SEO 101

Learn the Basics of Search Engine Optimization

20 YEARS OF SEO:
A Brief History of Search Engine Optimization

Why LINKS Are Important to SEO

15 SEO MYTHS
That Just Won't Die

140 OF TODAY'S *TOP SEO EXPERTS* TO FOLLOW

Contributors:

Loren Baker
Danny Goodwin
Benj Arriola
Anna Crowe
Dave Davies
Stoney deGeyter
Tylor Hermanson
Ryan Jones
Jeremy Knauff
Julia McCoy
Brock Murray
Kristine Schachinger
Dan Taylor

SEJ Search Engine® Journal

SEO 101

Learn the Basics of Search Engine Optimization

Copyright 2017 Search Engine Journal. Published by Alpha Brand Media
All Rights Reserved.

DEEPCRAWL

MAKING BUSINESSES VISIBLE

Consumer tracking information

Combine data from your web analytics. Adding web analytics data to a crawl will provide you with a detailed gap analysis and enable you to find URLs which have generated traffic but aren't linked to – also known as orphans.

External link metrics

Uploading backlink data to a crawl will also identify non-indexable, redirecting, disallowed & broken pages being linked to. Do this by uploading backlinks from popular backlinks checker tools to track performance of the most link to content on your site.

Search Analytics

DeepCrawl's Advanced Google Search Console Integration allows you to connect technical site performance insights with organic search information from Google Search Console's Search Analytics report.

Crawler requests

Integrate summary data from any log file analyser tool into your crawl. Integrating log file data enables you to discover the pages on your site that are receiving attention from search engine bots as well as the frequency of these requests.

Monitor site health
Migrate your site

Improve your UX
Support mobile first

Unravel your site architecture
Internationalization

Store historic data
Complete competition Analysis

hello@deepcrawl.com +44 (0) 207 947 9617 +1 929 294 9420 @deepcrawl

Free trail at: https://www.deepcrawl.com/free-trial

TABLE OF CONTENTS

9
Chapter 1:
20 Years of SEO: A Brief History of Search Engine Optimization

27
Chapter 2:
What Is Search Engine Optimization

69
Chapter 3:
SEO Glossary: 200+ Terms & Definitions You Need to Know

119
Chapter 4:
Why Search – and SEO – Is Important

126
Chapter 5:
60+ Mind-Blowing Stats About Search Engine Optimization

NEED LINKS?

From blogger outreach, to editorial placements, to custom local citation building, we have something for just about everyone.

THEHOTH.COM

135
Chapter 6:
Meet the Search Engines

149
Chapter 7:
How People Search: Classifying & Understanding User Intent

162
Chapter 8:
20+ Free Tools to Help You Find What People Search For

180
Chapter 9:
Why Links Are Important for SEO

193
Chapter 10:
Why Keywords Are Perpetually Important for SEO

217
Chapter 11:
Why Content Is Important for SEO

235
Chapter 12:
9 Essential Types of Web Pages Every SEO Need to Be Familiar With

SEO **PowerSuite**

End-to-End SEO Tools

for smarter Internet Marketing

Keyword Research

Rank Tracking

Site Audit

Content Optimization

Backlink Research

Anti-Penalty Link Audit

Link Building

Link Management

www.link-assistant.com

249
Chapter 13:
How Long SEO Takes

259
Chapter 14:
15 SEO Myths That Just Won't Die

276
Chapter 15:
The 25 Best Blogs & Publications for Learning SEO

286
Chapter 16:
The Best SEO Conferences to Attend

288
Chapter 17:
140 of Today's Top SEO Experts to Follow

315
Chapter 18:
11 Big SEO Challenges You'll Face in Your Career

CHAPTER 1

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

WRITTEN BY
LOREN BAKER

Search engine optimization (SEO) very much revolves around Google today. However, the practice we now know as SEO actually pre-dates 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 percent 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 ("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 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. 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 making sure the content was good and relevant, there was enough text, your HTML tags were accurate, and that you had internal and external links, among other factors.

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:

- **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.

- **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). 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 and 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 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.

Google AdSense: Monetizing Terrible SEO Content

In 2003, after acquiring Blogger.com, Google launched AdSense, which serves contextually targeted Google AdWords ads on publisher sites. The mix of AdSense and Blogger.com leads to a surge in monetized simple Internet 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 another person sitting next to you in a coffee shop when searching 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.

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 more than a 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 products in 2006:

- **Google Analytics.** This free, web-based tool was 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.

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 user experience.

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).

Shortly after this update, Google releases another to improve the speed of their indexing, called Caffeine. As SEJ 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 percent 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.

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 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].

The Google Zoo: Panda & Penguin

Two major algorithmic updates, in 2011 and 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.

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 Google's Amit Singhal, SVP, 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."

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.

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. AMP are designed to instantly load content and mostly has been adopted by news media and publishers.

And there's much more mobile to come. Next up: a mobile-first index is on the way sometime in 2018.

Machine Learning, AI & 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 an AI-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 AI into all of its products – including search, Gmail, AdWords, Google Assistant, and more.

In terms of search, we've already started to see the impact of AI with Google RankBrain. Announced in October 2015, RankBrain was initially used to try to interpret the 15 percent 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. And users (and brands) are increasingly adopting chatbots and using personal assistants (e.g., Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, and Microsoft's Cortana).

Exciting times are ahead for SEO.

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 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!

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

WRITTEN BY
DANNY GOODWIN

Search engine optimization (SEO), according to our definition, is:

> **The process of optimizing a website – as well as all the content on that website – so it will appear in prominent positions in the organic results of search engines. SEO requires an understanding of how search engines work, what people search for, and why and how people search. Successful SEO makes a site appealing to users and search engines. It is a combination of technical and marketing.**

But there is no single definition of SEO.

That's why I reached out to more than 60 SEO experts and asked them how they would define what search engine optimization is now.

All of their answers and perspectives are unique – and not one of these definitions of SEO is wrong.

Here's how these SEO professionals say we should answer the question, "what is SEO?".

Benj Arriola

SEO Director, Myers Media Group

Google continuously develops and improves upon their algorithm to create a sophisticated machine that learns as it grows; the more it learns, the less humans can comprehend. Over the years, SEO strategies have evolved in attempts to keep pace with Google's algorithm changes and updates with the use of machine learning and data science, and this is SEO in today.

Yet some things never change, one factor remains constant: Google has always focused on quality, beneficial content that users love to read, watch, listen to, and share. With quality content that benefits the user as a focal point in Google's ranking algorithm, it is imperative to also make that the priority of the SEO when producing content.

Loren Baker

Founder, Search Engine Journal

SEO is the encompassing definition of putting together a three-part strategy which includes:

- The ongoing technical optimization of a website to make sure that Google is able to properly read and index the pages

which are meant for Google, its desktop and mobile rankings, and other engines Also, it's ongoing innovation for search and consumer usability via solutions like AMP, Schema, and rich snippets.

- The inclusion of content on the transactional, informational, and publishing level on websites so consumers and engines can easily define a page or section of the site, its importance and relevance to natural search queries and subject matter. Navigation is a part of content strategy, so interlinking plays a big part here.

- The ability to promote content which is shareable and supports the above mentioned SEO goals. Sharing content via outreach, PR, link building, and amplification initiatives lead to signals from authority sites in the same topical neighborhood of the site being optimized, which in simple terms means you get great links that Google loves.

Aleh Barysevich

Founder & CMO, Link Assistant

SEO today is about making the right choices based on tons of accurate SEO data, the latest Google trends, and common sense. Simple but not easy!

There's also this tendency for SEO to merge with performance marketing and lose its role as a standalone discipline.

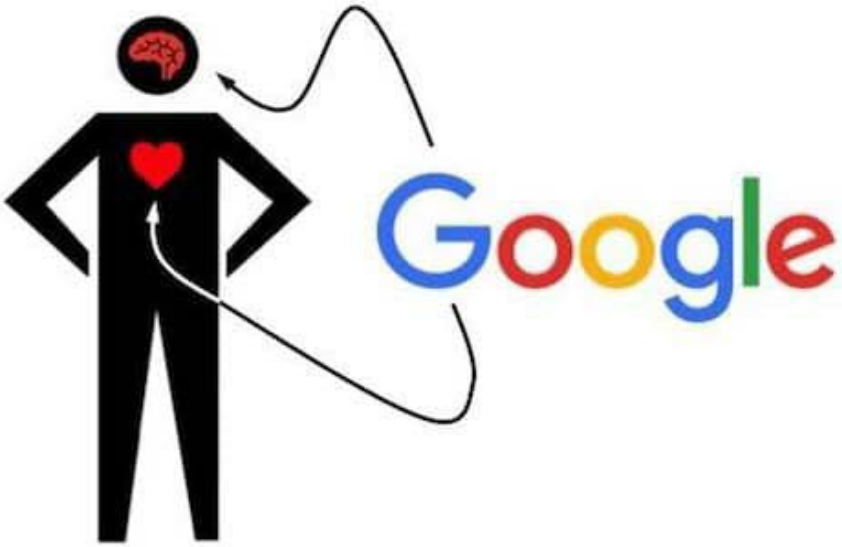
Seth Besmertnik

CEO, Conductor

There is one simple answer to this: give your customers value. If you know what your customers need/want and give it to them, you will win in SEO tremendously.

There is only one algorithm that matters: Your customers – and their hearts, minds, and souls.

This picture says it all:



Andy Betts

Executive and CMO Adviser

SEO has a real opportunity to redefine its role as a pivot point in the modern-day marketing stack. There is a very real opportunity for search marketers to align and integrate themselves across content, digital, and marketing communication channels.

The convergence of content and SEO presents a massive opportunity for brands to evangelize organic search success and tear down the silos and stigma once associated with the dark side of the industry. SEO, alone, is not enough to guarantee success and content marketing, alone, is not enough to guarantee success. Search and content together builds a better customer experience and there is massive market opportunity for marketers who are connecting the dots.

Alan Bleiweiss

Alan Bleiweiss Consulting

SEO, is the process of helping search crawlers and algorithms gain maximized access, understanding, and formulaic confidence that "this page is the best choice for this search query."

Ultimately, even that too, is really about helping searchers discover your content and doing so in a way that instills confidence to them that "this is what I was looking for."

Chris Boggs

Founder, Web Traffic Advisors

SEO continues to be about forcing the "blocking and tackling" basics to be fully optimized – processes, channel-understanding, and politics are often in the way.
Communication continues to be a problem on the mid-sized to enterprise side, with teams either unwilling or unable to work together efficiently to accomplish 90+ percent of SEO recommendations.

On the SMB side, there is a high expectation of SEO performance yet often an inability to complete (or pay-to-complete) hours dedicated toward improving content, links, or "online branding," which are all important to growing performance.

The "unwillingness" at both ends of the spectrum comes from a general naiveté about the level of effort required for SEO to work, especially in moderately to competitive spaces.

Michael Bonfils

Global Managing Director, SEM International

On a global and multilingual standpoint, when doing SEO in multiple languages and cultures, only a native language SEO specialist would

truly understand the behaviors, usage, and types of keywords that respond to their market. Outside of the implementation of hreflang and market/language rich keywords, all the same rules apply to multilingual SEO as in regular English SEO.

Katya Bovykina

Digital Marketing Manager, Resolver

SEO to me is about valuable content and meaningful partnerships. To win the SEO game, you need to provide useful, relevant, accurate and recent information.

If you combine that with building relationships online, you get a very strong competitive advantage. There is very little room left for "get rich quick" schemes, and that's a good thing.

Clark Boyd

Digital Marketing Consultant

Searching implies the requirement for an answer. As long as people have questions, those that provide the best, quickest answers will prosper.

What has changed is that technology is allowing us to deliver on the purest essence of SEO. Whether via a mobile screen or a digital home

assistant, our job is to ensure that our content can be discovered and served as seamlessly as possible. The addition of AI and machine learning into search algorithms means that there are no shortcuts to success; the best content starts to rise to the top over time.
Success no longer means just working toward high rankings on Google, as the proliferation of data and devices serves to decentralize the source of many searches. We therefore need to adapt our perspective on SEO as an acquisition channel and our ways of measuring campaign impact.

Those that keep their eye on the fundamental, enduring truths of SEO while adapting to so much flux will achieve the best results. People still need answers, after all.

Winston Burton

VP of SEO, Acronym Media

SEO is all about providing end users with the a positive content experience at the right moment in their user journey across different platforms and devices.

Doc Sheldon Campbell

Founder, Intrinsic Value SEO

Understanding what's effective in SEO today requires a deeper understanding than ever of how search works. Obviously, everyone isn't a

search engineer, so that can be simplified to understanding what the primary goal of the search engines is.
Sure, "relevant results" is true, but it goes much deeper than that. More than ever before, we need to know the audience:

- WHO are they.
- WHAT are they searching for.
- WHEN are they searching.
- WHY are they searching.
- WHERE are they searching.
- HOW are they searching.

This isn't new... it's just more critical now. We used to be able to achieve results focusing on just one or two of these. Now we need to nail them all.

Christine Churchill

President & CEO, KeyRelevance

SEO is the science of getting eyeballs to the page through search. It's a multi-discipline approach to helping web pages get found by humans and search engines.

It involves a balancing act between technical components (the ability to find server and code issues that could block or limit search engine crawling and the inclusion of on-page ranking factors) and a thorough understanding of psychology of user motivation and user behavior. Ignore conversion optimization at your peril.

Catfish Comstock

Director of SEO, Business OnLine

SEO is maximizing findability, user experience, and engagement by ensuring that content and messaging is aligned and organized based on the language that potential customers and visitors are most commonly using to describe the products, solutions, services or information that a website is offering.

