrelevant websites.
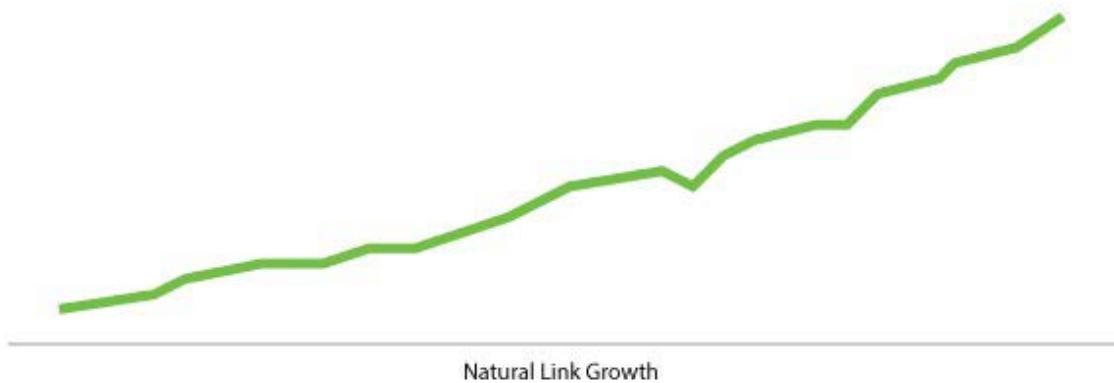
This is also important because high-quality links are generally more difficult to earn, so they will be more difficult for your competitors to replicate.

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And they tend to last longer, as opposed to links generated using automated methods.
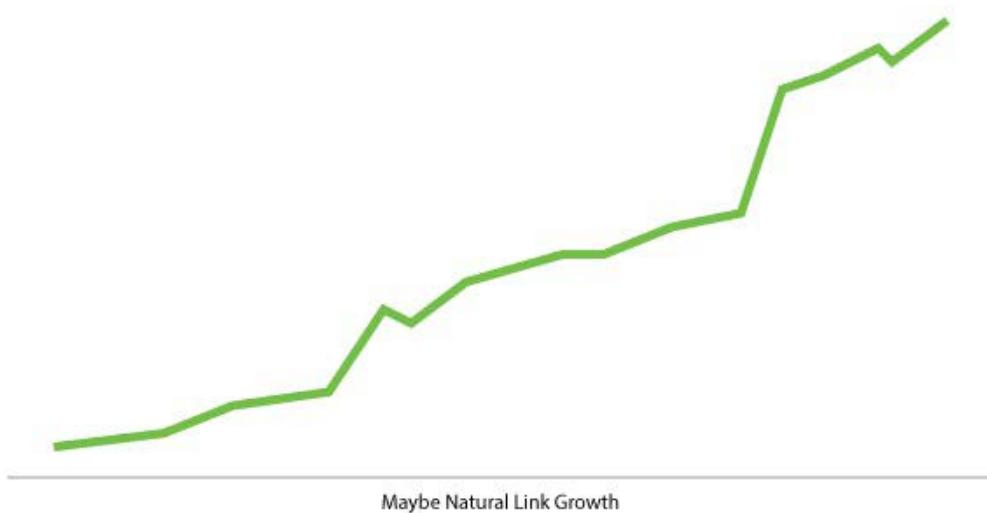
But the speed at which you earn links and the speed at which you have historically earned links can also be factors because, generally, an abrupt increase could indicate an unnatural attempt to manipulate ranking.

If you're using methods that don't meet Google's Webmaster Guidelines, and you have an abrupt increase in the number of inbound links that trigger a manual review, you could end up facing a **penalty.**
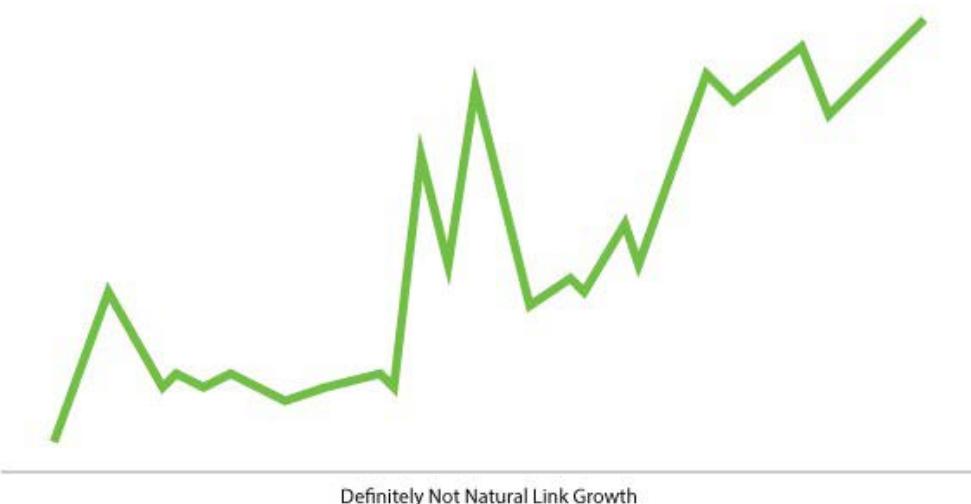
This looks natural:

Natural Link Growth

This looks less natural but depending on other factors, such as recent media coverage, a new product launch, or an amazing content marketing campaign, it could be completely natural:

Maybe Natural Link Growth

This looks about as natural as a spray tan:

Definitely Not Natural Link Growth
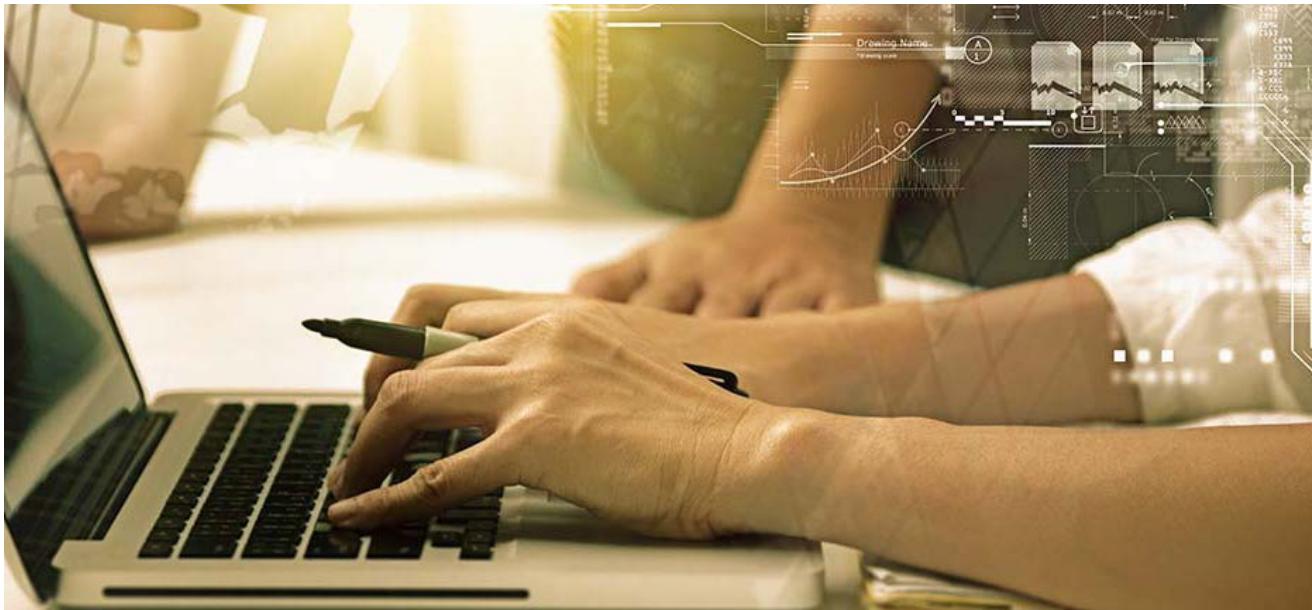
So, generally, the faster you can earn relevant, high-quality links, the faster you will rank, but that comes with a caveat.

Your link velocity – the speed at which you earn links – should have relatively stable growth.

If your link building tactics follow Google's guidelines, that should happen naturally.

It's usually only when you use **black hat** tactics that you see unnatural patterns that could hurt your progress.

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THE ROLE OF CONTENT IN HOW LONG SEO TAKES

The content published on your website also plays a role in how quickly you see results, and the first thing you need to know is that quality matters a lot.

Fortunately, the days of churning out hundreds of 300-word articles you ordered on Fiverr isn't going to move the needle when it comes to your ranking.

Now, don't interpret this to mean that each piece of content you publish needs to be a 4,000-word beast.

In fact, there is no minimum or even ideal length – content simply needs to be long enough to solve a visitor's problem.

Jennifer Slegg @jenstar · Aug 15
Sigh... just because your content is shorter than 300 words doesn't mean Google views it as thin content.

💬 6   🔁 14   ♡ 34   ✉

Jennifer Slegg @jenstar · Aug 15
There are tons of examples of super short content (under 100 words) that is awesome enough to score the featured snippet in Google.

💬 1   🔁 2   ♡ 8   ✉

Jennifer Slegg
@jenstar   (Follow)

As long as you are delivering what your title is promising, if that ends up being 100 words (ie. how to hard boil an egg), that's fine.

3:42 PM - 15 Aug 2017

3 Retweets   18 Likes

There is a myth that you should publish new content slowly, which comes from the theory that publishing lots of new content at once could look unnatural to Google, and thus, could hurt your ranking.

It's understandable how people could believe this myth, but it's been officially debunked by Google.

If you have great content ready to go, then there is no reason, from an SEO perspective, not to publish it immediately.

The sooner you get it out there, the sooner it will have a positive impact on your ranking.

Waiting only makes your SEO take longer.

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It's worth noting that the ranking of a webpage does correlate with its age.

In other words, newer pages tend not to rank as well as older pages, but that is due to other factors, not the age.

On that note, I recommend maintaining a consistent publishing schedule, rather than publishing in surges though, for two reasons:

- It shows Google that new content is added to your website on a regular basis, which generally encourages their spiders to crawl it more frequently. This helps to speed up your SEO efforts.
- It encourages users to return to your website more frequently, which may help send positive user experience signals to Google, and as a result, speed up your SEO efforts.

However, it's not just creating content.

Deleting content can play a positive role in how long your SEO takes, as well.

The key is determining which content to keep, which to improve, and which to delete.

Danny Goodwin **hosted a webinar on this topic,** where he explained how Search Engine Journal **used this approach** to cull a number of underperforming pages, which helped to boost the site's overall performance in the search results.

Ultimately, the key is to create original, useful content that solves your audience's needs, and continually improve it.

And if you needed another reason to do this, higher-quality, long-form content tends to earn more links compared to low-quality and/or shorter content.

In fact, Backlinko's Brian Dean analyzed 912 million blog posts and determined that long-form content earns an average of **77.2%** more links than short articles.

So while content plays an important role in its own right, it also impacts your link building efforts, so it's like a two-for-one.

SO, IS IT ALL JUST AN EDUCATED GUESS?

Our job is a lot like that of meteorologists, where despite all of our knowledge, experience, and tools, we often get things wrong.

And much like my local weatherman, whom I want to choke until he turns blue when my beach plans are ruined by the rain that he promised wasn't going to happen, our clients are often just as frustrated when they don't see results from their SEO campaign as quickly as they would like.

Part of the job of an SEO professional is to **manage client expectations.**

This is an area that many fail in.

