

# FROM KEYWORD RESEARCH TO CONTENT STRATEGY



A DIGITAL MARKETING E-BOOK BY  
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## TURNING YOUR KEYWORD DATA INTO GREAT IDEAS

By the time you've got your keyword research done, you might be a little dazed with spreadsheet overload. Here's where it all pays off. Now, you can start decoding those reams of data to find what you're looking for: the perfect content opportunities for your business. We'll walk you through four criteria you can use to find them.

### DO THIS FIRST

#### KNOCK OUT THOSE PRE-REQS

Here's what you need to have in hand before you get started:

1. **Keyword Research:** Base your SEO strategy on data, not guesses. Need help with keyword research? We have a guide that will walk you through it.
2. **Content Brand:** You need to know who you are trying to reach and how you can connect with them. Our [Content Branding Guide](#) can help you identify your target audiences, unique value, key messages, voice, and tone.
3. **Website Goals:** Clearly state why you want to bring people to your site and what you want them to do once they get there. Do you want them to buy your products, call or email you, join your mailing list, come to an event, make a donation, or get involved in a cause?

## GET ORGANIZED

If you're one of those people who likes to organize, you'll love this part. You might have done it in the research phase. If not, you need to group those search queries into topics. Why? If your keyword research results in super-long lists of unrelated or loosely related keywords, it's not going to help you decide where to focus. On the opposite extreme, you don't want to hyperfocus on one specific keyword at a time. That's simply not how SEO works anymore.

Here's an example from our own keyword research of how to organize keywords into topic groups. In our keyword research example, we show you an Excel trick that can make this go a lot faster.

### Keyword Topic Group Example

Keyword	Avg. Monthly Searches	C
<b>social impact marketing</b>		
social impact marketing	30	
social enterprise marketing	20	
social entrepreneurship marketing	10	
marketing social enterprise	10	
marketing for social enterprises	10	
marketing for social enterprise	10	
marketing strategy for social enterprise	10	
social enterprise marketing strategy	10	
social impact advertising	10	
social benefit storytelling	10	
social media social impact	10	
social media social enterprise	10	
social enterprise social media	10	
social impact communications	10	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>170</b>	

## Keyword Topics—Not Keyword Stuffing!

We want to rank for “social enterprise marketing.” So, if this were 2013, we’d write a page using that exact phrase—“social enterprise marketing”—over and over and over again.

But Google has gotten a lot better at figuring out what humans want to find, which means we can now do good SEO by writing good content for humans. Everybody wins—except for people who are still keyword stuffing (i.e., using the same exact keyword over and over and over again). Google now frowns on keyword stuffing and rewards more natural SEO writing. That means you can mix up the synonyms and variations that you see in your keyword topic group.

## THE BIG PICTURE: FOUR CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING KEYWORD TOPICS

We use four criteria to identify great SEO content opportunities. Some are straightforward and numerical, while others take some bigger picture thinking: What are your goals? What excites you? What’s at the heart of what you do? How hard are you willing to work to rank?

In this guide, we’ll show how to assess the value of keyword topics using these four criteria—and we’ll talk about the give and take as you put it all together.

1. **Search Volume:** How many people are searching for this keyword topic?
2. **Match:** How relevant are you for this search? Can you provide what the searchers are looking for?
3. **Competition:** How hard would it be for you to rank for this topic?
4. **Conversion Value:** Why bother? If you get traffic from this search term, will that lead to results?

## FIND YOUR CORE TOPICS, THEN GET NICHE

Your first step is to determine what topics should make up the core of your website. If you're creating a new website, keyword research can help you decide what your core topics are, so you can find a place for them in your site architecture. If you have an existing site, you can revisit your SEO content strategy to determine whether you need to make changes to your architecture.

Of course, you're not going to score any SEO big wins by creating one classy page on your chosen topic and working it into your architecture. You've got to support those core topics with strong supporting content. Supporting content could mean a lot of things—depending on what works best for your audience and what formats work on the distribution channels you're using to reach them. That could mean:

- ⤵ Blog posts
- ⤵ Videos
- ⤵ Podcasts
- ⤵ Photo galleries
- ⤵ Guides
- ⤵ Case studies
- ⤵ White papers
- ⤵ Infographics
- ⤵ Cartoons
- ⤵ You name it (as long as you optimize it!)

With your supporting content, you can target more niche or long tail keyword ideas. For example, if a core topic is backpacking gear (like in the REI example we share later in this guide) niche topics might include “how to adjust a backpack” or “how to fit a backpack.”