It means ensuring that your site is designed, built, maintained with SEO best practices to ensure that search engines don't have any technical limitations with indexing or understanding your content. This includes using structured data constructs whenever possible to ensure maximum portability of your content.

Additionally, search engine optimization is infusing keyword focus and SEO best practices across other digital marketing channels, including social, paid, display, and PR to produce optimal results and benefit.

Anna Crowe

Features Writer, Search Engine Journal

We may be living in the age of artificial intelligence, where SEO marketers are building more personalized websites with a few tweaks to UX and spending hours creating content for RankBrain.

SEO is giving us a new concept: Instead of typing keywords on a computer, consumers are asking questions. Sure, it sounds like a pretty basic idea, but AI is reshaping how users engage with your brand, not just your website. And, your first-position ranking — not to mention your organic traffic — will become even more valuable.

Dave Davies

CEO, Beanstalk Internet Marketing

We're currently at a turning point in the industry and the strategies we use, making now one of the more difficult times to work in.

Many of the classic SEO elements still hold a lot of weight, things like incoming links and internal structures so we're having to optimize for those but at the same time most see the writing on the wall – AI is pushing its way into the algorithm and with it an increased ability for Google to understand a user's intent and whether a page meets that intent and deliver that as a result that irrespective of many of those classic signals.

Essentially, SEOs today (and for the next year or two) need to optimize for two sets of signals, the ones that have worked historically and the ones we can see working in the near future – and the same content and strategy isn't necessarily ideal for both.

Stoney deGeyter

President, Pole Position Marketing

SEO has become a catch-all phrase that represents all organic marketing. In fact, my preferred phrase is "Web Presence Optimization" because that's really what we do, optimize all aspects of a business' web presence.

Pratik Dholakiya

Co-Founder, E2M

To me, today, SEO has two important facets:

- A specific branch of inbound marketing: One that is designed to bring in traffic, attract attention, and spread your reach, even in the absence of search engines. But those efforts are made with the search engines in mind, and carried out in such a way that they will maximize your potential to bring in long-term organic search traffic.

- **Technical SEO:** Assuring all links are up to date, performing keyword research, setting up redirects when pages are moved, fixing errors, using proper markup, and so on.

These two facets must then be integrated in such a way that they enhance the brand's overall marketing efforts. It's a very exciting field and I'm happy to be a part of it.

Eric Enge

CEO, Stone Temple Consulting

Today, some aspects of SEO remain the same. Building a solid site architecture, and creating content that users want. But there is so much more now.

Optimizing for the Amazon store, optimizing for digital personal assistants (Amazon Echo & Google Home), implementing AMP, developing PWAs. The landscape has diversified dramatically, and as a result, the complexity has scaled.

Last, but not least, the process for attracting links has changed as well – now it's about crafting content and web presences that make your site a magnet for links. The result is that SEO is more fun (and impactful) than ever!

Erin Everhart

Senior Manager, Media Strategy & Mobile, The Home Depot

SEO today hasn't really changed from SEO yesterday. We're still optimizing for search engines, but now, there isn't just one search engine we're optimizing for.

People have more options than ever on where they're starting their research, both in the traditional website sense (i.e., Google, Amazon, Pinterest, Facebook, Next Door, Trivago, Houzz), but also in new ways with voice search on Siri, Alexa, or Google Home. Tactically, of course, everything is different, but that's the case with all marketing: the "how" will constantly evolve.

Gianluca Fiorelli

Senior SEO & Inbound Marketing Consultant

SEO is not that different in spirit from what it was 5, 10, or 15 years ago: a means for having our own and our clients' websites the most visible possible to potential customers in the search engine results.

What has changed is that, now, it seems finally clear that our job must be a perfect balance between deep technical knowledge and equally deep marketing expertise.

- Technical knowledge because technology plays a huge role in creating, optimizing, and taking advantage of every available search marketing opportunity (e.g., AMP, PWA, rich results, angular SEO).

- Marketing expertise, because the ability to define our audience, understand their behavior, and anticipate their needs with proper answers and solution is tied directly (keyword and topical research) and indirectly (search user experience and users' metrics) to earning the widest SEO visibility.

Casie Gillette

Senior Director, Digital Marketing, KoMarketing

For me, the goal of SEO hasn't changed in the 12 years I've been doing it. SEO is about getting your website found in search results by your target audience.

I know there's the whole concept of "search experience optimization" and making sure you are optimizing for platforms beyond search but when it comes down to it, SEO is about being found in search engines. Of course, how we do that and what we actually give customers has changed, but that's a result of the changing search landscape vs. SEO itself.

Damon Gochneaur

Founder, Aspiro Digital Agency

SEO, while still search engine optimization, encompasses so many disciplines. SEO is more than just on-site optimizations to increase search ranking. It's user experience and conversions rate optimization, it's part PR and part traditional marketing.

SEO today is a multi-disciplinary marketing channel, that continues to evolve and mature as both a profession, and as a marketing channel. At its heart, SEO is still about getting people whom don't know your brand, to your website. But the manner and methods in which that task is accomplished is a dynamic process and endeavor.

Jenny Halasz

President & Founder, JLH Marketing

SEO is all about information retrieval. Studying and responding to the needs of relevance, timing, variety, and simplicity.

The customer is the core; are you providing them with what they need in that moment? It goes so far beyond web, apps, and even voice.

SEO is the discipline that allows people and websites to access the potential of the internet. It's about knowing when your site is the right result, and admitting to yourself when it is the wrong result.

SEO is making your company and services more accessible to your prospective customers by studying what they need and creating the resources to serve them.

Brian Harnish

SEO Specialist, YMarketing

SEO is about the user experience and creating great websites for your users. Technical SEO, content, and links should continue to be the focus of SEO campaigns, tailored to your users and the type of customer you are targeting.

Identifying your user base, and custom-tailoring everything about your SEO campaign (from keyword research to Schema markup to content creation) should help you come out on top. Just a minimum amount of effort (only changing meta tags, for example) is not enough to cut it in today's competitive environment.

Bill Hartzer

SEO & Digital Marketing Consultant

SEO, for me, is still on-page (and on-site) and off-page optimization. With so many changes and additions to website code in the past few

years, on-page SEO and technical optimization has become more of a priority.

From Schema to AMP to canonical tags, it's really easy to screw up a website so that it won't rank well in search. Add HTTPs to that, along with redirects and site migrations, SEO has become more important than ever. I see it as more of a need now for SEOs to make websites search engine friendly.

Marie Haynes

Owner, Marie Haynes Consulting

SEO means helping businesses do everything they can to make more money from people who are visiting their website via organic search.

This might include obvious things such as improving rankings on the most important keywords for this business. But, there are other things that can be done too such as:

- Determining which long-tail searches could bring business.
- Tracking conversions properly so that we know which of our ef forts is helping the most.
- Taking advantage of recent changes in local search.
- And much more.

Adam Heitzman

Managing Partner, Higher Visibility

Everyone knows that SEO is an acronym that stands for Search Engine Optimization. But that description is dated. It makes us sound siloed and that we optimize specifically for search engines.

I like to refer to SEO as Search Experience Optimization. The work we do as SEO professionals is more about improving our websites to provide a better experience for users, which subsequently makes the search engines want to reward us.

Jon Henshaw

Director of Digital Marketing, TapClicks

SEO is a mixture of art and skill that blends multiple disciplines.

A modern SEO needs to:

- Know how to architect the structure of their site and its content for search bots and humans.
- Focus on user experience as it relates to site speed, stickiness, and the device being used.
- Know how to do proper outreach and promotion to help increase mentions, referrals, and backlinks.

When those disciplines are combined and done well, the result is increased organic exposure and traffic from search engines for their site.

Dixon Jones

CMO, Majestic

I think by now, most of the principles of SEO are more or less well understood by people that have done their time in the trenches since 1999, although new platforms and data types arrive all the time keeping the need for ongoing practice or testing even more important than in the past. The need to learn about new entrants like Siri, Alexa, Facebook, Linkedin, and specialist search engines (like Booking.com, for example) will keep SEOs on their toes for years to come.

But there is more... there is also the need to blend what is "optimal" with what is "realistically acceptable" in a basket of digital marketing tools. In particular, SEOs have a tendency to think and often work in isolation. They do not appreciate many of the issues surrounding development processes such as Agile, Scrum, and Lean methodologies. Not understanding these wider engineering concepts, SEOs' implementations continually lose out to other "more urgent" projects.

The modern SEO needs to be – above all else – a rational communicator.

Kelsey Jones

Founder, MoxieDot

SEO means greeting the user with the exact information they are looking for at the exact time they are looking for it. This can be on a variety of platforms, from voice search to local businesses and online shopping.

By always thinking user-first, businesses can better cater to what their target audience is looking for. This helps them better predict trends, meet expectations, and grow their online presence.

Kristopher Jones

Founder & CEO, LSEO

SEO is all about reverse engineering and replicating the organic search success of market leaders.

If you are looking to capture market share, use a competitive analysis tool to find out information about the competition, such as total backlinks, domain authority, and top organic rankings.

Once you have competitive data in hand, the next step is to aggressively leverage proven SEO strategies such as content creation and link building, to replicate and extend the success of market leaders.

Julie Joyce

Owner & Director of Operations, Link Fish Media Inc.

SEO today is what it's always been: making sure your website both ranks well and converts traffic.

What has changed of late, and continues to change for the better, is that we're realizing that over-optimization can be just as bad as under-optimization. We're trying to make sites more user-friendly rather than focusing only on search engines. That includes the practice of building links.

More of our clients finally understand that the most desirable links are the ones that have the potential to convert for you and not just help you rank.

Jordan Kasteler

SEO Director, Hennessey Consulting

SEO is different! We're taking mobile very seriously. We're ramping up for a mobile-first index, and trying to predict what that exactly means to us and our clients.

SEO today is making sure a user's experience is optimal in terms of the content they're consuming, how they're consuming on various devices,

and what action they're lead to take next. Optimizing this entire journey is far beyond optimizing keywords for pages like we've been used to.

Technical SEO doesn't loose its' importance, though, as we need a sound structure to facilitate all this.

Michael King

Managing Director, iPullRank

SEO is a cross-functional marketing activity that gives visibility to content in the organic search channel. It's the confluence of development, content, and strategic marketing initiatives to drive qualified traffic from search engines.

SEO is the calculus of marketing.

Jeremy Knauff

CEO, Spartan Media

SEO today, particularly link building, is all about relationships because ranking highly requires quality links from authoritative websites.

Search engines have been pretty effective at stomping out low quality, paid, and machine generated links, forcing site owners to get back to

interacting with other human beings in order to earn worthwhile links, and this is one of the best things to happen to the industry in a long time.

Casey Markee

Founder, Media Wyse

SEO, in its simplest form, is defined by one word: usability. As a professional site auditor, my goal for any client is to investigate, assess, and define the usability of a website to its target audience.

- Does the site ask and answer questions that the user finds helpful?
- Will Google consider this site a high-quality representation of the overall niche as a whole?
- If Google didn't exist, would this site still be easy to discover, navigate, and convert its target audience?

Debra Mastaler

President, Alliance-Link

A good SEO professional understands optimizing a webpage is less about tweaking titles and tags and more about understanding user intent. Basic SEO can still influence website performance but instead

of being a reactive strategy, success is more likely to be achieved by being proactive.

Is this really any different than the past? Are building links a waste of time? No and no, link popularity and on-page content are still two of the three main components used to determine page rankings.

But Google has championed machine learning as its future and seems 100 percent focused on growing this segment of the algorithm. Going forward, SEO practitioners will need to be proactive and invest in analyzing data and understanding search behavior across a variety of search and social platforms. This way they can develop the type of content that will motivate and influence user/search behavior which will in turn influence rankings and traffic.

While understanding and conquering the new and more technical aspects of Google's search engine will be key in the future, SEOs should also create marketing programs that reach customers directly. Lessening your dependence on Google and utilizing cross-channel platforms as a way to generate traffic and sales is just smart marketing.

Josh McCoy

Lead Digital Marketing Strategist, Vizion Interactive

SEO is now an un-siloed approach. Marketers are thinking about SEO as more of an omni-channel partner and not simply as "oh... and SEO."

As we concentrate more on the customer journey we have to consider how content is created and marketed to rank well for organic searchers who are in the information-seeking phase – long before users may return and convert in the future through an alternate traffic channel.

Jesse McDonald

Director of SEO, Geek Powered Studios

SEO can be defined as helping a website be easily found across the entire internet and not just focusing on rankings in search engines. More so than ever, it's crucial to keep your user in mind when making SEO decisions. Everything from on-page targeting to link building should be considered for their impact on the potential users.

Corey Morris

Vice President of Marketing, Voltage

SEO today is in many ways still a focused and specific discipline requiring experience and expertise. However, it has become much more dependent on, and integrated with, other digital marketing channels which is a good thing allowing for the scaling of content and resources. As most marketing is now digital, SEO has a proper seat at the table and place as a lead organic traffic driver contributing to end business goals.

Britney Muller

SEO & Content Architect, Moz

SEO sits upon the foundation of old best-practice SEO while growing into new personalization, machine learning, and entity authority heights.

As Google acquires more off-site information about businesses, SEOs need to be thinking more about optimizing a business for both online and offline success.

Brock Murray

Co-founder, seoplus+

To me, SEO is all about continually trying new and cutting-edge methods to stay sharp. You need to have a hunger for knowledge, but an individual person can only digest, process, and do so much.