Thanks to being told what they wanted to hear by far too many practitioners, many clients today have unrealistic expectations. As a result, many people think this is something that only takes a few weeks or even months.

You might begin seeing improvements in organic ranking and an increase in traffic for keyword topics with little competition in just a few weeks.

On the other hand, moderately competitive topics might takes months, while highly competitive phrases could even take one year or more!

For example, my team was able to rank a website #1 for the term "marketing company," which produced a steady flow of leads for several years.

However, despite our skills, manpower, and resources, it took us about a year of consistent work to achieve that.

On the other hand, a particular client with virtually no digital presence came to us when a website had published some unflattering information about him that was taken completely out of context.

Since it held the first position in Google for his own name, this had cost him a considerable amount of business.

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Fortunately, there was little competition for his own name, and that website didn't have much authority, so we were able to fill the first several pages in the search results with pages we controlled in just a few weeks.

I've also seen cases when clients and even agencies have used tactics that violate Google's Webmaster Guidelines in an attempt to speed up the process.

While this may work in the short term, you will eventually face a penalty and end up further behind where you started.

FROM THE HORSE'S (GOOGLE'S) MOUTH

You need to be prepared to invest several months to a year before seeing results from your SEO efforts, but even then, you won't be king of the hill.

Here's what Google said about it.

> In most cases, SEOs need four months to a year to help your business first implement improvements and then see potential benefit.

In fact, according to a comprehensive statistical analysis by Tim Soulo, only **5.7%** of all newly published pages will get to Google's top 10 within a year.

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And even once you do, you won't be able to rest on your laurels because your competitors – both current and newcomers – will constantly be gunning to take that position from you.

In other words, this is an ongoing effort that will never really be complete.

CONCLUSION

You can't accurately predict exactly how long SEO takes until you start putting in the work.

However, you can make a highly educated guess based on certain variables. Then, over time, you can get a better idea of how long it may take within your particular niche against your competitors.

HOW TO SPOT SEO MYTHS: 7 COMMON SEO MYTHS, DEBUNKED

AUTHOR

HELEN POLLITT

There's a lot of advice going around about SEO.

Some of it is very helpful, some of it will lead you astray if acted on.

The difficulty is knowing, which is which.

It can be hard to identify what advice is accurate and based on fact, and what is just regurgitated from misquoted articles or poorly understood Google statements.

SEO myths abound.

You'll hear them in the strangest places.

A client will tell you with confidence how they are suffering from a duplicate content penalty.

Your boss will chastise you for not keeping your page titles to 60 characters.

Sometimes the myths are obviously fake. Other times they can be harder to detect.

THE DANGERS OF SEO MYTHS

The issue is, we simply don't know exactly how **the search engines work.**

Due to this, a lot of what we do as SEOs ends up being trial and error and educated guesswork.

When you are learning about SEO, it can be difficult to test out all of the claims you are hearing.

That's when the SEO myths begin to take hold.

Before you know it, you're proudly telling your line manager that you're planning to "BERT optimize" your website copy.

SEO myths can be busted a lot of the time with a pause and some consideration.

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How, exactly, would Google be able to measure that?

Would that actually benefit the end-user in any way?

There is a danger in SEO of considering the search engines to be omnipotent, and because of this, wild myths about how they understand and measure our websites start to grow.

WHAT IS AN SEO MYTH?

Before we debunk some common SEO myths, we should first understand what forms they take.

Untested Wisdom

Myths in SEO tend to take the form of handed-down wisdom that isn't tested.

As a result, something that might well have no impact on driving qualified organic traffic to a site gets treated like it matters.

Minor Factors Blown out of Proportion

SEO myths might also be something that has a small impact on organic rankings or conversion but is given too much importance.

This might be a "tick box" exercise that is hailed as being a critical factor in SEO success, or simply an activity that might only cause your site to eke ahead if everything else with your competition was truly equal.

Outdated Advice

Myths can arise simply because what used to be effective in helping sites to rank and convert well no longer does but is still being advised.

It might be that something used to work really well.

Over time the algorithms have grown smarter.

The public is more adverse to being marketed to.

Simply, what was once good advice is now defunct.

Google Being Misunderstood

Many times the start of a myth is Google itself.

Unfortunately, a slightly obscure or just not straightforward piece of advice from a Google representative gets misunderstood and run away with.

Before we know it, a new optimization service is being sold off the back of a flippant comment a Googler made in jest.

SEO myths can be based in fact, or perhaps these are more accurately SEO legends?

In the case of Google-born myths, it tends to be that the fact has been so distorted by the SEO industry's interpretation of the statement that it no longer resembles useful information.

When Can Something Appear to Be a Myth

Sometimes an SEO technique can be written off as myth by others purely because they have not experienced success from carrying out this activity for their own site.

It is important to remember that every website has its own industry, set of competitors, the technology powering it, and other factors that make it unique.

Blanket application of techniques to every website and expecting them to have the same outcome is naive.

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Someone may not have had success with a technique when they have tried it in their highly competitive vertical.

It doesn't mean it won't help someone in a less competitive industry have success.

Causation & Correlation Being Confused

Sometimes SEO myths arise because of an inappropriate connection between an activity that was carried out and a rise in organic search performance.

If an SEO has seen a benefit from something they did, then it is natural that they would advise others to try the same.

Unfortunately, we're not always great at separating causation and correlation.

Just because rankings or click-through rate increased around-about the same time as you implemented a new tactic doesn't mean it caused the increase.

There could be other factors at play.

Soon an SEO myth arises from an overeager SEO wanting to share what they incorrectly believe to be a golden ticket.

STEERING CLEAR OF SEO MYTHS

It can save you from experiencing headaches, lost revenue, and a whole lot of time if you learn to spot SEO myths and act accordingly.

Test

The key to not falling for SEO myths is making sure you can test advice whenever possible.

If you have been given the advice that structuring your page titles a certain way will help your pages rank better for their chosen keywords, then try it with one or two pages first.

This can help you to measure whether making a change across many pages will be worth the time before you commit to doing so.

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Is Google Just Testing?

Sometimes there will be a big uproar in the SEO community because of change in the way Google displays or orders search results.

These changes are often tested in the wild before they are rolled out to more search results.

Once a big change has been spotted by one or two SEOs, advice on how to optimize for it begins to spread.

Remember the favicons in the desktop search results?

The upset that caused the SEO industry (and Google users in general) was vast.

Suddenly articles sprang up about the importance of favicons in attracting users to your search result.

Whether favicons would impact click-through rate that much barely had time to be studied.

Because just like that, Google changed it back.

Before you jump for the latest SEO advice that is being spread around Twitter as a result of a change by Google, wait to see if it is going to hold.

It could be that the advice that appears sound now will quickly become a myth if Google rolls back changes.

20 COMMON SEO MYTHS

So now we know what causes and perpetuates SEO myths, let's find out the truth behind some of the more common ones.

1. The Google Sandbox

It is a belief held by some SEOs that Google will automatically suppress new websites in the organic search results for a period of time before they are able to rank more freely.

It's something that many SEOs will argue simply is not the case. So who is right?

SEOs who have been around for many years will give you anecdotal evidence that would both support and detract from the idea of a sandbox.

The only guidance that has been given by Google from this appears to be in the form of tweets.

As already discussed, Google's social media responses can often be misinterpreted.

Verdict: Officially? It's a myth.

Unofficially – there does seem to be a period of time whilst Google tries to understand and rank the pages belonging to a new site.

This might mimic a sandbox.

2. Duplicate Content Penalty

This is a myth that I hear a lot. The idea being that if you have content on your website that is duplicated elsewhere on the web, Google will penalize you for it.

The key to understanding what is really going on here is knowing the difference between an algorithmic suppression and a manual action.

A manual action, the situation that can result in webpages being removed from Google's index, will be actioned by a human at Google.

The website owner will be notified through Google Search Console. An algorithmic suppression occurs when your page cannot rank well due to it being caught by a filter from an algorithm.

Chuck Price does a great job of explaining the difference between the two **in this article** that lays out all of the different manual actions available from Google.

Essentially, having copy that is taken from another webpage might mean you can't outrank that other page.

The search engines may determine the original host of the copy is more relevant to the search query than yours.

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As there is no benefit to having both in the search results, yours gets suppressed. This is not a penalty. This is the algorithm doing its job.

There are some content related manual actions, as covered in Price's article, but essentially copying one or two pages of someone else's content is not going to trigger them.

It is, however, potentially going to land you in other trouble if you have no legal right to use that content. It also can detract from the value your website brings to the user.

Verdict: SEO myth

3. PPC Advertising Helps Rankings

This is a common myth. It's also quite quick to debunk.

The idea is that Google will favor websites in the organic search results, which spend money with it through **pay-per-click advertising.**

This is simply false.

Google's algorithm for ranking organic search results is completely separate from the one used to determine PPC ad placements.

Running a paid search advertising campaign through Google at the same time as carrying out SEO might **benefit your site** for other reasons, but it won't directly benefit your ranking.

Verdict: SEO myth

4. Domain Age Is a Ranking Factor

This claim finds itself seated firmly in the "confusing causation and correlation" camp.

Because a website has been around for a long time and is ranking well, age must be a ranking factor.

Google has debunked this myth itself many times.

In fact, as recently as July 2019, Google Webmaster Trends Analyst John Mueller replied to a tweet suggesting that domain age was one of "200 signals of ranking" saying "No, domain age helps nothing"

The truth behind this myth is that an older website has had more time to do things well.

For instance, a website that has been live and active for 10 years may well have acquired a high volume of relevant backlinks to its key pages.

A website that has been running for less than six months will be unlikely to compete with that.

The older website appears to be ranking better, and the conclusion is that age must be the determining factor.

Verdict: SEO myth

5. Tabbed Content Affects Rankings

This idea is one that has roots going back a long way.

The premise is that Google will not assign as much value to the content that is sitting behind a tab or accordion.

For example, text that is not viewable on the first load of a page.

Google has again debunked this myth as recent as March 31, 2020, but it has been a contentious idea amongst many SEOs years.

In September 2018, Gary Illyes, Webmaster Trends Analyst at Google, answered a tweet thread about using tabs to display content.

His response:

"AFAIK, nothing's changed here, Bill: we index the content, its weight is fully considered for ranking, but it might not get bolded in the snippets. It's another, more technical question how that content is surfaced by the site. Indexing does have limitations."

If the content is visible in the HTML, there is no reason to assume that it is being devalued just because it is not apparent to the user on the first load of the page.

This is not an example of cloaking, and Google can easily fetch the content.

As long as there is nothing else that is stopping the text from being viewed by Google, it should be weighted the same as copy, which isn't in tabs.

Want more clarification on this?

Then check out Roger Montti's **post** that puts this myth to bed.

Verdict: SEO myth

6. Google Uses Google Analytics Data in Rankings

This is a common fear amongst business owners.

They study their Google Analytics reports.

They feel their average sitewide bounce rate is too high, or their time on page is too low.

So they worry that Google will perceive their site to be low quality because of that.

They fear they won't rank well because of it.

The myth is that Google uses the data in your Google Analytics account as part of its ranking algorithm.

It's a myth that has been around for a long time.

Google's Gary Illyes has again debunked this idea simply with, "We don't use *anything* from Google analytics [sic] in the "algo."

Gary "鯨理／경리" Illyes ✓ @methode · Jun 26, 2017
We don't use *anything* from Google analytics in the "algo".

💬 1   🔁 22   ♡ 18   ⬆

If we think about this logically, using Google Analytics data as a ranking factor would be really hard to police.

For instance, using filters could manipulate data to make it seem like the site was performing in a way that it isn't really.