Niche or long tail keywords do two things for you:

1. They attract traffic in their own right, even if it's not a lot.
2. They build your authority for the broader, more competitive core topic, helping you to rank higher.

Later on in this guide, we'll highlight some tools that can help you brainstorm for niche content ideas.

## SEARCH VOLUME

The whole point of keyword research is to find out which search terms people use most so you can target the most popular ones—right?

Nope. But we hear that a lot. Common misconception.

Let's take an example from one of our longest running clients at JB Media Group, [Holistic Holiday at Sea](#). This company offers a Caribbean cruise with vegan cuisine and a focus on healthy living. Here are some potential keywords we could target:

Keyword	Avg. Monthly Searches
cruise	165000
caribbean cruise	74000
vegan cruise	1000
health cruise	110
vegetarian cruise	90
meat free cruise	0

Which would you choose?

If we're just aiming for the most search then, clearly, we'd go for "cruise" or "Caribbean cruise." Mega search volumes! Yes!

Not so fast. We've got some issues.

1. The vast majority of those searchers probably don't have a vegan cruise in mind, so Holistic Holiday at Sea isn't a very relevant result. This isn't a great match and it wouldn't have great conversion value.
2. This company isn't going to outrank Carnival Cruises or Royal Caribbean any time soon. Given the competition, those keywords just aren't realistic.

On the other hand, we can rule out some keywords because the search volume is too low. It doesn't make sense to optimize for "meat free cruise" because approximately nobody searches for that.

"Vegetarian cruise" and "health cruise" aren't too shabby... But what looks really promising is "vegan cruise."

A thousand searches every month is a very promising level of search for a company that's looking to sell a few thousand tickets per year. The match is spot on and the conversion value is high. Definitely worth doing what it takes to beat out the competition for this one.

We went for it and we got great results! Holistic Holiday at Sea now ranks near the top of search results for "vegan cruise," which is its #1 organic keyword.

## MATCH

The best keywords are the ones where people are totally looking for you. If they knew your name, they might type it right into Google. But they don't... yet.

You can start honing in on the best keywords by identifying the ones that really hit the nail on the head, in terms of match. In the example above, we can quickly determine that "vegan cruise" is a good candidate to research further, whereas the generic "cruise" is not. Of course, we wouldn't even research irrelevant keywords like "Alaska cruise."

Here's another example. At JB Media, we serve a specific niche: clients that are working to do good in the world, whether they're businesses or nonprofits. Here's our mission statement:

We increase the reach and influence of mission-driven companies and organizations in our community and across the globe. Our creative digital marketing strategies, content, and campaigns help our clients and students achieve their goals to make a greater impact.

So when we saw the keyword research on the topic of Social Enterprise Marketing ([on page 2](#)), we got excited. That's exactly what we do!

Let's jump ahead and look at all four criteria:

**Volume:** Our research shows 170 searches per month. That's enough to let us know: yes, people are looking for this. And we think that number will grow.

**Competition:** There is some significant competition, so we know we'll have to work to build our authority on this topic.

**Match:** Perfecto.

**Conversion Value:** High

Our conclusion: this is definitely a keyword topic we should target. So we recently created and launched a new page optimized for [Social Enterprise Marketing](#) and we're starting to see search traffic come our way.

We're also interested in terms like "tourism marketing," "conference marketing," and "nonprofit marketing" and we plan to build out pages on those topics as we move forward.



## >>> How Do You Determine the Best Match?

Sometimes it's not straightforward. One of our clients, Conscious Company Media, publishes articles on a wide range of topics with promising search volumes and they have potential to rank for many of them. How to choose which ones to focus on? We created a survey and distributed it to core members of their team.

Here's a small section of it (randomly filled out):

	Not Interesting	Interesting	Very Interesting	One of Our Top Picks
Triple Bottom Line	A	B	C	D
B Corps	A	B	C	D
Social Enterprise Examples	A	B	C	D
Social Enterprise Business Model / Strategy	A	B	C	D

We used their answers to prioritize topics, shape their content plan, and map out their site architecture.

## COMPETITION

Once you've identified some keywords with reasonable search volumes that are a great match for you, it's time to size up the competition. We want to know: Is it possible for us to rank for this keyword? How hard would we have to work to get there?

Here are a few tools and techniques you can use:

## >>> Google's Keyword Planner

Google's Keyword Planner will give you an AdWords competition score for each keyword term, between 0 (lowest) and 1 (highest).