Don't be afraid to invest in that new keyword research tool, tracking tool, or heat map software that gives you the info you need to take action. Automate everything you can and focus on being the eagle eye decision maker, it's the only way to go in an industry that's evolving at breakneck speed.

SEO changes so rapidly, the minute you stop devouring new information is the minute you're obsolete. It's also no longer about search engines only. It's about web presence optimization – optimizing across multiple channels for online success.

Lee Odden

CEO, TopRank Marketing

SEO is a methodology that technically and topically aligns brand content and engagement with searcher intent.

As long as content can be searched, its performance can be optimized to help make a company "the best answer" for customers, wherever they look.

Beau Pedraza

Senior Digital Marketing Manager, Forthea Interactive

Regardless of the year, SEO goes where people go as they search and find answers that apply to the world around them.

The "Ten Blue Links" still exist for a brand website, but so do a large number of social and third-party profile links that appear for branded and non-branded search terms. Not to mention, voice search and emerging frontiers across new mediums.

If an end-user opts to avoid a website listing and migrates to a review site such as Houzz, TripAdvisor, or ZocDoc, we want to make it easy for those organic results to convert.

If a client responded to this effort with "But those aren't organic leads, they're referral!" I would remind them about their bottom line with "If it touches organic search and can benefit your brand, I'll take conversions, leads, and revenue however I can."

Chuck Price

Founder, Measurable SEO

SEO is all about the user experience. This increasingly includes the delivery of a positive voice search experience.

Creating useful content and earning topically related backlinks remains the key to reaching the top of the SERPs.

Bridget Randolph

Freelance Consultant

More than ever, SEO today is about understanding your ideal customer and what they search for – and, by extension, identifying and establishing key relevance signals as they relate to that ideal

customer. As search becomes increasingly personalized, we are finding ourselves optimizing for a customer persona alongside optimizing for algorithms.

This greater alignment between Google's stated goals and the real world outcomes is an exciting shift, especially for those of us with a keen interest in human behavior.

That being said, I also appreciate the ways in which the principles of SEO have remained so stable as technology and tactics iterate and develop at a dizzying pace. At the end of the day, we're still just trying to:

- Make sure Google can access our content.
- That they know what it's about.
- That other people reference it as such.

And I don't expect that to change significantly anytime soon.

Adam Riemer

CEO, Adam Riemer Marketing

SEO today is the same as it was before, but with some advances in code, devices to optimize for, and a few small alternate tags. You need to provide solutions, a great user experience, and attract links.

If you've been keeping your code, content, and UX up to date, you've already seen that the only thing that has changed is the way we serve this experience to different devices, through robots and voice commands.

Dave Rohrer

Founder, NorthSide Metrics

If you were to think of your overall marketing plan as a workout, SEO would be one of the exercises that you would want to do daily. On its own, it can make you stronger, but when tied to other exercises (i.e., tactics and strategies) SEO has an even bigger impact.

Now, more than ever, SEO should be thought of a daily exercise that you do – not just that "thing" you think about for a few days or weeks following January 1.

Eli Schwartz

Director of Marketing, SurveyMonkey

SEO is the process of increasing organic traffic by creating content and optimizing webpages that match what search engine users are seeking. Search engine algorithms are closer than ever to mimicking a human understanding of query intent based on artificial intelligence; therefore the focus of all aspects of SEO need to be biased toward users with an emphasis on relevancy, quality, and engagement.

Chris Sherman

Partner & VP, Third Door Media

SEO means exactly what it meant in 1997, right about the time I started writing about it. Easily expressed: Creating good, readable, content that people feel compelled to share (a definition just as frustrating now to those who want overcomplicated answers as it was 20 years ago).

Of course, today there are additional, finer mechanical nuances that need to be addressed. But these can be handled by competent technicians – no special magic involved, just a journeyman's practical knowledge and skill applied to make sure everything is in compliance with the current set of "rules."

An apt comparison is to computer science. Brilliant computer scientists are inventive masters of algorithms, but not necessarily great coders. Great coders can create killer apps, but not without first-rate algorithms to use as blueprints.

I'll never forget an early 2001 visit to Google when my host said, "Oh, we never let Larry and Sergey touch the code any more. Too dangerous." Enough said, I think.

Grant Simmons

VP of Search Marketing, Homes.com

From site speed and availability to user context and satisfaction, SEO is a user-centric discipline that requires an understanding and mastery of the following:

- How (methodology and device) and where (location) the user is searching.
- Why the user is searching (query meaning and context) and how to best satisfy that reason (content and medium).
- What the optimal user experience is that meets or exceeds user expectations (and the delivery of such).
- How to completely satisfy the user's query so they provide signals of satisfaction through SERP engagement and/or social and link-based methods.

All this in an ideally perfect balance with developers, product folk, designers, and stakeholders!

Bill Slawski

Director of SEO Research, Go Fish Digital

Many changes have come to SEO in the past few years.

For instance, the use of structured data on websites and XML sitemaps show that search engines are looking at machine readable content to generate search results.

SEOs are able to access much more information than we ever could before directly from Google using Google Search Console (like mobile friendliness of content, and validation of structured data), and tools like the automated assistant in the mobile Google Analytics app, which provides machine learning insights to Google analytics data.

We still seem to have PageRank as an important ranking factor from Google, but have been told that Google is using a machine learning approach called RankBrain. The focus of this RankBrain approach is to help the search engine understand the meaning of queries better, and provide answers that (still) focus upon meeting the situational and informational needs of searchers.

We've been told by search engineers, such as Paul Haahr, more about how Google works, which now involves recognizing whether an entity is in a searcher's query.

Much of what I do in optimizing a site involves finding ways to improve how well it functions in terms of site speed and user experience, and application of pagination markup and canonical link elements and site architecture; and improving the likelihood that a searcher will click on a link to that page from engaging and persuasive search results.

As we've been told by the Google rater's guide, we ideally want to focus upon building sites that raters might see as involving Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness. A recent Google patent told

us that it might look at search results to gauge the authoritativeness of pages in search results, and if pages within those results don't meet a specific threshold of authoritativeness, Google may perform a search on a related query to find other authoritative search results, which could then be blended into search results for that initial query.

Authoritativeness is an important metric for SEO these days, and if you read that Google rater's guide, it means a lot more than just having lots and lots of backlinks.

Aleyda Solis

International SEO Consultant, Orainti

SEO is the process of maximizing a site's organic search visibility to connect with its potential users and customers during their search journey.

Shari Thurow

Founder & SEO Director, Omni Marketing Interactive

SEO is optimizing digital documents for people who use search engines. SEO involves communicating "aboutness" in a specific context to both human users and technology.

People locate and discover desired content by browsing, searching, and asking. Therefore, SEO is certainly a part of the user experience (UX). In Peter Morville's User Experience Honeycomb, SEO falls under the Findable facet.

SEO has never been about rankings only.

Bas van den Beld

Founder, Speak with Persuasion

SEO is a mature business. Your website needs to be ready on many levels.

"Just doing the SEO thing" isn't enough anymore. You need to understand who you are targeting. You need to be ready for mobile and security.

But most of all: SEO is all around and everywhere. That means it should be on a manager's desk so he or she makes sure everyone is aware of the need of good SEO.

Jennifer van Iderstyne

Senior Strategist, Overit

To me, SEO encompasses all aspects of how a business exists as it relates to presenting information and being found online.

Today's SEO is about understanding and responding to all aspects of how search results are sought, viewed, and rendered. It involves analyzing how people search, what they search for, and what they find. But also following the science behind how search engines, crawl, perceive and assign authority and relevance to websites and pages.

SEO, in an ever-changing technological landscape, means an ongoing process of re-imagining how we view search and what we can learn from it. It's not just seeing rankings as an end, but as a means of studying how search engines use our content to serve their users.

It means expanding our definition of what search is. It is the channel that most people use to begin an exploration of goods, services, and information. But it's not just through search engines as we know them, search is happening on social platforms and inside websites.

Search data is insight into the heart of human behavior. This information, paired with other forms of business intelligence, can be used to shape overall marketing strategies.

Frank Watson

CEO, Kangamurra Media

SEO, like how we use the internet, has changed. Mobile devices, voice search, and location linked searching are much more dominant than a couple of years ago.

Understanding that plus the influence of schema and Google's push for use of HTTPs are the major areas SEOs must master to gain presence in the SERPs.

Mindy Weinstein

Founder & CEO, Market MindShift

It's more than just trying to get links and create content. As an SEO, you have to think about the entire web presence:

- Are you quoted, featured, or interviewed on reputable websites or online publications?
- Are people sharing your content and talking about you?

These are some of the things that make a more natural SEO campaign. What hasn't changed is the need for a search-friendly website that is properly optimized and free of technical errors.

Amelia Wilson

Content Marketing Manager, HostGator

In the early days, SEO was all about serving Google. Then, it grew to be about serving Google, by way of the user.

Now, you should be thinking user first in everything you do, from site speed to content quality. If you're making users happy, Google's smart enough to notice and will reward you in the rankings.

It used to be a lot more about gaming the system. Now, SEO is mostly good marketing with some extra magic thrown in.

Rob Woods

SEO Consultant, Riseform Digital Marketing

SEO today is difficult to define because it's so entwined with so many other marketing techniques. Gone are the days where much of what one did for SEO was purely for SEO (link building, highly optimized content, content only for the search engines, etc).

Today, I would say that SEO is the practice of making your site as technically sound as possible, according to the search engines' guidelines, while also making your content the best possible answer/resource for a particular user's needs.

Technical SEO is becoming more and more complex with mobile, semantic data, and page speed layered on top of more traditional on-site issues. At the same time, the engines have become, and will continue to become, more attuned to truly understanding what a searcher's needs are and returning the most useful answer, rather than the best optimized, most linked to page.

Tony Wright

CEO & Founder, WrightIMC

It might be easier to say what SEO isn't. It isn't magic. It isn't proprietary. It isn't a stand-alone tactic. And it isn't easy.

Our agency has had to consult on so many areas of business, because search touches all those areas. When we see something is amiss, the client expects us to have answers – even if it is well beyond the realm of what we were hired to do.

Sure, the technical and advertising aspects are still there, but must be able to talk about recruiting, sales, accounting, security, and customer service, just to name a few.

SEO to me is the new business consulting. Long live SEO.

Wells Yu

SEO Analyst, Williams-Sonoma

SEO, today, means what it always has: creating a website that can be properly understood by a search engine. The thing that changes every year, however, is how we do that. This is why it is important to understand that as new technology is created in this world it will change our industry.

Understanding user behavior – and how to create a great website experience for those users – will solve most, if not all, of your SEO problems moving forward.

CHAPTER 3

SEO GLOSSARY: 200+TERMS & DEFINITIONS YOU NEED TO KNOW

WRITTEN BY
DANNY GOODWIN

Search engine optimization, like any specialized industry, has its own unique set of terminology, definitions, and abbreviations.

This SEO glossary compiles more than 200 of the most common terms you are likely to hear and will definitely need to know during your SEO career.

A

Above the Fold

Content that appears on a website before the user scrolls. Google created the Page Layout Algorithm in 2012 to lower the rankings of websites featuring too many ads in this space.

AJAX

Asynchronous JavaScript and XML is a type of programming that allows a webpage to send and receive information from a server to change that page dynamically without reloading.

Algorithm

A complex computer program used by search engines to retrieve data and deliver results for a query. Search engines use a combination of algorithms to deliver ranked webpages via a results page based on a number of ranking factors and signals.

Algorithm Change

Some algorithmic changes go completely unnoticed. However, the impact of a major algorithmic change can usually be seen quite quickly, though the change sometimes takes a few weeks to completely roll out. Algorithmic changes come in three forms:

- **Algorithm Update:** The search engine changes certain signals of an existing algorithm.
- **Algorithm Refresh:** The search engine re-runs an existing algorithm using the exact same signals as last time.
- **New Algorithm:** The search engine adds a new algorithm to improve search quality. For example: Google Panda, Google Penguin.

Alt Attribute

HTML code that provides information used by search engines and screen readers (for blind and visually-impaired people) to understand the contents of an image.

Also known as: Alt Text.

Analytics

The science of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to take future action based on what has (or hasn't) worked historically.

Also see: Google Analytics

Anchor Text

The clickable word or words of a link. This text is intended to provide contextual information to people and search engines about what the webpage or website being linked to is about. For instance, if you were creating a link to send your visitors to Search Engine Journal, "Search Engine Journal" is the anchor text.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The science of making computers perform tasks that require human intelligence. Rather than following a set of programmed rules (like an al-

gorithm), an AI computer system is basically a digital brain that learns. AI can also make and carry out decisions without human intervention.

Authority

The combination of signals search engines use to assess websites and webpages for the purposes of ranking

B

B2B

Short for business-to-business. In B2B SEO, the buying cycle is longer, products and services are more expensive, and the audience is professional decision-makers.

B2C

Short for business-to-consumer. In B2C SEO, the buying cycle is typically shorter (though it still varies by industry), products and services are (mostly) cheaper, and consumers are the audience.

Backlink

See: Inbound Link

Baidu

The most popular search engine in China, Baidu was founded in January 2000 by Robin Li and Eric Xu.

Bing

The name of Microsoft's search engine. Bing launched in June 2009, replacing Microsoft Live Search (previously MSN Search and Win-

dows Live Search). Since 2010, Bing has powered Yahoo's organic search results as part of a search deal Microsoft and Yahoo struck in July 2009.

Black Box

A complex computer program that is poorly understood. Inputs and outputs can be observed, but there is no access to the process itself due to its confidential nature. For example, Google's algorithm is a black box.