What is good performance anyway?

High "time on page" might be good for some long-form content. Low "time on page" could be understandable for shorter content. Is either right or wrong?

Google would also need to understand the intricate ways in which each Google Analytics account had been configured.

Some might be excluding all known bots, and others might not.

Some might use custom dimensions and channel groupings, and others haven't configured anything.

Using this data reliably would be extremely complicated to do. Consider the hundreds of thousands of websites that use other analytics programs.

How would Google treat them?

Verdict: SEO myth

This myth is another case of "causation, not correlation."

A high sitewide bounce rate might be indicative of a quality problem, or it might not be.

Low time on page could mean your site isn't engaging, or it could mean your content is quickly digestible.

These metrics give you clues as to why you might not be ranking well, they aren't the cause of it.

7. Google Cares About Domain Authority

PageRank is a link analysis algorithm used by Google to measure the importance of a webpage.

Google used to display a page's PageRank score, a number up to 10, on its toolbar.

Google stopped updating the PageRank displayed in toolbars in 2013. In 2016 Google confirmed that the PageRank toolbar metric was not going to be used going forward.

In the absence of PageRank, many other third-party authority scores have been developed.

Commonly known ones are:

- Moz's Domain Authority and Page Authority scores.
- Majestic's Trust Flow and Citation Flow.
- Ahrefs' Domain Rating and URL Rating.

These scores are used by some SEOs to determine the "value" of a page.

That calculation can never be an entirely accurate reflection of how a search engine values a page, however.

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Commonly, SEOs will refer to the ranking power of a website often in conjunction with its backlink profile.

This, too is known as the domain's authority.

You can see where the confusion lies.

Google representatives have dispelled the notion of a domain authority metric used by them.

Gary Illyes once again debunking myths with "we don't really have "overall domain authority."

Verdict: SEO myth

8. Longer Content Is Better

You will have definitely heard it said before that longer content ranks better.

More words on a page automatically make yours more rank-worthy than your competitor's.

This is "wisdom" that is often shared around SEO forums without little evidence to substantiate it.

There are a lot of studies that have been released over the years that state facts about the top-ranking webpages, such as "on average pages in the top 10 positions in the SERPs have over 1,450 words on them."

It would be quite easy for someone to take this information in isolation and assume it means that pages need approximately 1,500 words to rank on Page 1. That isn't what the study is saying, however.

Unfortunately, this is an example of correlation, not necessarily causation.

Just because the top-ranking pages in a particular study happened to have more words on them than the pages ranking 11th and lower does not make word count a ranking factor.

John Mueller of Google recently dispelled this myth:

John ☑ @JohnMu · Feb 8

Having the same word-count as a top-ranking article isn't going to make your pages rank first, just like having a bunch of USB chargers isn't going to get you to the moon. But, I'm still tempted to buy some of those USB chargers...

forrestheller.com/Apollo-11-Comp...

37   92   295

Verdict: SEO myth

9. LSI Keywords Will Help You Rank

What exactly are LSI keywords?

LSI stands for "latent semantic indexing."

It is a technique used in information retrieval that allows concepts within the text to be analyzed and relationships between them identified.

Words have nuances dependent on their context. The word "right" has a different connotation when paired with "left" than when it is paired with "wrong."

Humans can quickly gauge concepts in text. It is harder for machines to do so.

The ability for machines to understand the context and linking between entities is fundamental to their understanding of concepts. LSI is a huge step forward for a machine's ability to understand text. What it isn't is synonyms.

Unfortunately, the field of LSI has been devolved by the SEO community into the understanding that using words that are similar or linked thematically will boost rankings for words that aren't expressly mentioned in the text.

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It's simply not true. Google has gone far beyond LSI in its understanding of text, for instance, the introduction of BERT.

For more about what LSI is, and more importantly, what it isn't, take a look at **Clark Boyd's article**

Verdict: SEO myth

10. SEO Takes 3 Months

It helps us get out of sticky conversations with our bosses or clients. It leaves a lot of wiggle room if you aren't getting the results you promised.

"SEO takes at least 3 months to have an effect."

It is fair to say that there are some changes that will take time for the search engine bots to process.

There is then, of course, some time to see if those changes are having a positive or negative affect. Then more time might be needed to refine and tweak your work.

That doesn't mean that any activity you carry out in the name of SEO is going to have no effect for three months. Day 90 of your work will not be when the ranking changes kick-in.

There is a lot more to it.

If you are in a very low competition market, targeting niche terms, you might see ranking changes as soon as Google recrawls your page.

A competitive term could take much longer to see changes in rank.

A **study** by Ahrefs suggested that of the 2 million keywords they analyzed, the average age of pages ranking in position 10 of Google was 650 days. This study indicates that newer pages struggle to rank high.

However, there is more to SEO than ranking in the top 10 of Google. For instance, a well-positioned Google My Business listing with great reviews can pay dividends for a company.

Microsoft Bing, Yandex, and Baidu might be easier for your brand to conquer the SERPs in.

A small tweak to a page title could see an improvement in click-through rates. That could be the same day if the search engine were to recrawl the page quickly.

Although it can take a long time to see first page rankings in Google, it is naïve of us to reduce SEO success just down to that.

Therefore, "SEO takes 3 months" simply isn't accurate.

Verdict: SEO myth

11. Bounce Rate Is a Ranking Factor

Bounce rate is the percentage of visits to your website that result in no interactions beyond landing on the page. It is typically measured by a website's analytics program such as Google Analytics.

Some SEOs have argued that bounce rate is a ranking factor because it is a measure of quality.

Unfortunately, it is not a good measure of quality.

There are many reasons why a visitor might land on a webpage and leave again without interacting further with the site. They may well have read all the information they needed to on that page and left the site to call the company and book an appointment. In that instance, the visitor bouncing has resulted in a lead for the company.

Although a visitor leaving a page having landed on it could be an indicator of poor quality content, it isn't always. It, therefore, wouldn't be reliable enough for a search engine to use as a measure of quality.

"Pogo-sticking," or a visitor clicking on a search result and then returning to the SERPs, would be a more reliable indicator of the quality of the landing page. It would suggest that the content of the page was not what the user was after, so much so that they have returned to the search results to find another page or re-search.

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John Mueller cleared this up in a Google Webmaster Hangout in July 2018 with:

"We try not to use signals like that when it comes to search. So that's something where there are lots of reasons why users might go back and forth, or look at different things in the search results, or stay just briefly on a page and move back again. I think that's really hard to refine and say, "well, we could turn this into a ranking factor.""

Verdict: SEO myth

12. It's All About Backlinks

Backlinks are important, that's without much contention within the SEO community. However, exactly how important is still debated.

Some SEOs will tell you that backlinks are one of the many tactics that will influence rankings and not the most important one. Others will tell you it's the only real game-changer.

What we do know is that the effectiveness of links has changed over time. Back in the wild pre-**Jagger** days, link-building consisted of adding a link to your website wherever you could.

Forum comments spun articles, and irrelevant directories were all good sources of links.

It was easy to build effective links.

It's not so easy now. Google has continued to make changes to its algorithms that reward higher quality, more relevant links, and disregard or penalize "spammy" links.

However, the power of links to affect rankings is still great.

There will be some industries that are so immature in SEO that a site can rank well without investing in link-building, purely through the strength of their content and technical efficiency.

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That's not the case with most industries.

Relevant backlinks will, of course, help with ranking, but they need to go hand-in-hand with other optimizations.

Your website still needs to have relevant copy, and it needs to be crawlable.

Google's John Mueller recently stated, "links are definitely not the most important SEO factor."

If you want your traffic to actually do something when they hit your website, it's definitely not all about backlinks.

Ranking is only one part of getting converting visitors to your site. The content and usability of the site are extremely important in user engagement.

Verdict: SEO myth

13. Keywords in URLs Are Very Important

Cram your URLs full of keywords. It'll help.

Unfortunately, it's not quite as powerful as that.

John Mueller has said several times that keywords in a URL are a very minor, lightweight ranking signal.

If you are looking to rewrite your URLs to include more keywords, you are likely to do more damage than good.

The process of redirecting URLs en masse should be when necessary as there is always a risk when restructuring a site.

For the sake of adding keywords to a URL? Not worth it.

Verdict: SEO myth

14. Website Migrations Are All About Redirects

It is something that is heard too often by SEOs. If you are migrating a website, all you need to do is remember to redirect any URLs that are changing.

If only this one was true.

In actuality, website migration is one of the most fraught and complicated procedures in SEO.

A website changing its layout, CMS, domain, and/or content can all be considered a website migration.

In each of those examples, there are several aspects that could affect how the search engines perceive the quality and relevance of the pages to their targeted keywords.

As a result of this, there are numerous checks and configurations that need to occur if the site is going to maintain its rankings and organic traffic.

Ensuring tracking hasn't been lost. Maintaining the same content targeting. Making sure the search engines' bots can still access the right pages.

All of this needs to be considered when a website is significantly changing.

Redirecting URLs that are changing is a very important part of website migration. It is in no way the only thing to be concerned about.

Verdict: SEO myth

15. Well-Known Websites Will Always Outrank Unknown Websites

It stands to reason that a larger brand will have resources that smaller brands do not. As a result, more can be invested in SEO.

More exciting content pieces can be created, leading to a higher volume of backlinks acquired. The brand name alone can lend more credence to outreach attempts.

The real question is, does Google algorithmically or manually boost big brands because of their fame?

This one is a bit contentious.

Some people say that Google favors big brands. Google says, otherwise.

In 2009, Google released an algorithm update named "**Vince.**" This update had a huge impact on how brands were treated in the SERPs.

Brands that were well-known offline saw ranking increases for broad competitive keywords.

It's not necessarily time for smaller brands to throw in the towel. The Vince update falls very much in-line with other Google moves towards valuing authority and quality.

Big brands are often more authoritative on broad-level keywords than smaller contenders.

However, small brands can still win.

Long-tail keyword targeting, niche product lines, and local presence can all make smaller brands more relevant to a search result than established brands.

Yes, the odds are stacked in favor of big brands, but it's not impossible to outrank them.

Verdict: Not entirely truth or myth

16. Your Page Needs to Include 'Near Me' to Rank Well for Local SEO

It's understandable that this myth is still prevalent.

There is still a lot of focus on keyword search volumes in the SEO industry. Sometimes at the expense of considering user intent and how the search engines understand it.

When a searcher is looking for something with "**local intent,**" i.e., a place or service relevant to a physical location, the search engines will take this into consideration when returning results.

With Google, you will likely see the Google Maps results as well as the standard organic listings.

The Maps results are clearly centered around the location searched. However, so are the standard organic listings when the search query denotes local intent.

So why do "near me" searches confuse some?

A typical keyword research exercise might yield something like the following:

- pizza restaurant manhattan – 110 searches per month
- pizza restaurants in manhattan – 110 searches per month
- best pizza restaurant manhattan – 90 searches per month
- best pizza restaurants in manhattan – 90 searches per month
- best pizza restaurant in manhattan – 90 searches per month
- pizza restaurants near me – 90,500 searches per month

With search volume like that, you would think "pizza restaurants near me" would be the one to rank for, right?

It is likely, however, that people searching for "pizza restaurant manhattan" are in the Manhattan area or planning to travel there for pizza.

"pizza restaurant near me" has 90,500 searches across the USA. The likelihood is that the vast majority of those searchers are not looking for Manhattan pizzas.

Google knows this and, therefore, will use location detection and serve pizza restaurant results relevant to the searcher's location.

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Therefore, the "near me" element of the search becomes less about the keyword and more about the intent behind the keyword. Google will just consider it to be the location the searcher is in.