If you're planning an AdWords campaign, that's great information to have. The trick is that competition for *organic search* and competition for *Google ads* can be very different.

For keywords that describe products, there's often a relatively strong correlation. But if you want to know about competition for informational queries, that AdWords competition score can be deceiving.

### Example:

Let's say I'm still working for my vegan cruise client. I notice that the question "what is a vegan" gets over 27,000 searches per month and the AdWords competition score is just 0.06. That's practically nothing! It looks like it should be easy to start ranking #1 for that keyword and bringing in some massive organic traffic.

Of course, it's not. Organic competition for that popular query is through the roof. It's so strong that even powerhouse Wikipedia gets knocked to #5.

Clearly, if you need to know how strong the organic search competition is, you'll need to try a different approach.

## >>> Paid SEO Tools

If you have the budget for industry leading SEO tools, you can get helpful data on keyword competition.

The Moz Keyword Explorer offers a score for difficulty as well as other metrics that can help you evaluate whether to pursue certain keywords. That looks like this:

Keyword Overview:

how to grow orchids

[Add to...](#)

101-200

Monthly Volume [Learn more](#)



45

Difficulty [Learn more](#)



64%

Opportunity [Learn more](#)



50

Priority [Learn more](#)



Ahrefs has its own [Keyword Explorer](#) that lets you compare keyword difficulty (the KD in this screengrab below) alongside other metrics. That looks like this:

8 keywords					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Keyword		KD <sup>i</sup>	CPC <sup>i</sup>	Volume <sup>↑i</sup>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> flowers		3 62	6.00	635,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> orchids		3 30	1.00	56,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> orchid care		3 17	0.30	20,000
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> how to grow orchids		3 20	0.35	2,500
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> how to water orchids		“ 4	0	1,300
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> orchid gifts		4 0	1.60	150
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> how to grow orchids inside		2 20	0	30
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> how to grow orchids outside		“ 1	0.15	20

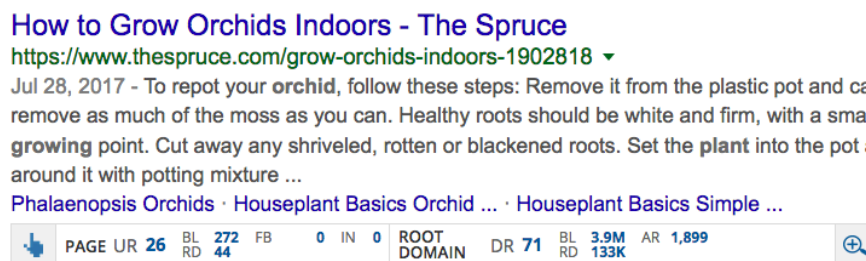
Both of these tools can be very helpful in selecting topics for SEO. And they both have free trial versions so you can test drive them.

## >>> Just Google It

The simplest way to assess how hard it would be to rank for a keyword is just to Google it and then see how tough the competition looks. We do this before we launch a campaign—even though we have access to sophisticated tools like Moz and Ahrefs. We still go to Google to ground-truth those estimates.

[^](#)  
BACK  
TO  
TOP

But we have an advantage. We bring our fancy tools with us. The Ahrefs data bar shows us a range of metrics about URL authority (UR) and domain authority (DR) right in Google results, like this:



That's pretty cool. But if you don't have that, you can still use Google results to scope out the competition.

The advantage of this approach is that it's free and anyone can do it. But there are some downsides:

- It's guesswork.
- It's time consuming if you have a lot of keywords to look at.
- Personalized results can throw you off.

But if you're savvy, you can still get some great information this way. Here are some tips:

1. **Limit personalized search results.** Google shows you results that are tailored to your interests. And the algorithm can probably figure out that you're interested in your own business. That means you might see your own website ranking pretty high. Alas, that's not what other searchers are seeing. To get a more accurate idea of who's ranking for these keywords:

- Sign out of your Google account.
- Clear your browser history.
- [See other steps you can take in Google Help.](#)

2. **Know what you're looking for.** To assess the competition, ask these questions about search results:

- Are these highly authoritative, well-known sites?
- Are they optimized for this specific search query?
- Is the content really strong—or could you produce something better?

## What if a Keyword is Too Competitive for You?

Let's say the takeaway from your competition research is that you're not realistically able to compete for ranking for a certain topic. So, you have options:

1. Rule it out. Look for keywords that are more achievable. *Tip: think about more specific, niche keywords that are a perfect match for what you do.*
2. Fight for it! Start by targeting niche keywords with a long-term strategy of building your authority for the harder-to-get term.
3. SEO aside, go ahead and create content on this topic. Why? Because...