Black Hat

Risky tactics that go against Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

Also see: Webspam

Blog

A publication of content, sorted in chronological order, with the most recent content appearing at the top. The content reflects personal or corporate interests, and can be written by an individual or a group of contributors. Blogs were originally called web logs or weblogs. However, as "web log" can also mean a server's log files, the term was confusing. To avoid this confusion, the abbreviation "blog" was coined, and became the common term.

Bounce Rate

The percentage of website visitors who leave without visiting another page on that website. Bounce rates range widely depending on industry and niche. Although bounce rate can indicate potential content or website issues, it is not a direct ranking factor, according to Google.

Bot

See: Crawler, Googlebot

Branded Keyword

When a user's query includes an exact match, or variation, of a specific company or brand name. For instance, "Search Engine Journal", "SEJ", "SearchEnginejournal.com", and "Search Engine Journal SEO 101 Guide" are a few examples of branded keywords.

Breadcrumb

A navigational element that helps users easily figure out where they are within a website.

See: Website Navigation

Broken Link

A link that leads to a 404 not found. Typically, a link becomes broken when:

A website goes offline.
A webpage is removed without implementing a redirect.
The destination URL is changed without implementing a redirect.

C

Cache

A technology that temporarily stores web content, such as images, to reduce future page loading times.

Cached Page
A snapshot of a webpage as it appeared when a search engine last crawled it.

Canonical URL
An HTML code element that specifies a preferred website URL, when multiple URLs have the same or similar content, to reduce duplicate content.

ccTLD
A country-code top-level domain. For instance, a company based in the United Kingdom would have a domain like this: www.example.co.uk, where uk is the ccTLD.

Click Bait
Content that is designed to entice people to click, typically by overpromising or being intentionally misleading in headlines, so publishers can earn advertising revenue.

Click-Through Rate (CTR)
The rate (expressed in a percentage) at which users click on an organic search result. This is calculated by dividing the total number of organic clicks by the total number of impressions then multiplying by 100.

Cloaking
Showing different content or URLs to people and search engines. A violation of Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

CMS

Stands for Content Management System. A web-based application that lets people create, upload, and manage digital assets.

Co-Citation

How frequently two websites (or webpages) are mentioned together by a third-party website, even if those first two items don't link to (or reference) each other. This is a way search engines can establish subject similarity.

For instance, imagine Search Engine Journal and Search Engine Roundtable never linked to or mentioned each other. However, other websites and blogs would likely mention both SEJ and SER on lists of popular search engine news publications.

To see this in action, see: related:https://www.searchenginejournal.com/ search engine journal

Comment Spam

Poorly written comments, often off-topic and self-promotional, posted by spambots in the hopes of getting a free (but ultimately worthless) link.

Competition

There are two types of competition:

- **Direct Competitors:** Companies that sell similar products and/or services, serve the same needs, and target a similar audience both online and offline.

- **SEO Competitors:** Companies that vie for the same keywords and organic search visibility, but with unalike products or services that address different needs and/or target audiences.

Recommended reading:

- Think You Know Who Your SEO & PPC Competition Is? Think Again!

Content

- Words, images, videos, or sounds (or any combination thereof) that convey information that is meant to be distributed to and consumed by an audience.

- One of the two most important Google ranking factors (along with links). Search engines want to reward content that is useful, informative, valuable, credible, unique, and engaging with better traffic and visibility.

"Content is King"

A phrase often used by speakers at conferences and writers on popular SEO (and digital marketing) publications. In this context, "content is king" usually means that content is essential for you to have any SEO, digital marketing, or business success.

This phrase actually dates back to a Bill Gates essay, "Content is King", published January 3, 1996.

Recommended reading:

- Content is King (Wayback Machine)

Conversion

When a user completes a desired action on a website. Examples of conversions include:

- Completing a purchase.
- Adding items to a shopping cart.
- Completing a form (e.g., requesting a demo, registering for a webinar/event).
- Downloading premium content (e.g., ebook, whitepaper).
- Subscribing to an email newsletter.
- Video views.

Conversion Rate

The rate (expressed in a percentage) at which website users complete a desired action. This is calculated by dividing the total number of conversions by traffic, then multiplying by 100.

Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO)

The process of improving the number or quality of conversions that occur on a website. Some popular CRO tactics include testing changes to website design, copy, images, price, call-to-action, and messaging.

Correlation

The extent to which a relationship exists between two or more elements. Often used in SEO research to infer relationships of variables on search rankings due to the black box nature of algorithms. Always remember, however, that correlation ≠ causation.

Crawl Budget

The total number of URLs search engines can and want to crawl on a website during a specific time period.

Recommended reading:

- What Crawl Budget Means for Googlebot (Google Webmaster Central)

Crawl Error

- URLs that a search engine bot is unable to crawl.
- URLs that return a status code error.

Crawler

A program search engines use to crawl the web. Bots visit webpages to collect information and add or update a search engine's index.

Also known as: Bot, Spider, Web Crawler

Crawling

The process of gathering information, using a crawler, from the billions of public webpages to update, add, and organize webpages in a search engine's index.

CSS

Cascading Style Sheets describe how HTML elements (e.g., color, fonts) should appear on webpages and adapt when viewed on different devices.

Customer Journey

All of the potential moments (or touchpoints) at which a prospect is exposed to or engages with a brand. All of these interactions are designed to eventually persuade, influence, and convert that prospect to become a customer, client, or subscriber.

Though customer journeys can vary greatly by business type and industry, typically it is made up of four main "stages":

Awareness > Consideration > Decision > Retention

Google's Avinash Kaushik offers an alternative framework:

See > Think > Do > Care

Also known as: Buying Process, Consumer Decision Journey, the Customer Journey to Online Purchase, Marketing Funnel, Path to Purchase, Purchase Funnel

D

Data

All the hard numbers that represent real customers – the who, what, where, when, why, and how – all of which is needed to make informed decisions about SEO strategies and tactics.

Dead-End Page

A webpage that links to no other webpages. So called because once a user or bot arrives on this page, there is no place to move forward.

Deep Link

- A link pointing to any webpage other than the homepage.
- A link pointing to content within a mobile app.

De-index

When Google removes a website or webpage, either temporarily or permanently, from search results, specifically its search index. Google provides a Remove URLs tool in the Search Console for voluntary cases; however, a website may also be de-indexed as punishment for violating Google's Webmaster Guidelines, in the form of a manual action.

Also known as: Delisting

Directory

A list of websites, usually separated by related categories and maintained by human editors. Depending on the directory, inclusion could be free or paid. In the past, links from directories were highly sought after (e.g., DMOZ), leading to widespread abuse and overall devaluing of this sort of link building.

Also known as: Web Directory, Link Directory

Disavow

If your link profile includes a high number of spammy, artificial, or low-quality inbound links that may be harming your rankings – and don't have the ability to get them removed for a legitimate reason (e.g., the link exists on a site you have no control over) – you can use Google's Disavow Tool tool to tell Google to ignore those links.

DMOZ

The Open Directory Project. This human-edited directory of websites launched June 5, 1998 and closed March 17, 2017.

Do-follow

A link that doesn't use the "nofollow" attribute. In other words, a link.

Domain

A website address – typically ending in an extension like .com, .org, or .net. For example: www.searchenginejournal.com is the domain of this website.

Domain Authority

- The overall "strength" of a website, built up over time, which can help a new page rank well quickly, even before that content has earned links or engagement.
- A score, between 0-100, SEO software company Moz uses to predict the ability of a website to rank in search results.

Recommended reading:

- The Three Pillars of SEO: Authority, Relevance, and Trust

Doorway Page

Webpages that are created to rank in search engines for specific keywords only for the purpose of redirecting users who click on that page to a different website.

DuckDuckGo

A search engine that was founded September 28, 2008. It is often praised for its heavy focus on user privacy and a lack of filter bubbles (search personalization). DuckDuckGo relies on more than 400 sources to serve its search results, including vertical search engines, its own crawler, DuckDuckBot, Bing, and Yandex. In 2016, 4 billion searches were conducted on DuckDuckGo.

Duplicate Content

When a significant amount of content contained on one webpage matches, or is incredibly similar to, content that exists elsewhere on the same website or a completely different website.

Dwell Time

The amount of time that elapses between when a user clicks on a search result and then returns to the SERP from a website. Short dwell time (e.g., less than 5 seconds) can be an indicator of low-quality content to search engines.

E

E-commerce

The buying and selling of products, all conducted online.

Recommended reading:

- A Step-By-Step Guide to SEO for E-Commerce Websites

Editorial Link

A link that is given by one website to another without the recipient asking or paying for it.

Also known as: Natural Link.

Engagement Metrics

Methods to measure how users are interact with webpages and content. Examples of engagement metrics include:

- Click-through rate
- Conversion rate

- Bounce rate
- Time on page/site
- New vs. returning visitors
- Frequency and recency
- Dwell time

Entities

People, places, organizations, websites, events, groups, facts, and other things.

Also see: Knowledge Graph

External Link

See: Outbound Link

F

Featured Snippet

For certain queries, usually questions (i.e., who/what/where/when/why/how), Google sometimes shows a special block above the organic search results. This box contains an summary (in the form of paragraph, list, table, or video), as well as the publication date, page title, link to the webpage from which the answer originated, and URL.

Also known as: Position Zero.

Recommended reading:

- Optimize Your Site for Featured Snippets

Findability
How easily the content on a website can be discovered, both internally (by users) and externally (by search engines).

Footer Link
Links that appear in the bottom section (or "footer") of a website.

See: Website Navigation

G

Google
The search engine founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin in September 1998. Google marked a radical departure from human-edited web directories, relying on web crawling technology and a complex algorithm to analyze hyperlinking patterns to rank websites. Google is the most-used search engine in nearly every country in the world.

Google Analytics
A free web analytics program that can be used to track audience behavior, traffic acquisition sources, content performance, and much more.

Visit: Google Analytics

Google Bomb
A practice intended to make a website rank number one for a surprising or controversial search phrase. This was accomplished by having a large number of websites link to a certain webpage with specific anchor text to help it rank for that term.

For example, in 2003 President George W. Bush's White House bio ranked number one on a search for "miserable failure."

Googlebot

The web crawling system Google uses to find and add new websites and webpages to its index.

Google Dance

An outdated term for the volatile period of time during which Google updated its search index, roughly every month.

Google Hummingbird

A new Google search algorithm that was officially announced in September 2013 after it had been in use for a month. The purpose of Hummingbird was to better understand the full context of queries (i.e., semantic search), rather than certain keywords, in order to provide better results.

Google Panda Algorithm

A major Google algorithm update that initially rolled out in February 2011, it was followed by numerous subsequent updates. The goal of Google Panda was to reduce the visibility of low-value content, often produced by "content farms." In 2016, Panda became part of Google's core ranking algorithm.

Google Penguin Algorithm

A major Google algorithm that launched in April 2012, it was followed by a series of updates and refreshes. The goal of Penguin was to reduce the visibility of overly-optimized sites, or sites that excessively abused certain spammy tactics (e.g., building low-quality links, key-

word stuffing). In 2016, Penguin started running in real-time as a part of Google's core algorithm.

Google Pigeon Update

The name (given by the SEO industry, not Google) of a significant Google local search update launched July 24, 2014. The goal of Pigeon was to improve the accuracy and relevance of local searches by leveraging more traditional Google ranking signals and improving distance and locating ranking parameters.

Google RankBrain

A major Google algorithm change officially introduced in October 2015, although it had been in testing for months before this. With RankBrain, Google added machine learning to its algorithm and has been called the third most important ranking signal. In June 2016, it was revealed that RankBrain has been involved in every query and has an impact on rankings.

Google Sandbox

A theorized and debated (but never confirmed by Google) "waiting period" that prevents new websites from seeing the full benefit of their optimization efforts. Typically, this effect is witnessed most often with new sites targeting competitive keywords and can only be overcome when the site gains enough authority.

Google Search Console

Google's Search Console offers several helpful features, including the ability to monitor sites for indexing errors and site speed. These pages are also used to communicate manual action notifications.

Recommended reading:

- A Complete Guide to the Google Search Console

Google Trends

A website where you can explore data visualizations on the latest search trends, stories, and topics.

Visit: Google Trends

Google Webmaster Guidelines

Google's guidance on good website optimization practices, as well as "illicit" practices that can result in manual action. Simply:

- Make unique, valuable, and engaging websites and webpages for users, not search engines.
- Avoid tricks and techniques that deceive users and are intended only to improve search rankings.

Recommended reading:

- Google Webmaster Guidelines

Gray Hat

A supposed "gray" area between techniques that adhere to Google's Webmaster Guidelines, but then add an element that bends the rules a little.

Guest Blogging

A popular link building tactic that involves developing content for other websites in exchange for a backlink pointing at your own pages.

Also known as: Guest Posting.

H

Heading
Heading tags (H1-H6) separate content into sections, based on importance, with H1 being the most important and H6 being the least important. Headline tags should be used naturally and should incorporate your target keywords where relevant, as doing so may provide a small SEO benefit.

Headline
An H1 tag.

Head Term
A popular keyword with high search volume that is usually difficult to rank for.

Also known as: Head Keyword, Short-Tail

Hidden Text
Any text that can't be seen by a user that is intended to manipulate search rankings by loading webpages with content-rich keywords and copy. This technique is against Google's Webmaster Guidelines and can result in a manual action. For example, adding text that is:

- Too small to read.
- The same color as the background.
- Using CSS to push the text off-screen.