So, do you need to include "near me" in your content to rank for those "near me" searches?

No, you need to be relevant to the location the searcher is in.

Verdict: SEO myth

17. Better Content Equals Better Rankings

It's prevalent in SEO forums and Twitter threads. The common complaint, "my competitor is ranking above me, but I have amazing content, and theirs is terrible."

The cry is one of indignation. After all, shouldn't the search engines be rewarding their site for their "amazing" content?

This is both a myth and, sometimes, a delusion.

The quality of content is a subjective consideration. If it is your own content, it's harder still to be objective.

Perhaps in Google's eyes, your content isn't better than your competitors' for the search terms you are looking to rank for.

Perhaps you don't meet searcher intent as well as they do.

Maybe you have "over-optimized" your content and reduced its quality.

In some instances, better content will equal better rankings. In others, the technical performance of the site or its lack of local relevance may cause it to rank lower.

Content is one factor within the ranking algorithms.

Verdict: SEO myth

18. You Need to Blog Every Day

This is a frustrating myth because it is one that seems to have spread outside of the SEO industry.

Google loves frequent content. You should add new content or tweak existing content every day for "freshness."

Where did this idea come from?

Google had an algorithm update in 2011 that rewards fresher results in the SERPs.

This is because, for some queries, the fresher the results, the better likelihood of accuracy.

For instance, search for "royal baby" in the UK in 2013, and you would be served news articles about Prince George. Search it again in 2015, and you would see pages about Princess Charlotte.

In 2018, you would see reports about Prince Louis at the top of the Google SERPs, and in 2019 it would be baby Archie.

If you were to search "royal baby" in 2019, shortly after the birth of Archie, then seeing news articles on prince George would likely be unhelpful.

In this instance, Google discerns the user's search intent and decides showing articles related to the newest UK royal baby would be better than showing an article that is arguably more rank-worthy due to authority, etc.

What this algorithm update doesn't mean is that newer content will always outrank older content. Google decides if the "query deserves freshness" or not.

If it does, then the age of content becomes a more important ranking factor.

This means that if you are creating content purely to make sure it is newer than competitors' content, you are not necessarily going to benefit.

If the query you are looking to rank for does not deserve freshness, i.e., "who is Prince William's second child?" a fact that will not change, then the age of content will not play a significant part in rankings.

If you are writing content every day thinking it is keeping your website fresh and, therefore, more rank-worthy, then you are likely wasting time.

It would be better to write well-considered, researched, and useful content pieces less frequently and reserve your resources to making those highly authoritative and shareable.

Verdict: SEO myth

19. You Can Optimize Copy Once & Then It's Done

The phrase "SEO optimized" copy is a common one in agency-land. It's used as a way to explain the process of creating copy that will be relevant to frequently searched queries.

The trouble with this is that it suggests that once you have written that copy, ensured it adequately answers searchers' queries, you can move on.

Unfortunately, over time how searchers look for content might change. The keywords they use, the type of content they want could alter.

The search engines, too may change what they feel is the most relevant answer to the query. Perhaps the intent behind the keyword is perceived differently.

The layout of the SERPs might alter, meaning videos are being shown at the top of the search results where previously it was just web page results.

If you look at a page only once and then don't continue to update it and evolve it with user needs, then you risk falling behind.

Verdict: SEO myth

20. There Is a Right Way to Do SEO

This one is probably a myth in many industries, but it seems prevalent in the SEO one. There is a lot of gatekeeping in SEO social media, forums, and chats.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple.

There are some core tenants that we know about SEO.

Usually, something is stated by a search engine representative that has been dissected, tested, and ultimately declared true.

The rest is a result of personal and collective trial and error, testing, and experience.

Processes are extremely valuable within SEO business functions, but they have to evolve and be applied appropriately.

Different websites within different industries will respond to changes in ways others would not. Altering a meta title, so it is under 60 characters long might help click-through rate for one page, and not for another.

Ultimately, we have to hold any SEO advice we're given lightly before deciding whether it is right for the website you are working on.

Verdict: SEO myth

CONCLUSION

Some myths have their roots in logic, and others have no sense to them.

Now you know what to do when you hear an idea that you can't say for certain is truth or myth.

LEARN SEO: THE 38 BEST BLOGS, RESOURCES & PUBLICATIONS

AUTHOR

DANNY GOODWIN

If you want to learn about search engine optimization (SEO), you're going to have to read.

A lot.

You've got a lot to learn.

In fact, the best and most successful SEO professionals are those who stay up to date with all the latest developments.

You must be a student of the game, constantly learning and educating yourself.

That's why we've compiled this list of places where you can learn SEO.

We want to make sure you've got the best and most recent advice at your fingertips.

Today, SEO is more important than ever – and it's also more complicated than ever.

Some of these blogs are for beginners. Many aren't, but don't let that scare you away. That just means more opportunities to learn something nifty, right?

Knowledge is power. So hit the books – I mean blogs. Keep reading and learning. You'll get there.

GOOGLE SEO RESOURCES

Where's the best place to get the most up-to-date information? The very source.

For SEO, this means Google.

Dig in here:

1. Google Webmaster Central Blog

Get news straight from Google at the **Webmaster Central Blog.** Google shares updates about crawling, indexing, and ranking on this blog.

It'll give you insights on things like:

- New features coming to search.
- Tips and tricks on using Search Console.
- Updates about algorithms.

2. Google Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines

Ever felt mystified about why your page is ranking where it is, despite the fact that you've tried literally everything?

Check out **Google's Search Quality Evaluator Guidelines.**

This is exactly the document that Google uses to train its evaluators. The entire inner workings of Google are laid bare right here.

While these guidelines don't reveal any algorithmic or ranking secrets, you will learn what types of things Google looks for in high-quality sites.

3. Google's Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Starter Guide

Google really wants you to understand SEO because they really want you to succeed in it so that they can serve up the best possible content to people using their search.

That's why they created the **Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide.**

Really, it's how to master SEO straight from the horse's mouth.

4. Google's Webmaster Guidelines

I've said it around here before: **mastering SEO** requires more than just understanding link-building and keywords. Google agrees – they've even put together the **Webmaster Guidelines** to help you out.

These guidelines cover:

- General best practices to help your site appear in search
- Quality guidelines that can impact your position in the SERPs
- How to help Google find and understand your pages

5. Google Webmasters YouTube Channel

Are you more of a visual learner?

Google has its own **YouTube Channel** and its rife with gems of wisdom.

Check them out next time you've got a few minutes to spare. Or just throw on a video in the background and listen.

You'll get everything from the SEO basics to much more advanced topics.

SEO INDUSTRY PUBLICATIONS

These days, it's easy for anyone and everyone to create a blog that brands them as an SEO expert.

That doesn't mean they're offering good advice.

We recommend that you check out the publications of leading industry experts for the best and most reliable info out there.

6. Search Engine Journal

Search Engine Journal – the team that created this SEO 101 guide you're reading right now – provides industry news, analysis, and guides for SEO and digital marketing professionals.

Best of all? We've been around since 2003, which means you're getting the perspective and insights from professionals who have seen Google's growth from almost the start.

In addition to our news, tutorials, and guides, you can grow your knowledge and skills at our eSummit virtual conference and webinars.

7. Search Engine Land

Search Engine Land is another inveterate voice in the SEO industry.

Launched in 2007 by Danny Sullivan (one of the most influential people in the history of the search industry, and who know works for Google), Search Engine Land provides daily breaking news and coverage of all aspects of the search industry.

In addition to having an experienced news team, SEL features a variety of industry experts who share tips, tactics, and strategies for you to really level up your SEO game.

8. Search Engine Roundtable

Barry Schwartz created **Search Engine Roundtable** in 2004 as his personal notebook about the SEO industry.

This site is all Barry, all day, as he provides brief daily updates and opinions on the latest industry news, events, and forum and social media discussions.

TOOL COMPANY SEO BLOGS

If you've spent any time whatsoever poking around in SEO, you know there are a lot of tools.

Many of these tool companies publish some good content on their blogs.

However, one important thing you should always consider: most tool companies want you to buy a subscription to their tool (duh).

So just be cautious with any advice before accepting it as gospel or believing any one company's metrics are a gold standard. Remember, Google doesn't use any of them.

All that said, here are some blogs we recommend:

9. Moz Blog

The Moz Blog, published by popular SEO software provider Moz, features tips and advice on the topics of SEO, social media, and content.

Typically, you can expect to find four to five posts a week here.

Definitely make sure you check out **Whiteboard Fridays.** It's a weekly video series that covers all sorts of awesome things related to SEO.

10. Ahrefs

Ahrefs is all about backlinks, keywords, and content. So is their blog.

If you're looking to take a deep dive into any of these topics, you can check them out for insights, best practices, and lots of tutorials.

11. SEMrush

The **SEMrush blog** comes from the maker of the popular keyword and competitive research tool.

You'll find a new article post here every day from members of the SEMrush team and industry experts.

12. Yoast SEO Blog

Yoast is best known for its popular (and free) Yoast SEO for WordPress plugin.

But they also have a blog that mainly focuses on WordPress SEO, technical SEO, and content.

Their blog is publishing new content almost every day.

13. RankSense

SEO automation? It's definitely a thing.

RankSense's blog covers a lot of topics related to technical SEO.

If you're interested in learning about **Python for SEO,** this resource is for you.

But there will be a steep learning curve.

14. Botify Blog

Got a large enterprise website, and you're consistently struggling with SEO?

According to **Botify's blog,** it's not just you.

Get tips and tricks on managing SEO when you've got a large site and discover insights you won't find elsewhere.

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15. SERPWoo

Want advice from a boots-on-the-ground perspective?

Check out **SERPWoo's blog.**

They've got everything from a day-by-day walkthrough of **ranking a new site from scratch** to everything you ever wanted to know about SEO niche research.

AGENCY SEO BLOGS

SEO is all about demonstrated experience.

Your clients want to see that you can achieve results.

One great way to do that is by having a blog.

Here are two whole handfuls of resources from SEO agencies to round out your reading list.

16. Go Fish Digital

At the **Go Fish Digital blog,** you'll find Bill Slawski (of SEO by the Sea fame) writing, as well as other members of the Go Fish Digital team about once or twice a week on various SEO-related topics.

This blog is often at its best when it strays into more advanced topics – and they do a wonderful job breaking things down.

17. Onely

Onely's blog is another fantastic resource for technical SEO topics.

They'll get pretty into the weeds on complicated topics, but their visual-heavy posts and crisp writing style mean you'll walk away enlightened rather than confused.

18. iPullRank

Want more advanced technical SEO tactics? Check out **iPullRank's blog and resources.**

Not only do they produce in-depth, insightful articles, but they also do a weekly podcast on everything from SEO topics to life within an SEO agency.

19. Path Interactive

Path Interactive takes a holistic approach to SEO, and that perspective reflects in their blog.

This blog is a great resource for data-driven, results-oriented insights from professionals who do this stuff every single day.

20. Beanstalk Internet Marketing Blog

If you don't have a lot of time to read the hundreds of posts being published every week on SEO, PPC, and social media, the **Beanstalk Internet Marketing blog** has you covered.

Beanstalk CEO Dave Davies puts together a pretty excellent weekly news recap, **This Week in Search & SEO,** which rounds up the biggest news and opinion stories of the week from a variety of websites.

21. Distilled

This blog comes from an online marketing agency **Distilled,** founded by Will Critchlow.

Once or twice a week, you'll find a post from a Distilled team member about an SEO-related topic.