### KEYWORD RESEARCH ISN'T JUST ABOUT SEO

Your keyword research is a great resource for understanding what people want to know. You can use this wealth of information to inform your content strategy—regardless of which channels have the most potential for you. It might make more sense to use channels like social media, email, or advertising to get people to your website. But the keyword research lets you know what people want to find once they get there.

### HOW IMPORTANT IS THIS KEYWORD TO YOU?

If you don't feel strongly and it's wildly competitive, rule it out. But if it's a keyword that gets strong search and it's a perfect match for what you do and it's likely to bring in your ideal customer, then you might decide to fight harder for it.

That brings us to the other two criteria, which are more subjective: match and conversion.

## CONVERSION VALUE

Finally, go back to where—hopefully—you started. What are your goals? Why do you want people to come to your website in the first place? What do you want to happen from there?

In the case of Holistic Holiday at Sea, we want people to book tickets for the cruise. Obviously, some keywords have a higher potential to lead to that end. Consider these potential topics:

### **Strong conversion potential:**

- ⤵ Vegan cruise
- ⤵ Vegan travel
- ⤵ Vegan vacations
- ⤵ Health cruise
- ⤵ Vegetarian cruise

### **Weak conversion potential:**

- ⤵ Vegan recipes
- ⤵ What is a vegan
- ⤵ Vegan protein sources
- ⤵ What do vegans eat
- ⤵ Famous vegans

## >>> Keywords for The Long Game

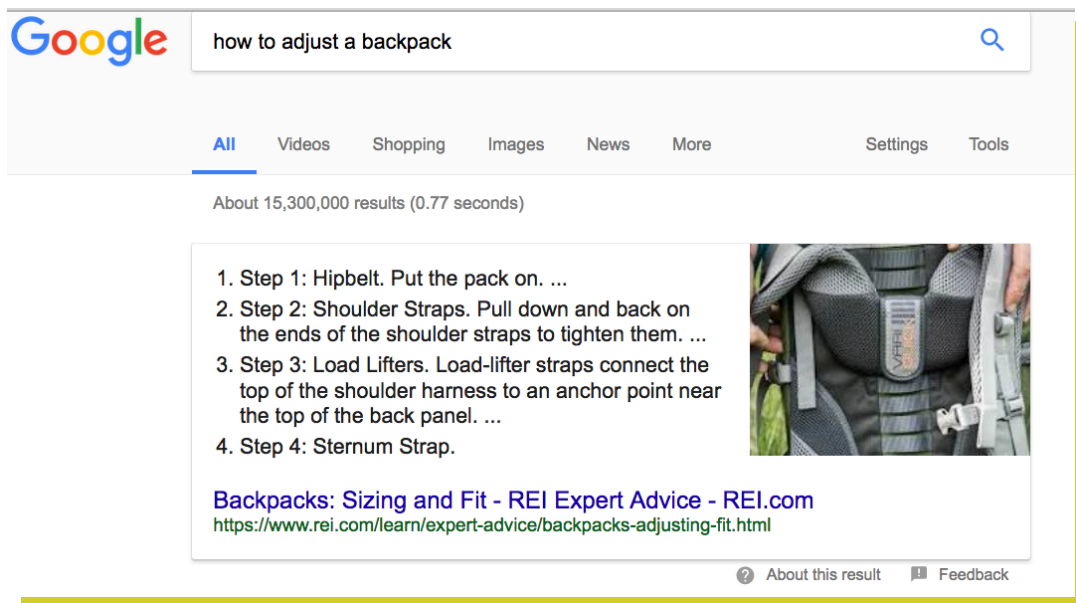
Of course, some businesses do target keywords with significant search, but weak conversion value. This approach allows them to expand their brand awareness

and get more people started on that engagement ladder.

Essentially, that means: Today, a click on your content. Later, if you can sell your value, maybe an email address. Down the road, your first sale. Ultimately, a satisfied customer who keeps coming back, making your effort totally worth it.

Here's a great example. Retail and outdoor recreation company [REI](#) produced valuable content on "how to adjust a backpack" (and lots of other how-to topics about outdoor gear). That gets them to the top of Google results. That gets people to their site and establishes them as the go-to backpack experts. Come by any time—happy to help. And while you're on the site... we've got some backpacks you can check out.