Hilltop Algorithm

Influenced by the HITS Algorithm, and added to Google's algorithm in 2003, Hilltop assigned "expert" status to certain websites or webpages published about a specific topic that also link to unaffiliated pages about that topic.

Recommended reading:

- Hilltop: A Search Engine based on Expert Documents (Krishna Bharat & George Mihaila)

HITS Algorithm

Hyperlink-Induced Topic Search is a link analysis algorithm that assesses a value not just based on content and inbound links (authorities), but also its outbound links (hubs).

Recommended reading:

- Authoritative Sources in a Hyperlinked Environment (Jon Kleinberg)

Homepage

The default, or introductory webpage, of a website.

.htaccess File

A server configuration file that can be used to rewrite and redirect URLs.

HTML

Stands for Hypertext Markup Language. HTML tags are specific code elements that can be used to improve the effectiveness of SEO for webpages and websites.

HTTP
The Hypertext Transfer Protocol is how data is transferred from a computer server to a web browser.

HTTPS
Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure uses a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) to encrypt data transferred between a website and web browser. HTTPS is a minor Google ranking factor.

Hub Page
An authoritative central resource (e.g., page or article), dedicated to a specific topic (keyword), that is continually updated and linked to, and also links out to topically-relevant webpages.

I

Inbound Link
A link to a webpage that originates from an external website. For example, if Search Engine Journal were to link to Google, that would count as an inbound link on Google's side; if Google were to link to Search Engine Journal, that would be an inbound link on SEJ's side.

Index
The database search engines use to store and retrieve information gathered during the crawling process.

Indexability
How easily a search engine bot can understand and add a webpage to its index.

Indexed Page

A webpage that has been discovered by a crawler, has been added to a search engine index, and is eligible to appear in search results for relevant queries.

Information Architecture

How a website is organized and where various content and navigational elements are located on webpages.

Information Retrieval

The process of searching for information (e.g., text, images, video) from a large database and then presenting the most relevant information to an end user.

Internal Link

See: Website Navigation

IP Address

An Internet Protocol Address. IP addresses can be:

- **Shared:** Numerous websites share an address within one server or a group of servers (a.k.a., virtual hosting).
- **Dedicated:** A website has its own address.

Neither will help you rank better; however, a dedicated IP address can increase site speed.

J

JavaScript (JS)

A programming language that makes it possible to dynamically insert content, links, meta data, or other elements, on websites. JavaScript can potentially make it difficult for search engine bots to crawl and index webpages and increase the time it takes for webpage to load for users.

K

Keyword

The word, words, or phrase that an SEO professional or marketer targets for the purpose of matching and ranking for what users are searching for. The words used on webpages can help search engines determine which pages are the most relevant to show in organic results when a searcher enters a query. Keywords usually represent topics, ideas, or questions.

Also known as: Keyphrase.

Keyword Cannibalization

A type of self-competition that occurs when multiple pages from one website rank for the same query on a SERP. This can result in a lower CTR, diminished authority, and lower conversion rates than from having one consolidated webpage that ranks well.

Recommended reading:

- How to Identify & Eliminate Keyword Cannibalization to Boost Your SEO

Keyword Density

How often a word or phrase appears within the content of a webpage. At best, this unproven concept is outdated, if ever really mattered to search engines. There is no ideal percentage that will help a webpage rank better.

Keyword Research

The process of discovering any relevant topics, subjects, and terms searchers enter into search engines, as well as the volume and competition level of those terms. This practice is made possible by a variety of free and paid tools.

Keyword Stuffing

Adding irrelevant keywords, or repeating keywords beyond what is natural, to a webpage in the hopes of increasing search rankings. This spam tactic is against Google's Webmaster Guidelines and can result in a manual action.

Knowledge Graph

An entity database Google uses to surface facts and information on people, places, and things (a.k.a., entities) – and their connections – in a Knowledge Panel or carousel at the top of search results on relevant queries.

Knowledge Panel

A box that appears at the top of, or on the right rail (desktop only), of Page 1 of Google's search results for relevant queries. This panel contains facts and information on people, places, and things, as well as links to related websites or Google searches.

KPI

Stands for key performance indicator. A measurement method businesses use to gauge whether marketing and business objectives, targets, and goals are being reached.

L

Landing Page

- Any webpage that a visitor can navigate to.
- A standalone webpage that is designed to capture leads or generate conversions.

Latent Semantic Indexing (LSI)

An information retrieval method designed to help search engines identify the correct context of a word. LSI doesn't play a useful role in SEO today.

See: Google Latent Semantic Indexing

Lead

A person who may or may not be interested in your product(s) and/or service(s). A lead willingly shares their email address (and usually other personal or contact information) in exchange for something they deem of value from the website.

Link

A connection between two websites built using HTML code. A link enables users to navigate to websites, social networks, and apps. Links play a critical role in how search engines evaluate and rank websites.

Also known as: Backlink.

Link Bait

Intentionally provocative content that is meant to grab people's attention and attract links from other websites.

Link Building

A process designed to get other trusted and relevant websites to link to your website to help improve your organic search rank and visibility. Link building can be done by:

- Conducting outreach to media outlets, bloggers, influencers, and webmasters.
- Attracting editorial links naturally, by publishing various types of high-quality or sensational content.
- Paying for them. For example, you can obtain links via sponsored content, paid reviews, or paying for a specific type of link to appear on another website.
- Forging partnerships.
- Manually. For instance, you link together various properties you manage or own, or add your site to online directories or review sites.

Link Equity

The value of inbound links, in terms of relevance, authority, and trust.

Link Farm

When a group of websites link to each other, usually using automated programs, in the hopes of artificially increasing search rankings. A spam tactic.

Also known as: Link Network, Blog Network, Private Blog Network

Link Juice
A term you should never use in public or online.

Did you mean...: Authority or PageRank

Link Profile
Every type of link that points to a particular website. The quality of a website's link profile can vary widely, depending on how they were acquired and the anchor text used.

Link Velocity
How quickly (or slowly) a website accumulates links. A sudden increase in link velocity could potentially be a sign of spamming, or could be due to viral marketing or doing something newsworthy (either intentionally or unintentionally).

Log File
A file that records users' information, such as IP addresses, type of browser, Internet Service Provider (ISP), date/time stamp, referring/exit pages, and number of clicks.

Log File Analysis
The process of exploring the data contained in a log file to identify trends, administer the site, track user's movement around the site, gather demographic information, and understand how search bots are crawling the website.

Long-Tail Keyword
- Highly specific multiple-word terms that often demonstrate higher purchase intent.
- Less popular keywords that have low search volume that are usually easier to rank for.

M

Machine Learning

A subset of Artificial Intelligence in which a system uses data to learn and adjust a complex process without human intervention.

Manual Action

Google's term for a penalty. Google will take manual action on a website after a human reviewer (i.e., a Google employee) manually reviews a website to confirm whether it has failed to comply with Google's Webmaster guidelines. Penalized websites can either be demoted or removed entirely from search results. Manual actions can be assessed to the entire website or just certain webpages.

Meta Description

A tag that can be added to the "head" section of an HTML document. It acts as a description of a webpage's content. This content isn't used in ranking algorithms, but is often displayed as the "snippet" that appears in the search results. Accurate and engaging descriptions can increase organic click-through rate.

Meta Keywords

A tag that can be added to the "head" section of an HTML document. Adding a bunch of keywords here won't help you rank – search engine algorithms have ignored this tag for ranking purposes for years due to abuse (in the form of keyword stuffing).

Meta Tags
Information that appears in the HTML source code of a webpage to describe its contents to search engines. The title tag and meta description are the most commonly used types of meta tags in SEO.

Metric
A way to measure activity and performance in order to assess the success (or lack thereof) of an SEO initiative.

N

Natural Link
See: Editorial Link

Negative SEO
A rare but malicious practice where webspam techniques are used to harm the search rankings of another website, usually a competitor.

Recommended reading:

- 7 Tips to Protect Your Site From Negative SEO

Niche
A specific market or area of interest consisting of a small group of highly-passionate people.

Noarchive Tag
A meta tag that tells search engines not to store a cached copy of your page.

Nofollow Attribute

A meta tag that tells search engines not to follow one specific outbound link. This is done in cases when a website doesn't want to pass authority to another webpage or because it's a paid link. The nofollow attribute looks like this:

Anchor text goes here

Noindex Tag

A meta tag that tells search engines not to index a specific webpage in its index.

Nosnippet Tag

A meta tag that tells search engines not to show a description with your listing.

"(not provided)"

After search engines moved to secure search in 2011, keyword data was removed from Google Analytics, replaced with "(not provided)" – thus making it impossible to know which queries were responsible for visitors finding a website.

Recommended reading:

- Not Provided: A Complete Roundup

O

Off-Page SEO

Demand generation and brand awareness activities that take place outside of a website. In addition to link building, promotion tactics can

include social media marketing, content marketing, email marketing, influencer marketing, and even offline marketing channels (e.g., TV, radio, billboards).

On-Page SEO

These activities all take place within a website. In addition to publishing relevant, high-quality content, on-page SEO includes optimizing HTML code (e.g., title tags, meta tags), information architecture, website navigation, and URL structure.

Organic Search

The natural, or unpaid, listings that appear on a SERP. Organic search results, which are analyzed and ranked by algorithms, are designed to give users the most relevant result based on their query.

Orphan Page

Any webpage that is not linked to by any other pages on that website.

Outbound Link

A link that directs visitors to a page on a different website than the one they are currently on.

P

PageRank

According to Google: "PageRank is the measure of the importance of a page based on the incoming links from other pages. In simple terms, each link to a page on your site from another site adds to your site's PageRank. Not all links are equal." The algorithm was named after Google co-founder Larry Page.

Recommended reading:

- The PageRank Citation Ranking: Bringing Order to the Web by Larry Page
- The Anatomy of a Search Engine by Sergey Brin and Larry Page

Page Speed

The amount of time it takes for a webpage to completely load. Page speed is ranking factor.

Pageview

A webpage is loaded in a browser.

Paid Search

Pay-per-click advertisements that appear above (and often below) the organic results on search engines.

PBN

Stands for Private Blog Network.

See: Link Farm.

PDF

Stands for Portable Document Format file. PDFs can contain text, images, links, videos, and other elements.

Recommended reading:

- 10 Tips to Make Your PDFs SEO Friendly

Penalty

See: Manual Action

Persona

A fictionalized representation of an ideal website visitor or customer – their demographics, behavior, needs, motivations, and goals – all based on actual data.

Also known as: Buyer Persona, Marketing Persona

Personalization

When search engines use search history, web browsing history, location, and relationships to create a set of search results tailored to a specific user.

PHP

Hypertext Preprocessor is a scripting language used to create dynamic content on webpages.

Piracy

Search engines aim to reduce the organic search rankings of content that infringes on copyright. Google introduced a filter in 2012 that reduces the visibility of sites reported for numerous DMCA-related takedown requests.

Recommended reading:

- An update to our search algorithms (Google)

Pogo-sticking

When, after entering a query, a searcher bounces back and forth between a SERP and the pages listed in those search results.

Also see: Dwell time

Position

See: Rank

PPC (Pay Per Click)

A type of advertising where advertisers are charged a certain amount (usually determined by bid, relevance, account history, and competition) every time a user clicks on the ad. Combining PPC and SEO can result in more SERP real estate, clicks, and conversions. Also, PPC data can inform your SEO strategy, and the reverse is also true.

Q

QDF

Stands for query deserves freshness, where a search engine might decide to show newer webpages in search results (rather than older pages) if a particular search term is trending, perhaps because a news event has resulted in a surge in searches on that topic.

Recommended reading:

- Google Keeps Tweaking Its Search Engine (New York Times)

Quality Content

Content that helps you successfully achieve business or marketing goals (e.g., driving organic traffic or social shares, earning top search rankings, generating leads/sales).

Quality Link

An inbound link that originates from an authoritative, relevant, or trusted website.

Query
The word, words, or phrase that a user enters into a search engine.

Also known as: A search.

R

Rank
Where a webpage appears within the organic search results for a specific query.

Ranking Factor
An individual component which contributes to a complex series of algorithms that determine where webpages should appear with the organic search results for a specific query. For years, Google has said that its algorithms "rely on more than 200 unique signals" to help users find the most relevant webpage or answer.

Also known as: Ranking Signal.

Reciprocal Links
When two websites agree to exchange links to one another.

Redirect
A technique that sends a user (or search engine) who requested one webpage to a different (but equally relevant) webpage. There are two types of redirects:

301: Permanent
302: Temporary

Referrer
URL data that identifies the source of a user's webpage request.

Reinclusion
The process of asking a search engine to return a website or web-page(s) to its search index after de-indexing.

Relevance
A way search engines measure how closely connected the content of a webpage is aligned to match the context of a search query.

Reputation Management
The practice of crafting a positive online perception of a brand or person – including in search results and on social media – by minimizing the visibility of negative mentions.

Also known as: Online Reputation Management, Public Relations

Responsive Website
A website designed to automatically adapt to a user's screen size, whether it's being viewed on a desktop or mobile device.

Rich Snippet
Structured data can be added to the HTML of a website to provide contextual information to the search engines during crawling. This information can then be displayed in the SERPs, resulting in an enhanced listing, known as a rich snippet.

Recommended reading:

- What Is Schema Markup & Why It's Important for SEO
- Getting Started With Schema Markup for SEO

robots.txt

The Robots Exclusion Protocol (or Standard) is a text file, accessible at the root of a website, that tells search engine crawlers which areas of a website should be ignored.

Return on Investment (ROI)

A way to measure the performance of SEO activities. This is calculated by dividing how much revenue you earned via organic search by the cost of the total investment, then multiplying by 100.