22. Seer

The **blog by Seer Interactive** is a very back-to-the-basics resource on a variety of SEO topics, which makes it a good resource if you're still newer to the topic.

They not only help make SEO super approachable but also provide lots of tips on work-life balance in this field.

23. SiegeMedia

Real-world insights – that's the name of the game in **SiegeMedia's blog.**

Check it out when you're looking for real-life examples, case studies, actionable guides, and practical advice on situations you may encounter in your own journey.

24. UpBuild

More advanced technical SEO advice! **UpBuild's blog** is chock full of super geeky yet actionable tips on the nitty-gritty of SEO.

Got an obscure problem or just want to go way down to the bottom of the rabbit hole? They've probably written an article that will get you everything you need to know.

25. From the Future

Want loads of tutorials and guides on how to do all things technical SEO?

Check out **From the Future's blog** for the latest information on how to do everything SEO.

26. Perficient Blog

Perficient's blog offers up some high-level insights into the way Google functions and thoughts about many of the hottest trends in SEO.

What to check out: their **Here's Why video series** aims to clear up confusion about common but misunderstood concepts.

27. BuiltVisible

Strategic thinking, actionable tactics, and inspirational innovation – that's what **BuiltVisible** promises in its blog.

You'll find everything from using Excel to JavaScript for SEO and plenty of other practical, technical tips.

28. The SALT.agency Blog

The **SALT.agency's blog** is loaded with good ideas for SEO.

Many of their guides provide targeted advice for specific industries. If you're looking for great tips on **local SEO** and **international SEO.** This is one can't-miss resource.

OTHER SEO BLOGS

Made it through all those? I've still got more for you!

These are blogs by well-known experts.

Each has his or her own specialty and can share a more in-depth look into a topic than you might find elsewhere.

29. SEO by the Sea

If you love reading about search patents, then you'll love **SEO by the Sea.**

Created by Bill Slawski, he tracks and interprets all the latest patents from Google so you can learn the potential implications for SEO.

It's a treasure trove of information from past years on SEO by the Sea that will help you understand search engines and SEO today.

30. Kevin Indig

Have you ever heard of **platform confluence?** That's **Kevin Indig's** primary piece of thought leadership.

However, he also writes a lot of fascinating, discerning pieces on SEO.

Some of it's pretty dense, but you'll have a very deep understanding of the ideas by the time you're through.

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31. SEO Blog by Aleyda

Aleyda Solis is an international SEO consultant, and she runs a blog loaded with advice.

Much of her content focuses on current SEO trends.

She's a great resource to check after significant algorithm updates, events in the industry, or even current events that impact people's behavior online.

32. Understanding Google My Business & Local Search

Mike Blumenthal's blog will keep you up to date on all the latest developments in local search.

This has been the go-to place for local businesses since 2006. It's all local, all the time.

For even more of Blumenthal, check out his weekly video recaps at **Local University.**

33. Portent

Portent is a Seattle-based digital marketing agency.

On the **Portent blog,** you'll find tips, guides, and some unique takes on SEO and digital marketing.

34. Rise at Seven

Have you ever heard of SEO bookmarklets? How about Gif SEO?

Those are just a couple of examples of the unusual topics you'll find covered in **Rise at Seven's blog.**

They're a digital marketing agency with a knack for solutions, and it shows in their content.

FORUMS & GROUPS

Have you spent hours Googling a question only to turn up ... nothing?

Consider asking around in one of these groups to crowdsource expertise.

35. WebmasterWorld

WebmasterWorld is one of the longest-running and most trusted forums among SEO professionals and webmasters.

You'll find up to the minute discussion and debate on the latest news and questions from webmasters trying to solve problems and improve their SEO.

36. Big SEO – Reddit

Ah, Reddit. **r/bigSEO** stands apart from other SEO subreddits in that it doesn't shy away from obscure, complicated topics.

Come here for a conversation that strays beyond 101, or to get advice from all stripes of inbound marketing professionals.

37. Webmasters Help Community

If you've got questions specifically about something related to Google, you can ask them directly.

Google's Webmasters Help Community walks you through a vast array of help-related articles and allows you to post questions to ask the community directly.

38. SEO Signals (Facebook Group)

What you don't know can hurt you in SEO – that's **SEO Signals'** primary mantra.

This Facebook group is dedicated to distributing case studies, analyzing split-test results, and keeping pace with SEO algorithm trends.

STAY UP TO DATE & INFORMED WITH THESE SEO RESOURCES

There are many ways to learn SEO.

How you do it is up to you, but one of the best ways to get (and stay) up to speed is to keep pace with industry experts.

Now you have 38 of the best SEO blogs and resources, plus four communities that are worth your time.

They run the gamut of beginner-friendly to ultra-advanced, which means there's something for everyone here.

Happy growing!

THE BEST SEO
CONFERENCES
TO ATTEND

18

AUTHOR

DANNY GOODWIN

The best SEO conferences are great for learning the latest SEO strategies, trends, tips, and tools.

Conferences are also the perfect opportunity to expand your list of professional contacts in the digital marketing industry and to connect with potential clients.

There's usually an opportunity to meet and network with SEO experts and also a time to share ideas with peers and friends.

At every conference, you always come away with a headful of ideas, inspiration, and new tactics that you can take action on when you return to the office.

For SEO professionals, conferences are a vital part of your ongoing education so you can advance your career.

Click here to view an up-to-date listing of the best SEO conferences to learn more about SEO (and digital marketing).

202 TOP SEO EXPERTS YOU SHOULD BE FOLLOWING

AUTHOR

DANNY GOODWIN

Want to learn more about search engine optimization (SEO)?

Then you should learn from the top SEO experts.

Reading the **top SEO blogs and publications** is a good start. So is attending **SEO conferences.**

But don't stop there.

SEO is such a giving community.

We share strategies, tactics, tips, tools, data, and so much more on social media and at conferences – as well as in articles, research, and blog posts.

You will definitely learn something new every day from this list of 202 SEO experts.

Follow them if you want a free SEO education.

WHY THIS SEO EXPERTS LIST EXISTS

The term "SEO expert" is thrown around a lot these days.

Do a Google search for [seo experts to follow] and you'll find plenty of lists.

Here's the thing about most of these lists: they're usually deeply flawed in one way or another.

Why?

Generally, top SEO expert lists:

- Are just a sneaky way for an unknown author to get himself or herself on a list filled with experts and look like a big-time SEO expert.
- Are published by unknown SEO agencies or companies purely for the purposes of attracting links and shares. Include people who, while brilliant in other areas of marketing (social media, content marketing, etc.), aren't really SEO experts.
- Include people who no longer are really involved in SEO (or never really were practitioners). For example, while **Matt Cutts,** the former distinguished engineer who was head of the webspam team at Google, might be great on a list if it were still 2013 – it's no longer 2013.
- Include popular "experts" who share bad information that give the industry a bad name. (We won't name any names here.)

That's why we began putting together this list of top authorities and experts you should be following or listening to if you want to learn about SEO today.

HOW THIS LIST WAS COMPILED

Now the Search Engine Journal team has updated this list for this year – to bring you what we believe to be the most up-to-date list of high-quality SEO experts you'll find.

This post isn't meant to reward everyone who has ever been an SEO professional or includes the acronym SEO in his or her job title. It also isn't intended to be a popularity contest that confuses expertise with social media follower counts.

The people on this list are all actively involved with SEO now – or they're sharing SEO information, knowledge, and insights (either via social media, contributing to publications or blogs, or speaking at conferences).

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Here was our basic judging criteria (though, like Google, our scoring algorithm was comprised of more than 200 ranking signals)

- Do they share good SEO content on social media?
- Do they write good content about SEO for blogs/publications?
- Do they speak about SEO at conferences (or webinars, podcasts, etc.)?
- Are they currently doing SEO (not mandatory)?

The main idea of this post is to help you find interesting people who know a lot about SEO and are willing to share what they know.

This is just one way Search Engine Journal is able to direct you to SEO professionals who can help you improve at your job and advance your career.

While I love the idea that there are hundreds of SEO professionals doing great work who go unrecognized – and there truly are! – if they aren't visible and sharing knowledge, it doesn't matter in terms of the list you're about to read.

No offense is intended toward any of those hard-working people, but if you aren't making yourself visible to the wider SEO community, then it's the equivalent of ranking on Page 2 of Google.

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Our goal with this list is to highlight people who are trying to help move the industry forward by sharing unique insights/knowledge/tips/ideas, etc.

Finally – there is no rankings order here from best to least best. Each person on this list has value in their own way.

Rather than go in alphabetical order by last name, we plugged our list into **this list randomizer** (though I did make a few minor adjustments) to give everyone a fair shot at where they appear.

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WHY YOU AREN'T ON THIS LIST

Let's be honest – these posts are always a bit controversial.

After a post like this is published, there are always a few responses you can expect:

- Those who are mentioned: Generally, they are honored, humbled, or even surprised. It's always nice to make someone's day.
- Those who aren't included: After quickly checking they aren't on the list, they go to their social media platform of choice and point out its flaws. Typically, it comes in the form of either "this person doesn't even DO SEO," "you included so-and-so, so this list sucks," "lists like these devalue our entire industry," or "this is just a list of the author's friends."

Again, no list is perfect.

But we've tried to make this list the least imperfect it can be, right now.

If you weren't included this year, there's always next year.

If you really want to be here next year, let it motivate you this year – get noticed, share your knowledge with the community, network, and increase your own visibility by building up your personal brand.

And if you really hate this list, you're welcome to write your own post and publish it wherever you want.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

For this year's installment, no employees or spokespeople from the major search engines were included as part of our 2020 SEO experts

However, we believe every SEO professional should always keep an eye on these people to stay up on the latest updates and get some advice straight from the search engines, as these folks regularly tweet, write, or speak (in Hangouts, at conferences, and on webinars):

Google:

- **Gary Illyes,** webmaster trends Analyst
- **Nathan Johns,** search quality analyst
- **John Mueller,** senior webmaster trends analyst
- **Martin Splitt,** developer advocate
- **Danny Sullivan,** public liaison of search (**@searchliason**)

Microsoft Bing:

- **Frederic Dubut,** senior program manager

DuckDuckGo:

- **Gabriel Weinberg,** CEO and founder

202 SEO EXPERTS TO FOLLOW RIGHT NOW

OK, now it's time for the main event and what you came here for – Search Engine Journal's list of SEO experts to follow.

The following people really know their stuff when it comes to SEO.

Follow them if you want to grow your skill set and knowledge.