Nice job, REI!



Here's another example, with a less direct route to conversion. Discover France, which sells bike tours, gets almost 400 visits every month in organic search traffic from this post on [traditional French Christmas food](#).

That looks like an SEO win—but it's only really a win if they can convert some of those Francophile foodies into bike tour customers.

Most companies have limited resources for digital marketing—so they need to use them strategically. Also some companies have more potential than others to achieve their goals through SEO. If you see big opportunities in SEO, it might make sense to dedicate a larger budget of time and money to ambitious, long-term strategies like REI's or Discover France's.

**Bottom line:** Prioritize keywords with high conversion value. Then look for niche keywords that support your top priorities. Tailor your content strategy to your overall goals.

Which brings us to...

## BRAINSTORMING NICHE KEYWORD TOPICS

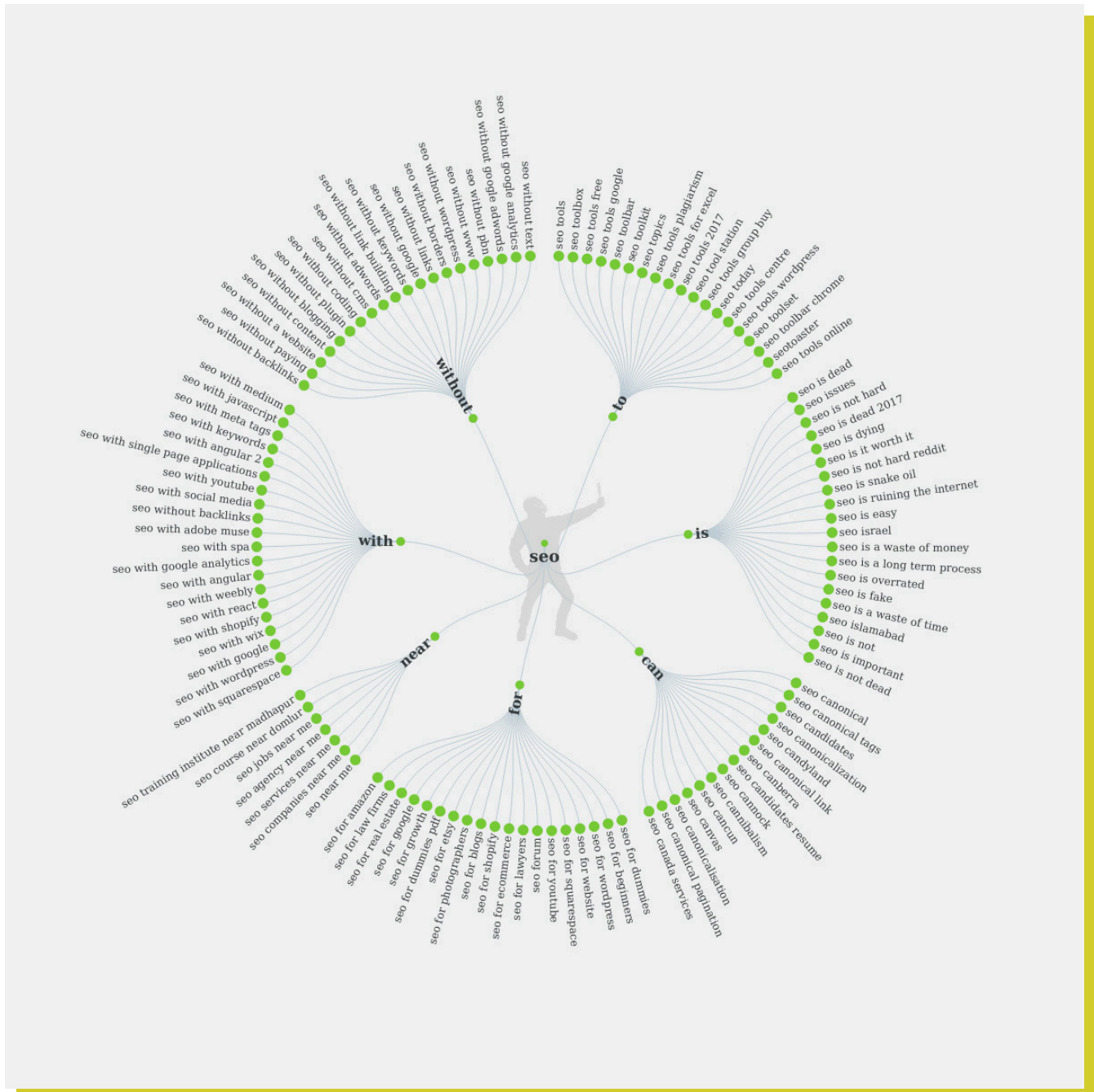
To really start moving up in rankings for your top keywords, you've got to support your core topics with ongoing content. As discussed [on page 4](#), that could mean anything from blog posts to videos to a comprehensive guide (like this one!)