S

Schema

A form of microdata which, once added to a webpage, creates an enhanced description (commonly known as a rich snippet), which appears in search results.

Scrape

A technique used to copy website content or information using a computer program or script. Search engines, such as Google, scrape data in order to build a searchable index of websites.

Also known as: Web scraping.

Search Engine

A computer program that enables users to enter a query in order to retrieve information (e.g., files, websites, webpages) from that program's index (i.e., a web search engine, such as Google, indexes websites, webpages, and files found on the World Wide Web). A

search index is built and updated using a crawler, with items being analyzed and ranked by a series of algorithms.

Also see: Baidu, Bing, DuckDuckGo, Google, Yahoo, Yandex

Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

An umbrella term for increasing a website's visibility in search engine results pages, encompassing both paid and organic activities.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

The process of optimizing a website – as well as all the content on that website – so it will appear in prominent positions in the organic results of search engines. SEO requires an understanding of how search engines work, what people search for (i.e., keywords and keyphrases), and why people search (intent). Successful SEO makes a site appealing to users and search engines. It is a combination of technical (on-page SEO) and marketing (off-page SEO).

See: On-Page SEO, Off-Page SEO

Search Engine Results Page (SERP)

The page search engines display to users after conducting a search. Typically, search engines show about 10 organic search results, sorted by relevance. Depending on the query, other search features may be shown, including:

- AdWords Ads (above and below the organic search results)
- Featured snippets (a.k.a., Position Zero)
- Images
- Knowledge panels
- Local Pack (with map)
- News

- Related questions
- Related searches
- Shopping results
- Sitelinks
- Tweets
- Videos

Also known as: SERPs, when referring to multiple search engine results pages.

Search History

Search engines track every search users conduct (text and voice), every webpage visited, and every ad clicked on. Search engines may use this data to personalize the results for signed in users.

Also known as: Web Browsing History.

Share of Voice

How many impressions a brand receives in the SERPs for search terms when compared to the total impressions that the brand's competitors receive for those same search terms.

Sitelinks

Up to six algorithmically-chosen links that appear below the listing for the same website of a top-ranked organic search result. Pages can be blocked from appearing as sitelinks within the Search Console or Bing Webmaster Tools.

Also known as: Deep Links (Bing).

Sitemap
A list of pages on a website. There are two types of sitemaps:

- **HTML:** This type of sitemap, typically organized by topics, helps site users navigate a website.
- **XML:** This type of sitemap provides crawlers with a list of webpages on a website.

Sitewide Links
A link that appears on every page of a website, typically in a sidebar or footer of blogs or websites that use templates.

Social Media
Platforms (websites and apps) where users can interact with each other, as well as create, share, and consume content.

Social Signal
Any factors that demonstrate authority and influence on popular social networking websites. For example, the social authority of a user on Twitter.

Although many correlation studies have indicated that socials signals impact rankings (e.g., number of Likes/shares a piece of content receives), Google has publicly stated that social signals are not a direct ranking factor. Popular sites that have a lot of social media engagement tend to rank well for other reasons.

Spam
See: Webspam

Spider
See: Bot

Split Testing

A controlled experiment used to compare at least two webpages to measure the effects of a different variable on conversions. After the pages are shown for a long enough period of time to site visitors to gather an adequate amount of performance data, a "winner" can be declared.

Also known as: A/B Testing.

SSL Certificate

A digital certificate used for website identity authentication and to encrypt information sent to the server using Secure Sockets Layer technology.

Status Codes

The response codes sent by a server whenever a link is clicked, a webpage or file is requested, or a form is submitted. Common HTTP status codes important to SEO:

- 200 (OK)
- 404 (Not Found)
- 410 (Gone)
- 500 (Internal Service Error)
- 503 (Service Unavailable)
- Stop Word

A frequently used word. For example: a, at, for, is, of, on, the. Search engines have, in the past, ignored these words to save time/resources when indexing. Search engines have evolved greatly since the early days, and stop words sometimes are meaningful, so this isn't something to worry much about for SEO purposes.

Recommended reading:

- New Google Approach to Indexing and Stopwords by Bill Slawski
- How Google Might Ignore Insignificant Terms in Queries by Bill Slawski

Subdomain

A separate section that exists within a main domain. For example: http://jobs.searchenginejournal.com/ is a subdomain that exists within the main domain of https://www.searchenginejournal.com/

T

Taxonomy

Organizing and categorizing a website to maximize content findability and help users complete desired on-site tasks.

Time on Page

An inexact estimation of how long a user spent looking at a particular webpage. Pages with high exit rates can greatly skew this data.

Title Tag

An HTML meta tag that acts as the title of a webpage. Typically, the title tag is the title search engines use when displaying search listings, so it should include strategic and relevant keywords for that specific page. The title tag should also be written so it makes sense to people and attracts the most clicks. Typically, title tags should be less than 65 characters.

Top-Level Domain (TLD)

The extension of a given web address. These include:

- .com
- .org
- .net
- .info

There are also many more industry and country-specific options. See:

Also known as: gTLD (Generic Top-Level Domain); Domain Extension.

Traffic

The people (and sometimes bots) who visit your website.

Trust

Generally applies to the history of a domain (e.g., whether it cites or features expert sources, builds a positive reputation, adheres to Webmaster Guidelines).

TrustRank

A link analysis technique used to separate good "reputable seed pages" from web spam.

Recommended reading:

- Combating Web Spam with TrustRank by Zoltan Gyongyi, Hector Garcia-Molina, and Jan Pedersen

U

User-Generated Content (UGC)

Any form of content – videos, blog posts, comments, reviews, etc. – that is created by users or customers.

Universal Search

When search engines pull data from multiple speciality databases to display on the same SERP. Results can include images, videos, news, shopping, and other types of results.

Also known as: Blended Search.

Unnatural Link

Any links Google identifies as suspicious, deceptive, or manipulative. An unnatural link can result in Google taking manual action on your website.

URL

A uniform resource locator is the specific string of characters that lead to a resource on the web. The term URL is usually short-hand for the letter-based web address (e.g., www.searchenginejournal.com) entered into a browser to access a webpage.

URL Parameter

The values added to a URL in order to track where traffic comes from (i.e., which link someone clicked on to discover your website or webpage).

Here's an example of a URL parameter (bolded):

https://www.searchenginejournal.com/example-article-url/999999/?utm_source=share-back-traffic&utm_medium=desktop-share-button&utm_campaign=twitter

Also known as: Query String.

Usability

How easy it is for people to use your website. Site design, browser compatibility, disability enhancements, and other factors all play a role in improving usability and making your site accessible for as many people as possible.

User Agent

Web crawling software.

User Experience (UX)

The overall feeling users are left with after interacting with a brand, its online presence, and its product/services.

V

Vertical Search

A specialized type of search where the focus is only on a specific topic, type of content, or media. For example, YouTube (video), Amazon (shopping), Kayak (travel), Yelp (business reviews).

Virtual Assistant

A bot that uses natural language processing to perform tasks, such as conducting web searches. For instance, Apple's Siri or Microsoft's Cortana.

Visibility
The prominence and positions a website occupies within the organic search results.

Voice Search
A type of voice-activated technology that allows users to speak into a device (usually a smartphone) to ask questions or conduct an online search.

W

Webpage
A document that exists on the World Wide Web and can be viewed by web browsers.

Website
A collection of webpages hosted together on the World Wide Web.

Website Navigation
How a website connects its webpages to help visitors navigate that site. Website navigation comes in a few different forms, including:

- **Main Navigation:** The major topics or subjects your website is focused on. For instance, on SEJ our Main Navigation consists of SEO, News, PPC, Content, and Social.
- **Secondary Navigation:** Topics related to the main navigation. For instance, on SEJ secondary navigation includes links to webinars, podcasts, guides, SEJ Summit, and other topics.
- **Footer Navigation:** Typically this includes links to pages

that contain important informational resources about a brand or business. These pages usually aren't important for ranking purposes. For example, SEJ's footer navigation links to our About Us page, privacy policy, and our various social profiles.

- **Related Links:** This area usually appears in the right rail or beneath content. It might be called "Most Popular," "Most Read," or "Trending Now."
- **Content Links:** Links that appear within your main content (e.g., articles, landing pages).
- **Breadcrumb Navigation:** This type is less popular than it once was. Essentially, each webpage shows a "trail" to help quickly tell visitors where they are on your site. For example: Home > SEO > Link Building > What Is Website Navigation?

Also known as: Internal Links (or Internal Linking), Site Architecture

Webspam

Any methods that exist solely to deceive or manipulate search engine algorithms and/or users.

Also known as: Black Hat SEO, Spam, Spamdexing, Search Spam

White Hat

Tactics that comply with Google's Webmaster Guidelines.

Word Count

The total number of words that appear within the copy of content. Too little (or thin) content can be a signal of low-quality to search engines.

WordPress

A popular blogging and content management system.

X

XML
Extensible Markup Language is a markup language search engines use to understand website data.

XML Sitemap
A list of all the pages on a website that search engines need to know.

Y

Yahoo
Yahoo was born in April 1994 and was an incredibly popular search engine and portal in the '90s. Yahoo search was mostly human-powered, at least until June 2000 when a then unknown search engine called Google began powering Yahoo's organic search results. That deal continued until 2004, when Yahoo started using its own search technology. Since 2010, Yahoo's organic search results have been powered by Microsoft's search engine, Bing.

Yandex
The most popular search engine in Russia, Yandex was founded September 23, 1997 by Arkady Volozh and Ilya Segalovich.

CHAPTER 4

WHY SEARCH — AND SEO — IS IMPORTANT

WRITTEN BY
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." 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.

In order 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.

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.

The 3 Main Tenants of Any Marketing Strategy or Campaign

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 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.

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.

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 up front 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.

CHAPTER 5

60+ MIND-BLOWING STATS ABOUT SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

WRITTEN BY
DANNY GOODWIN

Search engine optimization (SEO) is essential because organic search is arguably the most valuable marketing channel there is.

Every company that operates online needs SEO. Period.

Small. Medium. Large.

Startup. Local business. Global brand.

Whenever someone is using a search engine to find information that's relevant to your product, service, or website, you need to be there.

Yet, there remains a constant struggle, to justify the value of SEO.

Why? In part, the undeniable proof of SEO's value is scattered across a handful of websites.

This post brings together all the data you need to know about organic traffic, industry spending and value, search behavior, Google, and more.

Here are more than 60 mind-blowing statistics you need to know about search engine optimization.

Organic Traffic Statistics

- **32.5 percent:** The average traffic share the first Google organic search result gets. (Chitika)

- **91.5 percent:** The average traffic share generated by the sites listed on the first Google search results page. (Chitika)

- **1,890 words:** The average content length of a Google first page result. (Backlinko)

- **51 percent** of all website traffic comes from organic search, **10 percent** from paid search, **5 percent** for social, and **34 percent** from all other sources. (BrightEdge)

- Over **40 percent** of revenue is captured by organic traffic. (BrightEdge)

- **73 billion:** The estimated number of phone calls that will be generated from mobile search alone by the end of 2018. (Acquisio)

- **8.5:** The average number of organic mobile search results that Google shows on page 1. It previously consisted of 10 "blue links" in its search results. (SearchMetrics)

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

Industry/Business Spending Statistics

- **$65 billion:** The amount that companies spent on SEO in 2016. (Borrell Associates)

- **$72.02 billion:** The estimated amount brands and agencies in the United States will shell out for SEO services in 2018. The amount is forecasted to rise up to $79.27 billion by 2020. (Borrell Associates)

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

- **77.8 percent** of US search ad revenues for 2017 is expected to be earned by Google. (eMarketer)

Local Search Behavior Statistics

- **80 percent** of Google search interest in "near me" came from mobile in Q4 2014. (Think with Google)

- **4 in 5 consumers** use search engines to find local information. (Google/Ipsos MediaCT/Purchased)

- **18 percent** of local smartphone searches led to a purchase within a day. (Google/Ipsos MediaCT/Purchased)

- **88 percent** of users search on a smartphone, while 84 percent search on a computer/tablet. (Google/Ipsos MediaCT Purchased)

- **54 percent** of smartphone users search for business hours, 53 percent search for directions to a local store. (Google/Ipsos MediaCT/Purchased)

- **4 in 5 consumers** want ads customized to their city, zip code, or immediate surroundings. (Google/Ipsos MediaCT/Purchased)

- **>70 percent** of consumers say it's important to have directions and a call button in ads. (Google/Ipsos MediaCT/Purchased)

- **2.1X:** The increase in mobile searches for "stores open now" or "food open now" in the past year. (Think with Google)

- **1.3:** The number of times mobile searches for "where to buy/find/get" increased in the past year. (Think with Google)

- **65 percent** of people use their phone in their I-want-to-buy moments. (Think with Google)

- **76 percent** of people who search on their smartphones for something nearby visit a business within a day and 28 percent of those searches for something nearby result in a purchase. (Think with Google)

User Search Behavior Statistics

- **51.3 percent** of internet users worldwide operate mobile and tablet devices, while 48.7 percent use desktops. (StatCounter)

- **15 percent** of the millions of active US web users performed at least one or more searches in a day, 45 percent performed at least one query in a week, and 68 percent performed one or more queries that month. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **79 percent** of people took a relevant action on their phone prior to making a purchase. (Think with Google)

- **39 percent** of purchasers were influenced by a relevant search. (Think with Google)

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

- **~8 percent** of search queries are phrased as questions (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **8 percent** of queries on Google result in the searcher changing their search terms without clicking any results. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **21 percent** of searches lead to more than one click on Google's results. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **8 percent** 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). (Jumpshot/Moz)