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Founder / Women in Tech SEO

Follow @areej_abuali on Twitter

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Dave Davies

Co-Founder / Oohloo Internet Marketing

Follow @oohloo on Twitter

Follow Dave on LinkedIn

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Dan Taylor

Head of Research & Development / SALT.agency

Follow @TaylorDanRW on Twitter

Follow Dan on LinkedIn

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Jes Scholz

International Digital Director / Ringier AG

Follow @jes_scholz on Twitter

Follow Jes on LinkedIn

Read Jes on Search Engine Journal

Fili Wiese
SEO Expert / SearchBrothers.com

Follow @filiwiese on Twitter

Follow Fili on LinkedIn

Ruth Everett
Technical SEO Analyst / DeepCrawl

Follow @rvtheverett on Twitter

Follow Ruth on LinkedIn

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Tyler Reardon
SEO Manager / Chewy

Follow @TylerReardon on Twitter

Follow Tyler on LinkedIn

Carolyn Shelby
Technical SEO & News SEO / ESPN

Follow @cshel on Twitter

Follow Carolyn on LinkedIn

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Founder and CEO / LinkResearchTools

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SEO Trainer & Consultant / Craig Campbell SEO

[Follow @craigcampbell03 on Twitter](#)
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Jackie Chu

Global SEO Lead / Uber

[Follow @jackiecchu on Twitter](#)
[Follow Jackie on LinkedIn](#)

Jeff Ferguson

Partner / Amplitude Digital

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[Follow Jeff on LinkedIn](#)
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Ross Hudgens
Founder & CEO / Siege Media

[Follow @rosshudgens on Twitter](#)
[Follow Ross on LinkedIn](#)

Cindy Krum
CEO & Founder / MobileMoxie

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Jan-Willem Bobbink
Freelance SEO Consultant

[Follow @jbobbink on Twitter](#)
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Valentin Pletzer
Head of SEO / BurdaForward GmbH

[Follow @VorticonCmdr on Twitter](#)
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SEO Director / Path Interactive

[Follow @lilyraynyc on Twitter](#)

[Follow Lily on LinkedIn](#)

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Suganthan Mohanadasan

Co-Founder & Technical SEO Lead / Snippet Digital

[Follow @Suganthanmn on Twitter](#)

[Follow Suganthan on LinkedIn](#)

Andrea Volpini

Co-Founder & CEO / Wordlift

[Follow @cyberandy on Twitter](#)

[Follow Andrea on LinkedIn](#)

Anna Crowe

Assistant Editor / Search Engine Journal & Head of Content / Leadfeeder

[Follow @annaleacrowe on Twitter](#)

[Follow Anna on LinkedIn](#)

[Read Anna on Search Engine Journal](#)

Kristopher Jones

Founder / LSEO

[Follow @krisjonescom on Twitter](#)

[Follow Kristopher on LinkedIn](#)

[Read Kristopher on Search Engine Journal](#)

Taylor Berg

Enterprise SEO Leader

[Follow @taylorannberg on Twitter](#)

[Follow Taylor on LinkedIn](#)

Brodie Clark

SEO Consultant / Brodie Clark Consulting

[Follow @brodieseo on Twitter](#)

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President / RustyBrick

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President / Adam Riemer Marketing, LLC

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Carrie Hill
Local SEO Specialist/Analyst / Sterling Sky Inc

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[Follow Carrie on LinkedIn](#)

Mordy Oberstein
Chief Marketing Officer / Rank Ranger

[Follow @MordyOberstein on Twitter](#)
[Follow Mordy on LinkedIn](#)

JP Sherman
Manager of Search & Findability / Red Hat

Follow @jpsherman on Twitter

Follow JP on LinkedIn

Carolyn Lyden
Lead SEO + Owner / Search Hermit

Follow @CarolynLyden on Twitter

Follow Carolyn on LinkedIn

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Steven Kang
Founder / SEOSignalsLab

Follow @SEOSignalsLab on Twitter

Follow Steven on LinkedIn

John Shehata
Vice President - Audience Growth / Condé Nast

Follow @JShehata on Twitter

Follow John on LinkedIn

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Abby Hamilton

SEO Associate Manager / Merkle

Follow @abbynhamilton on Twitter

Follow Abby on LinkedIn

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Michael King

Founder / iPullRank

Follow @iPullRank on Twitter

Follow Michael on LinkedIn

Read Michael on Search Engine Journal

Kevin Indig

VP SEO & Content / G2

Follow @Kevin_Indig on Twitter

Follow Kevin on LinkedIn

Jamie Alberico

Technical SEO Consultant / Not a Robot

Follow @Jammer_Volts on Twitter

Follow Jamie on LinkedIn

Max Prin

Head of Technical SEO / Merkle

Follow @maxxeight on Twitter
Follow Max on LinkedIn

Andy Betts

Executive Advisor and Consultant

Follow @andybetts1 on Twitter
Follow Andy on LinkedIn
Read Andy on Search Engine Journal

Claire Carlile

Digital Marketing Consultant / Claire Carlile Marketing

Follow @clairecarlile on Twitter
Follow Claire on LinkedIn

Andy Simpson

Local & Technical SEO

Follow @ndyjsimpson on Twitter
Follow Andy on LinkedIn

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Damon Gochneaur
Founder / Aspiro Agency

[Follow @DamonGochneaur on Twitter](#)

[Follow Damon on LinkedIn](#)

Alexis Sanders
Senior SEO Manager / Merkle

[Follow @alexisksanders on Twitter](#)

[Follow Alexis on LinkedIn](#)

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Cyrus Shepard
Founder / Zyppy

[Follow @CyrusShepard on Twitter](#)

[Follow Cyrus on LinkedIn](#)

David Mihm
Founder / Tidings

[Follow @davidmihm on Twitter](#)

[Follow David on LinkedIn](#)

Mindy Weinstein

Founder & CEO / Market MindShift

Follow @mindyweinstein on Twitter

Follow Mindy on LinkedIn

Read Mindy on Search Engine Journal

Jason Barnard

Owner / Kalicube.pro

Follow @jasonmbarnard on Twitter

Follow Jason on LinkedIn

Read Jason on Search Engine Journal

Lukasz Zelezny

SEO Consultant & SEO Specialist

Follow @LukaszZelezny on Twitter

Follow Lukasz on LinkedIn

Krystal Taing

Solutions Engineer & Strategic Partnerships / Uberall

Follow on @krystal_taing Twitter

Follow Krystal on LinkedIn

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SEO Consultant / Online Ownership

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Founder & SEO Consultant / MediaSesh

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Data Scientist / DatAIzer

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Co-Founder / Aira

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Shaun Anderson

SEO Consultant / Hobo-web.co.uk

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Bibi Lauri Raven

Link Builder / BibiBuzz

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Loren Baker

Founder / Search Engine Journal

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[Follow Loren on LinkedIn](#)
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Owner / Rob Woods Consulting

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Izzi Smith

Technical SEO Analyst / Ryte

[Follow @izzionfire on Twitter](#)
[Follow Izzi on LinkedIn](#)

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Trond Lyngbø

Founder / Search Planet AS

Follow @TrondLyngbo on Twitter

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Gerry White

SEO Director / RiseAtSeven

Follow @dergal on Twitter

Follow Gerry on LinkedIn

Casie Gillette

Sr. Director of Digital /KoMarketing

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Follow Casie on LinkedIn

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Darren Shaw

Founder & President / Whitespark

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Follow Darren on LinkedIn

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Forensic SEO Consultant / Alan Bleiweiss Consulting

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Chief Marketing Officer / FoodBoss

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CEO / Hartzer Consulting

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Andrew Optimisey

Founder / Optimisey

Follow @Optimisey on Twitter

Follow Andrew on LinkedIn

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Amanda Jordan
Local Search Analyst / LOCOMOTIVE

Follow @amandatjordan on Twitter
Follow Amanda on LinkedIn

Casey Markee
Founder / Media Wyse

Follow @MediaWyse on Twitter
Follow Casey on LinkedIn

Saijo George
SEO Strategy Director / Supple

Follow @SaijoGeorge on Twitter
Follow Saijo on LinkedIn

Marie Haynes
Owner / Marie Haynes Consulting

Follow @Marie_Haynes on Twitter
Follow Marie on LinkedIn

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Andy Drinkwater
Freelance SEO Consultant / IQSEO LTD

Follow @iqseo on Twitter
Follow Andy on LinkedIn

Wil Reynolds
Founder & VP of Innovation / Seer Interactive

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Follow Wil on LinkedIn

Faye Watt
SEO Manager / Seeker Digital

Follow @FayeWatt on Twitter
Follow Faye on LinkedIn

Oliver H.G. Mason
Freelance Technical SEO

Follow @ohgm on Twitter
Follow Oliver on LinkedIn

Joe Hall

SEO Consultant & Principal Analyst / Hall Analysis LLC

Follow @joehall on Twitter

Follow Joe on LinkedIn

Kate Toon

SEO & Copywriter

Follow @KateToon on Twitter

Follow Kate on LinkedIn

Brian Harnish

Sr. SEO Analyst / Bruce Clay, Inc.

Follow @BrianHarnish on Twitter

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Martin MacDonald

Founder / MOG Media Inc.

Follow @searchmartin on Twitter

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Maret Reutelingsperger

Inbound Marketing Consultant and SEO / Mobe Digital

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Marketing Scientist / Moz

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Ryan Jones

SEO Group Director / Razorfish

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Nik Ranger

SEO Specialist / StudioHawk

[Follow @nikrangerseo on Twitter](#)
[Follow Nik on LinkedIn](#)

Aaron Bradley

Knowledge Graph Strategist / Electronic Arts (EA)

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Jesse McDonald

Global SEO Strategist / IBM

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Orit Mutznik

Head of SEO / SilkFred

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Jamar Ramos

Head of SEO / SilkFred

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Freelance SEO Consultant

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Hamlet Batista

CEO / RankSense

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Jessica Levenson

Head of Digital Strategy & SEO / NetSuite

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SEO Director / CouponCabin

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CEO / LocalSEOGuide.com

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Follow Andrew on LinkedIn

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Managing Director & Lead SEO / Arrows Up

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Chief Strategy Officer / From The Future

Follow @nick_eubanks on Twitter

Follow Nick on LinkedIn

Pedro Dias

Managing Partner & Director of SEO / apis3

Follow @pedrodias on Twitter

Follow Pedro on LinkedIn

Britney Muller

Keynote Speaker, Entrepreneur

Follow @BritneyMuller on Twitter

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Chuck Price

Founder / Measurable SEO

Follow @ChuckPrice518 on Twitter

Follow Chuck on LinkedIn

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Dan Shure

Consultant and Podcast Host / Evolving SEO

Follow @dan_shure on Twitter

Follow Dan on LinkedIn

Martha van Berkel

CEO and Co-founder / Schema App

Follow @marthavanberkel on Twitter

Follow Martha on LinkedIn

Tomek Rudzki

Head of R&D, Technical SEO / Onely

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Founder / Schema Mark App

Follow @MusicalGamersO on Twitter

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Himani Kankaria

Ecommerce & Digital Marketing Consultant, Content Specialist

[Follow @himani_kankaria on Twitter](#)

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Richard Baxter

SEO & Non Executive Director / Builtvisible

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Jason Mun

Director / Overdose

[Follow @jasonmun on Twitter](#)

[Follow Jason on LinkedIn](#)

Jo Turnball

Freelance SEO Consultant and Growth Marketer / SEO Jo Blogs

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VP, Search / Local SEO Guide

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General Manager / Perficient Digital

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Paige Hobart

SEO Team Director / ROAST

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Sr. SEO Strategist / IBM

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CEO & Director Organic Search / Peak Ace AG

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Director of Technical SEO Consulting / DeepCrawl

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Paul Shapiro

Global Director, Technical SEO / Condé Nast

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Lead SEO Consultant / Verve Developments

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Dawn Anderson
Managing Director / Bertey

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Charly Wargnier
SEO, BI & Data Engineering Consultant

Follow @DataChaz on Twitter

Follow Charly on LinkedIn

Jeremy Rivera
Freelance SEO & Digital Marketing Consultant

Follow @JeremyRiveraSEO on Twitter

Follow Jeremy on LinkedIn

Alli Berry
SEO Director / The Motley Fool

Follow @AlliBerry3 on Twitter

Follow Alli on LinkedIn

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Owner / The Media Supermarket

Follow @eliasdabbas on Twitter

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Owner & Director / David Sottimano Search Consulting

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Follow Dave on LinkedIn

Niki Mosier

Head of SEO / TwoOctobers

Follow @nikers85 on Twitter

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Omi Sido

Senior Technical SEO / Canon Europe

Follow @OmiSido on Twitter

Follow Omi on LinkedIn

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Will Critchlow
Founder and CEO / SearchPilot