Both quantity and quality matter—but if it looks like a trade-off to you, go for quality. Ask how you can create something that doesn't just add to all the noise out there, but provides something unique, something better.

In our Guide To Keyword Research, we highlight several free tools that can help you uncover niche keyword opportunities, including [Keywordtool.io](#) and [AnswerThePublic.com](#). Plug in your broader keyword topic and see these tools come up with for you.



Here's an example from Answer The Public, using the broad topic of SEO.



## APPLYING THE FOUR CRITERIA TO NICHE KEYWORD TOPICS

We use the same four criteria when zeroing in on more niche topics—say, for a blog post—as we do when we’re looking for core website topics that will be the hubs of your content strategy. But we apply them a little differently. Here’s how:

- **Search Volume:** It’s worth targeting even very small search volumes. You’re actually getting two kinds of benefit. 1) Hopefully, you can capture those very specific searches and bring that traffic to your site. 2) You’re building your authority for the broader core topic.
- **Match:** Match is always important. If you’re not relevant, there’s no point in bringing traffic to your site. But you can focus more on details, rather than the most essential points.
- **Competition:** We look for opportunities with very low competition, where we can hope to rank more quickly than for broad topics.
- **Conversion Value:** Niche topics are often more informational than sales oriented, so the path to conversion may be less direct. However, it’s important to build clear calls to action on all of these pages.

## >>> Think Beyond SEO as You Come Up With Great Content Ideas

As you brainstorm topics, keep in mind that there’s more to content strategy than SEO. Way more. And you can use that to your advantage, because the best content can work for you across multiple channels. Ask yourself:

- Who do we most need to reach? What channels are we using to reach them?
- What would be most helpful and interesting to our audience? What do they want and need that we can provide?
- What do we know people are searching for that there’s no great content about yet?
- What would capture people’s attention on social media?
- What would engage our email subscribers?
- What stories or resources can we pitch to reporters or bloggers?

- What kinds of content would our partners want to distribute to their networks?
- What are we excited about? Pass your passion on. Look for the overlap between what you're most excited about and what will spark the interest of your audience.

## YOUR SEO CONTENT STRATEGY CHECKLIST

- ☐ Get your pre-reqs together: your keyword research, your content brand, and your goals for your website.
- ☐ Organize your keyword research into topic groups (if you haven't done this already).
- ☐ Sort your keywords in order of search volume, highest to lowest. Total the search volumes for each topic group.
- ☐ Identify the keywords that are the best match for what you do, that have reasonable search volumes. Now you have a short list of keywords to research further.
- ☐ Decide what tool to use for competition research: Google Keyword Planner, an SEO software tool, or Google search results.
- ☐ Use your tool of choice to assess the competition. Can you reasonably expect to rank for this keyword topic?
- ☐ If the competition is too strong, decide what to do. You can target less competitive keywords. You can work to build up your SEO over time. Or, you can decide to focus on channels other than SEO.
- ☐ Go back to your goals and ask how search for the topics you're considering will help you achieve them. What is the conversion value?
- ☐ List keyword topics that look promising using all four criteria: search volume, match, competition, and conversion value. Congratulations! You've identified potential core topics for your website.
- ☐ Build these core topics into your site architecture, whether you're building a new site or adapting an old one.
- ☐ Brainstorm niche topics for blogs or other supporting content that will help you rank for your core topics. You can use online tools to help you uncover long tail and niche SEO opportunities.
- ☐ Think outside the SEO box. Develop a content strategy that supports all of your online channels, including social media, email outreach, PR, and partner marketing.

### MORE IN YOUR MARKETING TOOLKIT

Yay! You've gotten this far on your digital marketing plan. Keep going! You got this.

Make sure you've downloaded each of the four bundles in the

**JB Media Digital Marketing Toolkit**, which includes resources on:

CONTENT BRANDING • KEYWORD RESEARCH • SITE ARCHITECTURE

WRITING FOR SEO • SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY • PARTNER MARKETING

## Improve Your Understanding of Digital Marketing



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