Link Building Statistics

- **Over 1,000 words:** The average length of long form content that receives more shares and links than shorter form content. (Buzzsumo/Moz)

- **41 percent** of large companies consider link building as the most difficult SEO tactic. (Ascend2/Conductor)

Google Statistics

- **130 trillion:** How many webpages Google is aware of as of 2016. (Google via Search Engine Land)

- **~2 trillion:** The estimated number of searches Google is handling per year worldwide. That breaks down to 63,000 searches per second; 3.8 million searches per minute; 228 million searches per hour; 5.5 billion searches per day; and 167 billion searches per month. (Search Engine Land)

- **1 billion+:** How many people use Google search every month. (Google via Business Insider)

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

- **1,600+:** How many improvements to search Google launched in 2016. (Google)

- **81.12 percent:** The total search engine market share that Google currently holds. (Net Market Share)

- **15 percent:** The percentage of daily queries Google sees that have never been searched for previously. (Google)

- **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.) (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **30 percent** of all mobile searches are related to location. (Think with Google)

- **66 percent** of distinct search queries resulted in one or more clicks on Google's results, while 34 percent of searches get no clicks at all. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **3.4 percent** of distinct search queries in Google resulted in a click on an AdWords (paid) ad. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **0.9 percent** of Google.com search results get a click on Google Maps. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **~0.5 percent** of clicks on Google search results go to links in the Knowledge Graph. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **3 percent** of clicks on Google search results go to image blocks. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **~0.23 percent** of clicks on Google search results go to Twitter block results. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **1.8 percent** of clicks on Google search results go to YouTube. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **0.16 percent** of clicks on Google search results go to personalized Gmail/Google Mail results. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **0.55 percent** of clicks on Google search results go to Google Shopping results. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **11.8 percent** of clicks from distinct Google searches result in a click on a Google property, i.e. YouTube, Google Maps, Gmail, Google Books, the Google Play Store on mobile, and Google+. (Jumpshot/Moz)

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

- **25 percent** of all search volume happens outside the top 100 million keywords. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **40.9 percent** of Google searches done on mobile devices result in an organic click, 2 percent in a paid click, and 57.1 percent in no click at all. (Jumpshot/Moz)

- **62.2 percent** of Google searches done on desktop devices result in an organic click, 2.8 percent in a paid click, and 35 percent in no click. (Jumpshot/Moz)

SEO & Other Marketing Channels

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

- **45 percent** of all companies say content marketing is 'highly integrated' with their SEO strategy. (Econsultancy)

CHAPTER 6

MEET THE MAJOR SEARCH ENGINES

WRITTEN BY
DAVE DAVIES

While we battle daily to create an uptick in our analytics when we're 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.

Google

With over 75 percent 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 $650 billion.

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 more expensive than on other sites.

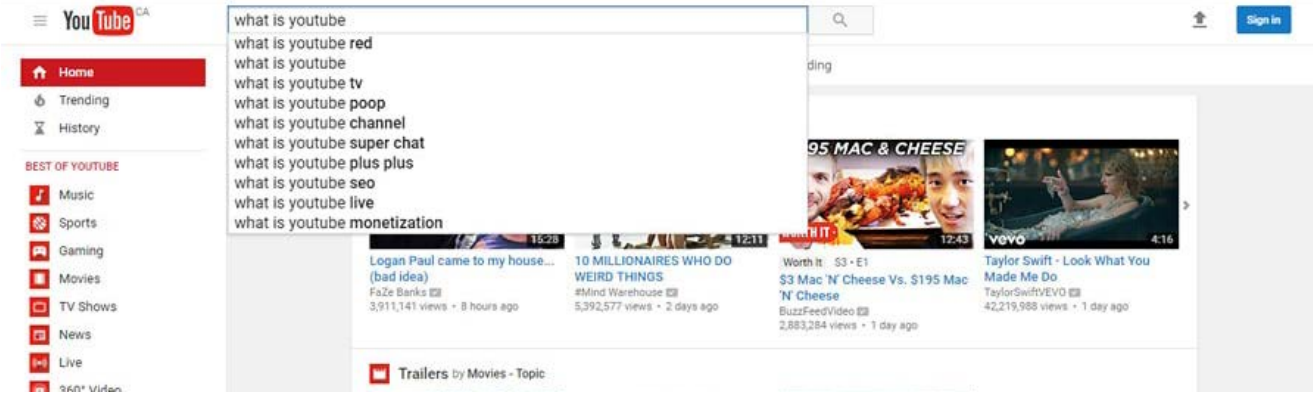
Further, many argue that Google is moving searchers away from clicking through to websites and toward fulfilling their needs and intents directly on the Google website via featured snippets, reduced numbers of organic results on the first page, increases in paid search results, etc. making the competition more costly with less potential reward.

Optimization Tips

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

- 4 Most Important Ranking Factors, According to SEO Industry Studies
- A Beginner's Guide to SEO in a Machine Learning World
- Why Google AdWords Isn't Working for You

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 1.5 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 but considering that over 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute, it can be a challenge to stand out.

With paid opportunities under the Google AdWords system, it can also get pricey to compete on that front.

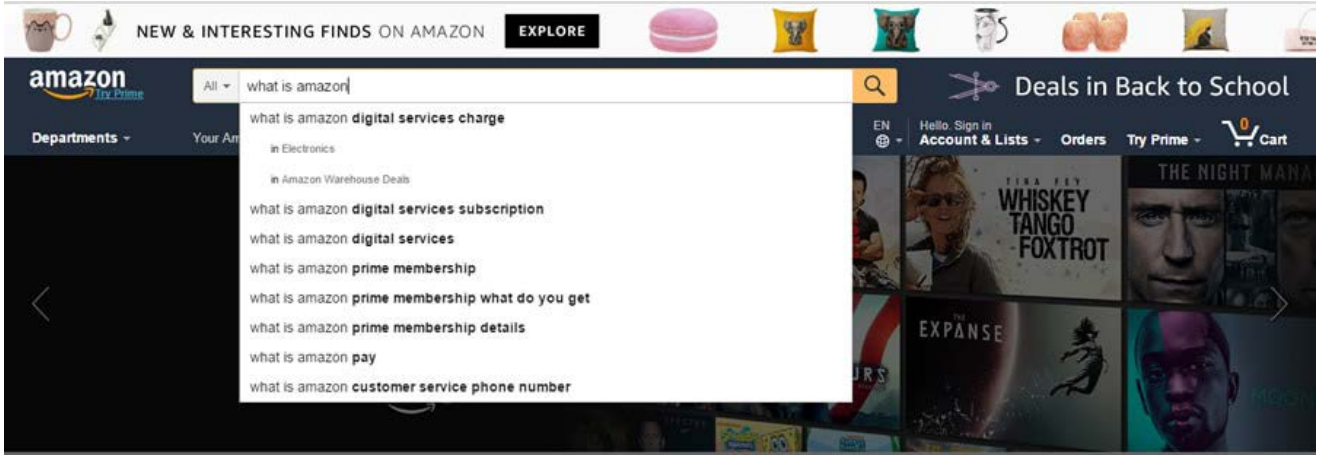
That said, if you can get the attention of your target demographic on YouTube with amazing campaigns such as those by GoPro or Blendtec, you can get incredible exposure inexpensively.

Optimization Tips

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

- How To Rank YouTube Videos
- How Video Rankings Differ On Google And YouTube
- How Deep Learning Powers Video Search

Amazon



Amazon was launched in 1995 and, thus, is considered as one of the first large companies to sell goods on the internet. 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 more than half of all online shopping searches began not at Google but at Amazon. 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, like on 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. 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?

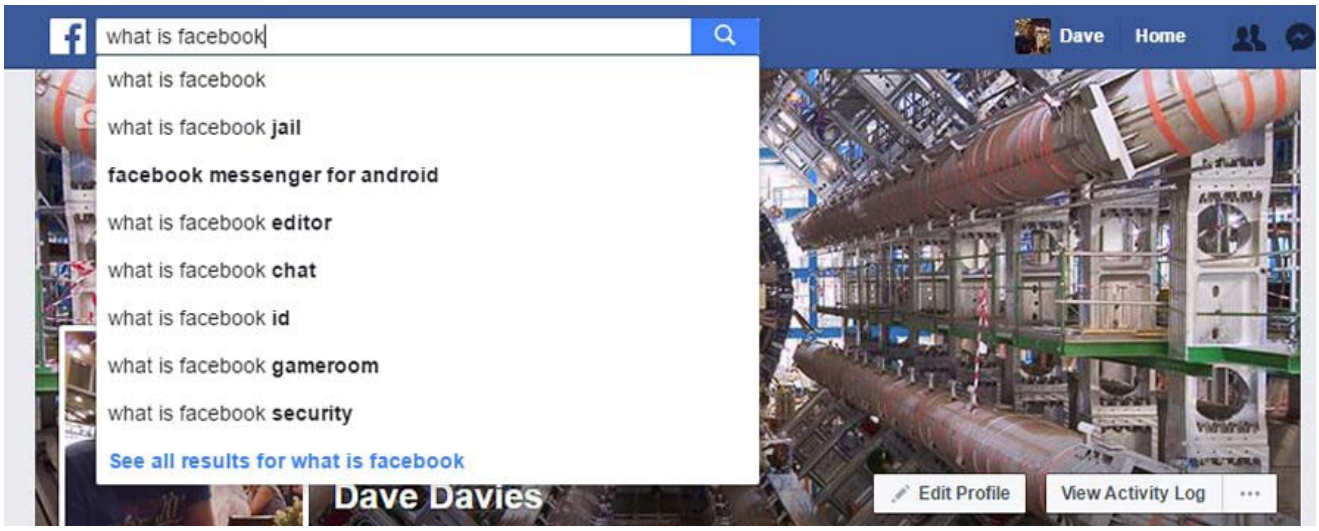
It's too early to tell right now how Alexa will impact searches and sales but this is an area to watch. To prepare yourself for the possible scenario where Amazon wins (or at least does well in the personal assistant race), the third article below discusses it further.

Optimization Tips

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

- How To Kick Ass at Amazon SEO
- How To Rank Products On Amazon
- The Complete Guide to Amazon Alexa SEO

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, last year it surpassed 2 billion searches/day putting it ahead of Bing. With over 1.5 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 AdWords but still pricey. Some can argue that the traffic isn't as targeted.

Therein is another pro-and-con: while traffic via the AdWords 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 on 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.

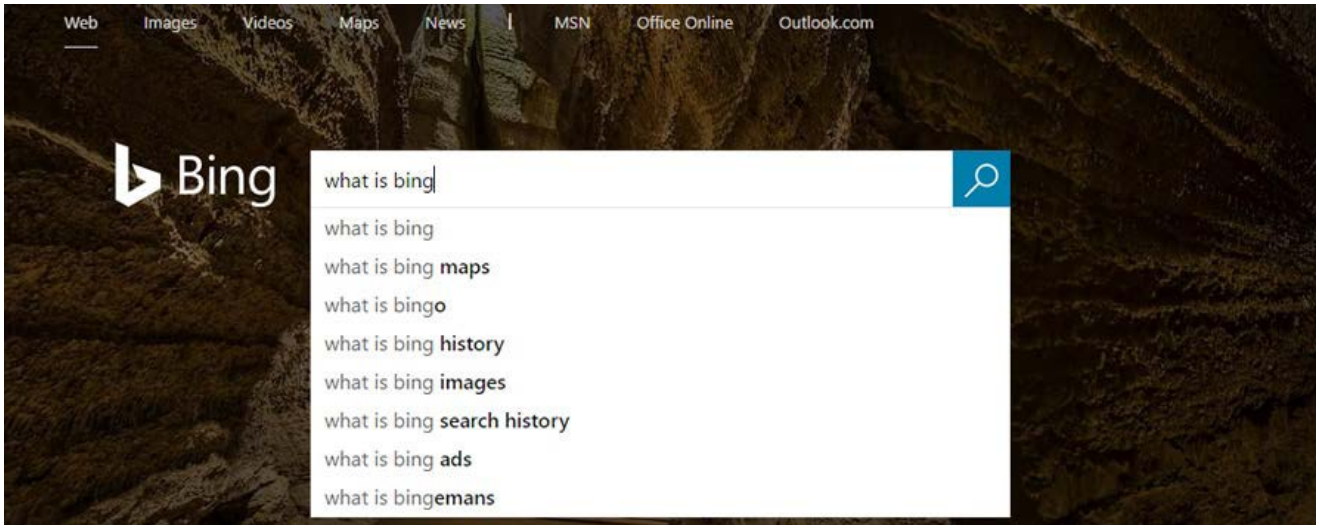
This involves ensuring you have brand loyalty and are consistently producing good content as consistent engagement is the key to ranking organically.

Optimization Tips

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

- 10 Facebook Ad Optimization Hacks for Massive Success
- 6 Tips to Optimize Your Facebook Page
- 7 changes by Facebook that make it a real local search player

Bing



Bing replaced MSN Search as Microsoft's answer to Google in 2009. Launching with just 8.4 percent 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 percent. In 2016, they added AOL to the sites they provide search results for.

These additions made them a real contender and the latest data from Microsoft indicates they are now powering 33 percent of U.S. searches.

Bing has been making a lot of plays recently in the advertising space in their effort to catch up with Google, adding a number of features to Bing Ads – ranging from improving their AdWords import functionality to keyword match changes, as well as reporting improvement to bring their systems up-to-standard and help managers already familiar with AdWords to work in their system.