[Follow @willcritchlow on Twitter](#)
[Follow Will on LinkedIn](#)

Roxana Stingu
Head of SEO / Alamy

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[Follow Roxana on LinkedIn](#)

Grant Simmons
VP, Performance Marketing / Homes.com

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[Follow Grant on LinkedIn](#)
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Eli Schwartz
Growth Advisor / Eli Schwartz

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CEO / NeoMam Studios

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Duane Forrester

VP of Industry Insights / Yext

Follow @DuaneForrester on Twitter

Follow Duane on LinkedIn

Read Duane on Search Engine Journal

Aleh Barysevich

Founder and CMO / SEO PowerSuite

Follow @ab80 on Twitter

Follow Aleh on LinkedIn

Read Aleh on Search Engine Journal

Rachel Anderson

Technical SEO Analyst / DeepCrawl

Follow @rachelleighrva on Twitter

Follow Rachel on LinkedIn

Gianluca Fiorelli

SEO & Digital Marketing Consultant / ILoveSEO.net

Follow @gfiorelli1 on Twitter

Follow Gianluca on LinkedIn

Heather Lloyd-Martin

CEO / SuccessWorks Search Marketing

Follow @heatherlloyd on Twitter

Follow Heather on LinkedIn

Read Heather on Search Engine Journal

Dave Smart

Technical SEO / Tame the Bots

Follow @davewsmart on Twitter

Follow Dave on LinkedIn

Marianne Sweeny

Principal Consultant / BrightEdge

Follow @msweeny on Twitter

Follow Marianne on LinkedIn

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VP of Community / ContentKing

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Follow Steven on LinkedIn

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Dixon Jones

CEO / inLinks

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Jess Peck

Digital Analytics, Senior Consultant / CVS Health

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Ross Tavendale

Managing Director / Type A Media

Follow @rtavs on Twitter

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Ammon Johns

Internet Marketing Consultant

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SEO Consultant & Founder / Flow SEO

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Head of Technical SEO / HubSpot

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Product Management & Ecommerce / CNN

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Arsen Rabinovich

Founder / TopHatRank

Follow @tophatarsen on Twitter

Follow Arsen on LinkedIn

Ian Lurie

Digital Marketing Consultant /
Ian Lurie Consulting

Follow @ianlurie on Twitter

Follow Ian on LinkedIn

Aleyda Solis

International SEO Consultant and
Founder / Orainti

Follow @aleyda on Twitter

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Luke Carthy
eCommerce Growth Consultant

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[Follow Luke on LinkedIn](#)

Greg Gifford
Vice President of Search / SearchLab

[Follow @greggifford on Twitter](#)

[Follow Greg on LinkedIn](#)

Julie Joyce
Owner / Link Fish Media

[Follow @JulieJoyce on Twitter](#)

[Follow Julie on LinkedIn](#)

[Read Julie on Search Engine Journal](#)

Patrick Stox
Product Advisor, Technical SEO, & Brand Ambassador / Ahrefs

[Follow @patrickstox on Twitter](#)

[Follow Patrick on LinkedIn](#)

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Bartosz Goralewicz

CEO / Onely

[Follow @bart_goralewicz on Twitter](#)

[Follow Bartosz on LinkedIn](#)

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Hannah Rampton

Freelance SEO Consultant

[Follow @HannahRampton on Twitter](#)

[Follow Hannah on LinkedIn](#)

Robbie Richards

Founder / robbierichards.com

[Follow @RobbieRichMktg on Twitter](#)

[Follow Robbie on LinkedIn](#)

Dave Rohrer

Founder / NorthSide Metrics

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[Follow Dave on LinkedIn](#)

Ruth Burr Reedy
Vice President of Strategy / UpBuild

Follow @ruthburr on Twitter

Follow Ruth on LinkedIn

Eric Wu
Product Growth / Honey

Follow @eywu on Twitter

Follow Eric on LinkedIn

Topher Kohan
Senior Manager SEO / Cox Automotive Inc.

Follow @Topheratl on Twitter

Follow Topher on LinkedIn

Steph Whatley
SEO Manager / Blue Array

Follow @seostephw on Twitter

Follow Steph on LinkedIn

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Stephan Bajaio

Chief Evangelist & Co-Founder / Conductor

Follow @stephanbajaio on Twitter

Follow Stephan on LinkedIn

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Jeremy Knauff

CEO and Founder / Spartan Media

Follow @jeremyknauff on Twitter

Follow Jeremy on LinkedIn

Read Jeremy on Search Engine Journal

Holly MIller Anderson

SEO & Digital Marketing Consultant / Holly Miller Consulting

Follow @millertime_baby on Twitter

Follow Holly on LinkedIn

Aymen Loukil

International SEO Consultant

Follow @LoukilAymen on Twitter

Follow Aymen on LinkedIn

Alina Benny
SEO & Content Lead at Nextiva

[Follow @alinacbenny on Twitter](#)

[Follow Alina on LinkedIn](#)

Sam Underwood
Search Marketing Consultant

[Follow @SamUnderwoodUK on Twitter](#)

[Follow Sam on LinkedIn](#)

Annie Cushing
Senior Marketing Analyst / Annielytics

[Follow @AnnieCushing on Twitter](#)

[Follow Annie on LinkedIn](#)

Bill Slawski
Director of SEO Research / Go Fish Digital

[Follow @bill_slawski on Twitter](#)

[Follow Bill on LinkedIn](#)

[Read Bill on Search Engine Journal](#)

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Jim Boykin

CEO & Founder / Internet Marketing Ninjas

Follow @jimboykin on Twitter

Follow Jim on LinkedIn

Dana DiTomaso

President & Partner / Kick Point

Follow @danaditomaso on Twitter

Follow Dana on LinkedIn

Dan Petrovic

Director / DEJAN Marketing

Follow @dejanseo on Twitter

Follow Dan on LinkedIn

Roger Montti

Owner / Martinibuster.com and News Writer / Search Engine Journal

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Follow Roger on LinkedIn

Read Roger on Search Engine Journal

Debra Mastaler
President / Alliance-Link

[Follow @debramastaler on Twitter](#)

[Follow Debra on LinkedIn](#)

Jon Henshaw
Founder / Coywolf

[Follow @henshaw on Twitter](#)

[Follow Jon on LinkedIn](#)

Tony Wright
CEO / WrightIMC

[Follow @tonynwright on Twitter](#)

[Follow Tony on LinkedIn](#)

[Read Tony on Search Engine Journal](#)

Kim Doughty
Digital Marketer & SEO

[Follow @howdydoughty Twitter](#)

[Follow Kim on LinkedIn](#)

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Luke Davis

Digital Marketer & SEO

[Follow @lukedavisseo Twitter](#)

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Mark Williams-Cook

Director / Candour

[Follow @thetafferboy on Twitter](#)

[Follow Mark on LinkedIn](#)

Kristina Azarenko

Founder, eCommerce & Technical SEO Consultant / MarketingSyrup

[Follow @azarchick on Twitter](#)

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Barry Adams

SEO Consultant / Polemic Digital

[Follow @badams on Twitter](#)

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JR Oakes

Senior Director, Technical SEO Research / LOCOMOTIVE Agency

[Follow @jroakes on Twitter](#)

[Follow JR on LinkedIn](#)

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Rachel Costello

Technical SEO Consultant / Builtvisible

Follow @rachellcostello on Twitter

Follow Rachel on LinkedIn

Read Rachel on Search Engine Journal

Tim Soulo

CMO / Ahrefs

Follow @timsoulo on Twitter

Follow Tim on LinkedIn

Chris Boggs

Founder / Web Traffic Advisors

Follow @boggles on Twitter

Follow Chris on LinkedIn

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Jenn Mathews

SEO Manager / GitHub

Follow @SEOGoddess on Twitter

Follow Jenn on LinkedIn

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Ross Simmonds
CEO / Foundation

Follow @thecoolestcool on Twitter

Follow Ross on LinkedIn

Matt Siltala
Founder & President / Avalaunch Media

Follow @Matt_Siltala on Twitter

Follow Matt on LinkedIn

Melissa Fach
Owner & President / SEOAware

Follow @SEOAware on Twitter

Follow Melissa on LinkedIn

Read Melissa on Search Engine Journal

Micah Fisher-Kirshner
Director of SEO & Content / Turn/River Capital

Follow @micahfk on Twitter

Follow Micah on LinkedIn

Read Micah on Search Engine Journal

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Simon Cox

Technical SEO Consultant / Cox and Co Creative

Follow @simoncox on Twitter

Follow Simon on LinkedIn

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Kaspar Szymanski

SEO Consultant and Co-Founder / SearchBrothers

Follow @kas_tweets on Twitter

Follow Kaspar on LinkedIn

Shelly Fagin

Founder & SEO / Highly Searched

Follow @shellyfagin on Twitter

Follow Shelly on LinkedIn

Read Shelly on Search Engine Journal

Marcus Tandler

Co-Founder & Chief Evangelist / RYTE

Follow @mediadonis on Twitter

Follow Marcus on LinkedIn

Glenn Gabe

SEO Consultant / G-Squared Interactive

Follow @glenngabe on Twitter

Follow Glenn on LinkedIn

Rhea Drysdale

CEO / Outspoken Media

Follow @rhea on Twitter

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SEO Consultant / Aira

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Sarah McDowell

Marketing Executive / LikeMind Media

Follow @sarahmcduk on Twitter

Follow Sarah on LinkedIn

Koray Tuğberk GÜBÜR

SEO Expert, Digital Marketer & Search Analyst

Follow @KorayGubur on Twitter

Follow Koray on LinkedIn

HOW TO BECOME AN SEO EXPERT

AUTHOR

DANNY GOODWIN

So you want to become an SEO expert.

I can totally understand why.

There are so many reasons to **love SEO.**

SEO is fascinating.

SEO is a fast-paced, in-demand field with plenty of longevity ahead of it.

But that means SEO also attracts people who just see it as an easy money grab or work-from-home job.

They read some blogs here and there, learn the **terminology,** and voila! They're changing their title on LinkedIn to "SEO Expert."

After only a few days.

Or worse, a matter of hours.

That's like reading a few medical books and calling yourself a doctor.

That's not how this works.

SEO expertise, like any other field, requires time, commitment, and experience.

You can't just declare yourself an SEO expert.

It's not a young field anymore.

There are experts who've been **doing SEO** for decades now.

Ready to follow in their footsteps?

Here are 21 things you need to know to become an SEO expert.

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1. UNDERSTAND THE BASICS OF SEO

To become an expert, start with the basics. You need to understand how audiences and search engines interact, and what you can do to optimize content effectively.

Learning the basics boils down to three core components:

- The types of content that users want, expect, or need. It's all about **user intent.**
- The inner workings of how search engines really work.
- The tools and techniques needed to optimize websites.

Without this background, you may be able to explain the "what," but not the "why."

As someone who has worked in this industry for 15 years, knowing the why sets you apart.

When you get into more advanced aspects of SEO, knowing why things are the way they are makes you more effective.

At Search Engine Journal, we created an ebook that covers the **SEO basics.**

SEJ Search Engine® Journal

2. BUILD YOUR OWN WEBSITES

Once you understand the basics of SEO, it's time to apply them.

Most pros will tell you they learned the most by building sites and breaking things.

Ryan Jones of Razorfish put it well when I **interviewed** him on the Search Engine Journal Show:

"Don't just start out trying to do SEO for big brands; start doing SEO for yourself. Make something. Whether it's a blog, affiliate site, or an app...start doing it for yourself and hone your skills that way."

Learn HTML. Learn all the tags. Test.

Fiddle with the content and see how it manifests in SERPs.

Pick a topic that you're into. That'll make it easier to create content.

You want to spend more time building and optimizing the content, not writing it.

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3. LEARN WORDPRESS

One-third of websites are built with **WordPress.**

So if you want to be an SEO expert, you need to know it well.

It's not just that it's ubiquitous – it's also the **best CMS for SEO.**

WordPress is perfect for functionalities that directly (e.g., metadata) and indirectly (e.g., UX) affect SEO performance.

Start your WordPress education with this great **list of resources** from Kinsta.

4. LEARN GOOGLE ANALYTICS & GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

SEO pros use a wide variety of tools to optimize content and analyze their effectiveness.

Google Analytics and Google Search Console are essentials for any SEO command center.

Google Analytics is all about measurement and reporting.

Google Search Console enables you to optimize your site.

SEO expertise requires mastery of both.

5. READ ABOUT SEO EVERY DAY

Remember I mentioned commitment?

You've got to have the determination to read about SEO daily.

The major search engines make changes every day and you never know the impact that will have on your rankings.

Your colleagues, clients, and bosses – they'll expect you to have answers.

Keeping up with SEO content daily keeps you fresh.

Not sure where to begin? Try this list of **25 reliable resources** to start with.

6. UNDERSTAND HOW SEARCH ENGINES WORK

It can feel like much of your fate rests in the hands of the search engines.

And it does.

That's why you need to know about crawlers.

These bots are making decisions about the quality and relevancy of your content.

Several key factors drive those decisions.

Understanding search intent, relevance, content quality, links, and usability will help you better grasp why the algorithms operate the way that they do.

Search engines are a black box – they don't reveal the secret sauce behind their products.

But you can use these known factors to optimize your site and give yourself a leg up.

If you want to get into the real nitty-gritty of Google's patents, check out Bill Slawski's **SEO by the Sea** blog.

Or, dive deep by reading our ebook: **How Search Engine Work.**

7. READ GOOGLE'S QUALITY RATER GUIDELINES

For an even more in-depth look behind the curtain, study Google's Quality Rater Guidelines.

Google hires people to rate websites, and this guide covers the factors they're told to look for.

It's not a short read.

You may be familiar with the [simplified version](#) of its contents, known as E-A-T:

- Expertise
- Authoritativeness
- Trustworthiness

The simplified version is useful if you're just starting out or even at the intermediate level, but to become an expert, you need to read the whole thing.

The raters are not SEO professionals – they're everyday people.

Similar to the search engines' bots, these raters have an effect on your site's performance.

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8. LOOK AT THE SERPS

This is where all the action is.

**Look at the search engine results pages (SERPs).**

- How are they composed?
- What content do they display?
- Who is doing it well?

Notice how the results change when you search for different kinds of queries.

Look at how this search for "How to make alfredo sauce" differs from "alfredo sauce."

You can see this featured snippets for recipes because I asked a question in the search box.

Then, here you can see the knowledge panel on the right.

Google is making decisions about the intent behind those queries and serving up content in a format that it thinks users want the most.

So look at the SERPs.

A lot.

9. LEARN ABOUT TECHNICAL SEO

Technical SEO is everything that you do to make your site easier to crawl and index.

Technical SEO involves mobile usability, site speed, structured data, JavaScript, and all the mechanisms that influence how a website works.

These factors play a role in how well a site ranks in the SERPs.

You can have amazing content, but a slow or site with lots of bugs will hurt your performance.

With so much content to compete with, a website with a solid foundation from technical SEO can **make or break your strategy.**

Learn more in our **technical SEO guide.**

10. LEARN ABOUT CONTENT STRATEGY, CREATION, OPTIMIZATION & PROMOTION

While technical SEO helps search engines crawl and index your site more effectively, understanding content will help you improve the user experience, time on site, links, and so much more.

Gone are the days when content was created by a keyword-first strategy.

Since the **Hummingbird update** and RankBrain came on the scene, content needs to be created in a user-first strategy.

But, just because you published content, doesn't mean users will find it.

Content needs to be optimized to add context to content to help search engines understand how to categorize it.

That content also needs to be supported by a promotional strategy.

SEO alone isn't enough – other marketing channels (e.g., social media, email) contribute to the success or failure of your content.

11. USE LINK BUILDING TACTICS THAT ACTUALLY WORK

Link building is one of the first things you learn about when studying SEO.

And it's also one of the topics with the most dubious advice out there.

To benefit from link building, you need quality links, not just quantity. Getting there requires a mixture of good reporting and relationship-building.

Relationships are super important for link building. I was asked to contribute to **this post** on PointVisible, and that resulted in a nice link back to SEJ.

Danny Goodwin, Executive Editor at **Search Engine Journal**
Know the publication you're pitching. Pitching ideas that have already been published on the site is a waste of your time and my time – unless you have some new/unique spin on it. Pitch ideas that are relevant to the audience of the publication. If a topic won't be a good fit, why bother pitching? Your email is also an indicator of the quality of your guest post. Spelling or grammar errors are a warning sign to editors about the quality of the actual post they can expect. So read, re-read, and self-edit mercilessly.
Also, don't pitch yourself and then ask ME to give YOU ideas. You're pitching – so impress me with YOUR ideas. Otherwise, I'll think you really don't have any expertise or anything original and interesting to share or say.

If you're a beginner, start with our ebook, Link Building for Beginners.

If you're a little further along, check out our more in-depth link building guide.

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12. DON'T DEVELOP CHECKLIST MENTALITY

Checklist mentality is when you're so focused on following a regiment that you become inflexible and unaware of when that routine isn't working anymore.

Search engines are changing all the time.

You need to be adaptable, and checklist mentality means blindly walking through a to-do list.

Over time, the items on that to-do list become outdated or don't account for new updates.

Eventually, the checklist mentality will negatively affect your outcomes.

Instead, be open-minded and outcome-oriented.

If your rankings have dropped, despite adhering to your checklist, think creatively.

Ask for help.

Be prepared to change.

Just don't be held captive by your checklist.

The following tips will point you in the direction of good resources to help you continually develop.

13. JOIN FACEBOOK GROUPS

Facebook is full of active, helpful groups for SEO professionals. Here are just a few:

Global SEO Network

Digital Marketing Questions

SEO Tips, Tricks & Tools

Facebook groups give you access to a ready-made network of peers.

Don't just look for SEO groups, look for groups that also include marketers, content creators, and social media pros.

If you have an interest in e-commerce or B2B marketing, look for groups with those areas of focus.

The sheer breadth of the network you can access on Facebook is unmatched.

14. FOLLOW SEO EXPERTS ON TWITTER

Sometimes you need a break from your typical blogs and news sites.

Following SEO experts on Twitter gives you one more way to access their wealth of knowledge.

Use Twitter to keep up with the latest news, participate in conversations, and get opinions on SEO topics that aren't black-and-white.

To start, follow other SEO experts that top SEO blogs are already following.

When you follow the right people on Twitter, it sharpens your SEO knowledge and connects you to opportunities that you may not have heard about otherwise.

I've curated a list of **experts** to help you get started.

SEJ Search Engine® Journal

15. ATTEND SEO & MARKETING CONFERENCES

Another way to level up your skills is by attending events.

Conferences and webinars are excellent resources for learning more about specific aspects of content marketing.

In-person events may be on hold for now, but there are plenty of virtual conferences still going on.

The presentations feature expert guidance on the topics that are top of mind for most SEO pros.

11:05 am	Main Stage Agenda **Bartosz Góralewicz** Rendering SEO manifesto - Why we need to go beyond JavaScript SEO	▶
11:25 am	Main Stage Agenda **Gianluca Fiorelli** SEO for Images; or See What You're Missing in Your Visual Search Strategy	▶
11:45 am	Main Stage Agenda **Live Q&A with Bartosz & Gianluca** Partner Session **Dr. Vishakha Shivdasani** How To Give Your Immunity a Makeover	▶
12:05 pm	Main Stage Agenda **Networking Break & Sponsor Demos** Partner Session **Michael Johnson** Fantastic Links and Where to Find Them	▶

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They can be pricey, but a great conference is totally worth the investment.

Attending events gives you a chance to hear directly from industry experts, an opportunity you may not get otherwise.

Here's a **list of great events** to check out this year and next year.

16. LISTEN TO PODCASTS

When you need a break from reading and watching, try listening.

Podcasts have exploded in recent years, and that includes **podcasts that cover SEO.**

Listen on your commute, or while you're cooking or working out.

Podcasts are the best way to feed your brain while multitasking.

You can find any number of formats, show lengths, and hosts to suit your fancy.

I'm admittedly biased, but check out **The Search Engine Journal Show** for lots of great insights and tips from some of the brightest minds in SEO today.

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17. GROW YOUR PERSONAL NETWORK

You don't know everything.

You don't have all the answers.

And in SEO, you likely never will.

But that's OK!

Some SEO professionals who are total experts in JavaScript SEO know next to nothing about link building.

Other people in our industry are amazing at content strategy and promotion, but terrible at some technical aspects of SEO.

At some point, you're going to need help from someone else in the industry.

So start building connections.

Use social media to start building relationships.

Platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn make this fairly easy.

The best way to make connections and grow your network is to be willing to share information.

Don't just take and take.

Give and take.

Remember, relationships are a two-way street.

Share your own experiences and expertise.

The idea is to continually stay in touch and develop a rapport with people.

Over time, these connections will start to see you as an expert.

Also, share and comment on content others have shared.

Eventually, you'll want to build a trusted network of people with whom you can troubleshoot, bounce ideas off of, and share tips, strategies, and other learnings.

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18. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FREE COURSES

One of the great things about learning SEO is the wealth of free information available to you.

Sure, there's a lot of junk to filter through.

But there are also plenty of free courses from highly respected companies and instructors.

Moz, for instance, lets you explore by topic:

You can also find free courses from **SEMrush,** and through **free trials on Lynda.com.**

19. KEEP LEARNING & GROWING YOUR SKILL SET

There's no endpoint to becoming an expert.

And there are many other skills adjacent to SEO that make you more effective.

Study web development, copywriting, or even graphic design.

Get familiar with a particular industry or specialize in a certain type of content.

Continually expanding your skillset deepens your expertise and sets you up as a knowledgeable resource.

And it also makes YOU more valuable – so you can earn more or charge more.

20. LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES & REPEAT YOUR SUCCESSES

SEO isn't an exact science, and experts learn a lot through trial and error.

Mistakes are inevitable.

Learn from them and move on.

On the flip side, when you do something that works, make a note of it.

Do it again.

Until it doesn't work.

Then it becomes a mistake that you can learn from.

The point: never stop learning and improving.

21. BE PATIENT

Like I said at the beginning of this post, becoming an SEO expert takes time.

Ride the wave of algorithm changes.

Get thrown off by updates to search tools.

Build your community.

None of these things can be rushed.

But if you have the passion for it, the payoff is a rewarding, in-demand career.

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SUMMARY

Being an SEO expert opens up a world of opportunities.

You can play a vital role in launching a startup.

You can upgrade the online presence of a 50-year-old company.

You can help a solopreneur reach new audiences.

You can help a retailer crush its sales goals.

There are a lot of **skills** you need to develop to become that trusted resource.

But it all starts with patience, integrity, and hunger to learn.

SEO 1⍰1 QUIZ

Put your knowledge of SEO basics to the test with this short quiz and share your results on social!

▶ TAKE THE SEO 101 QUIZ