Pros & Cons

While 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, making them easier to understand, predict, and optimize for. While this won't be an indefinite state, it's likely to be true for the next couple years.

Due to the lower traffic, there are less SEOs 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, however, Bing is clearly catching up quickly. Due to the lower volume and ease of setup from existing AdWords campaigns, the lower traffic can easily be made up for by the lower CPC.

Note: This isn't to say to simply copy your AdWords campaigns into Bing 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 speedup the setup process.

Optimization Tips

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

- How Is Bing SEO Different Than Google SEO?
- 7 Tips To Optimize our Bing Shopping Campaign
- PPC strategy for small businesses

Baidu

Baidu was founded in 2000 and is the dominant search engine in China with over 82 percent market share where Google comes in at 0.61 percent and Bing at 0.37 percent.

They're making huge investments into AI and setting the structure many others will have to follow or at least contend with in regards to deciding which companies (like NVIDIA) will have the monetary and competitive advantages.

Outside of China, Baidu holds little influence – but within the country, it's powering 3.3 billion searches per day.

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 2 years of Mandarin in high school").

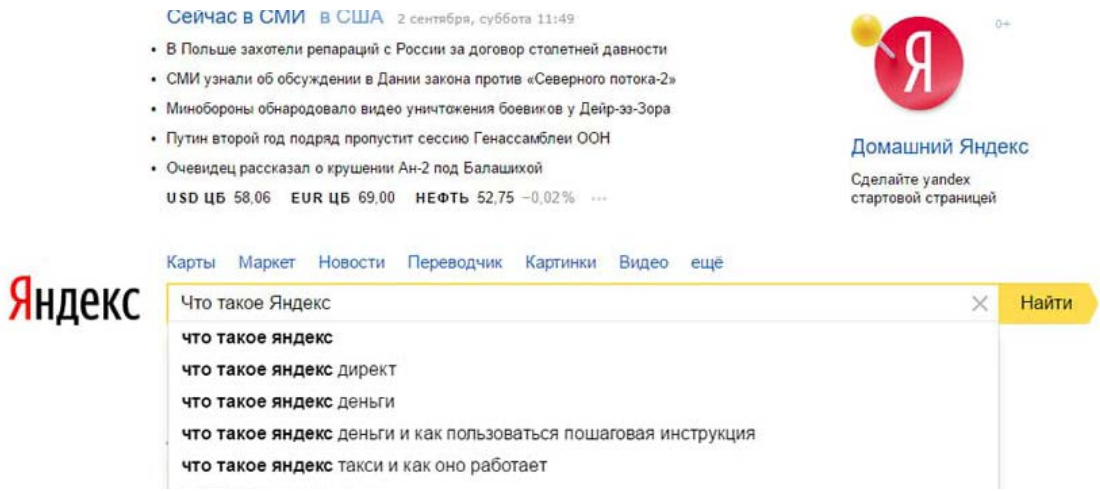
Overall, the organic algorithms are more simplistic than Google's and their paid systems can be easier once you're setup but that setup is more difficult if you reside outside China.

Optimization Tips

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

- Four Unique Features Found In Baidu Paid Search Management
- Baidu PPC Versus Google AdWords: 8 Key Differences
- An Introduction to International SEO

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 iN-DEXer." 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 more than half 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 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 $0.80 on Yandex. Of course, that's an English word but even the Russian "казино" is only $1.02.

Optimization Tips

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

- 9 Biggest Differences Between Yandex & Google SEO
- Optimizing Your Site For Yandex
- Yandex Online PPC Courses

CHAPTER 7

HOW PEOPLE SEARCH: CLASSIFYING & UNDERSTANDING USER INTENT

WRITTEN BY
DAN TAYLOR

In Google's earlier days, the search engine relied heavily on text data and backlinks in order to establish rankings through periodic 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. 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.

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 article will explain not only the different categorizations of search intent, but also how intent relates to the content we produce, and how the search engines deal with intent.

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. That a user is specifically looking to the find information relating to the keyword(s) they have used, or that they are 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 are just two examples of these.

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.

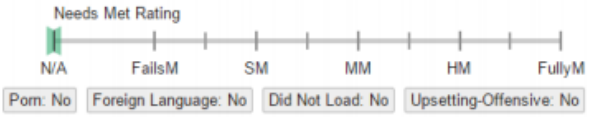
Google's Paul Haahr gave a great presentation in 2016 looking at how Google returns results from a ranking engineer's perspective. The same "highly meets" scale can be found in the Google Search Quality Rating Guidelines.

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.

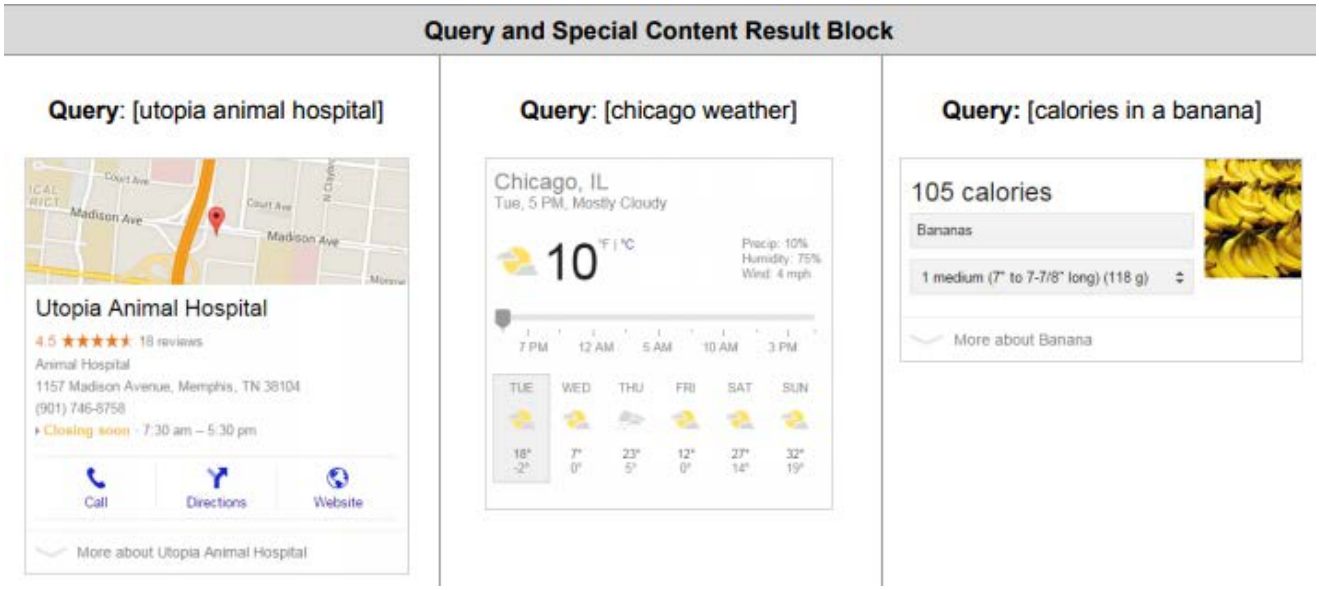
The Search Quality Rating Guidelines echo this. Section 3 of the guidelines details the "Needs Met Rating Guidelines" and how to use them for content.

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.

This is what the Needs Met rating slider looks like:



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, 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 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 recent study indicates that 57percent 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 percent 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.

According to ComScore, 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 percent 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.

Why Voice Search Is Important to Mobile Search

Also in section two of the guidelines is an important sentence, which helps us understand the relationship that Google sees between mobile and voice search.

> **If you are not familiar with voice commands, device actions, or phone features, please take some time to experiment on a mobile smartphone. For example, you can try some of these voice commands...**

Virtual assistants have evolved since the Microsoft Paperclip. Talking to your phone or small device in the corner of your room is fast becoming the norm. This evolution has come hand in hand with the increase in smartphone penetration and technologies, as Echo and Google Home devices fill our homes.

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] to much broader and complex queries that don't always have a simple answer. Know queries are almost always informational in intent.

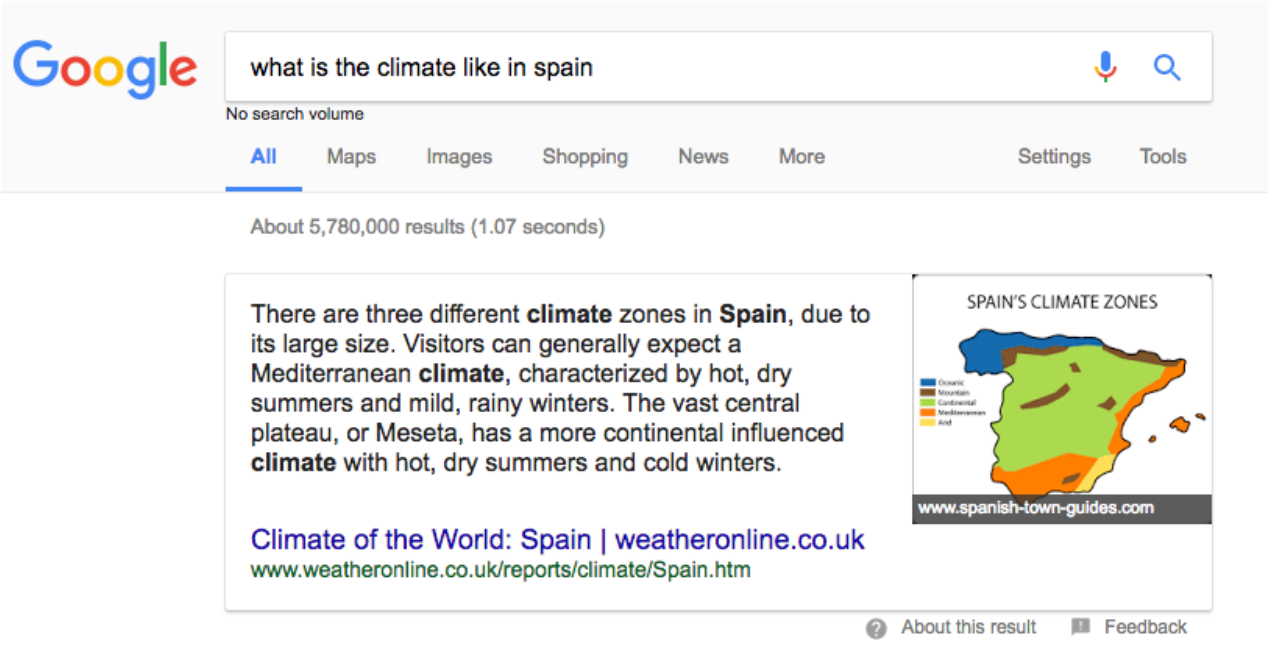
Know/Informational queries are neither commercial or transactional in nature. While there may be an aspect of product research, the user is not yet at the transactional stage.

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 website; but 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.

Position Zero

Rich snippets and special content results blocks 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 position zero 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 very 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 have introduced a new dynamic to our daily lives and shape our day-to-day decisions in a way like no other.

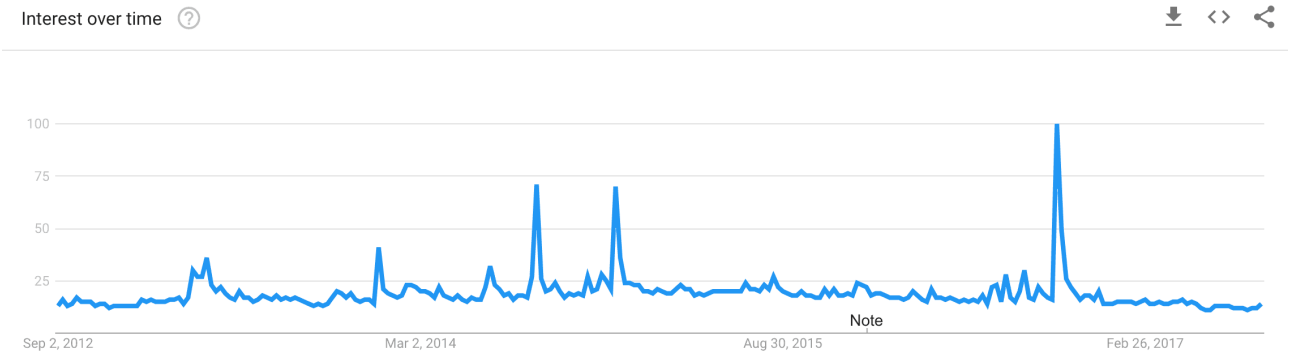
These micro-moments directly question our understanding of the user journey. Users no longer search in a single manner and because of how Google has developed in recent years, there is no single search

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.

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.



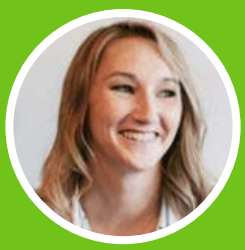
Prior to the attack, searching for terms like [ddos] or [dns] produced results from companies like Incapsula, Sucuri, and Cloudflare. These results were all technical and not appropriate for the new found audience discovering and investigating these terms.

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 relevancy to the domain.

CHAPTER 8

27 FREE TOOLS TO HELP YOU FIND WHAT PEOPLE SEARCH FOR



WRITTEN BY
ANNA CROWE

As thought-provoking and enjoyable as keyword research 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 Autocomplete. But, to put it honestly, keyword research is intimidating when you're just starting out.

Today, I know that keyword research is not that difficult. But, thanks to RankBrain, AI, digital assistants, etc. it can be confusing even to know where to begin when you're a newbie.

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.

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

What People are Searching 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:

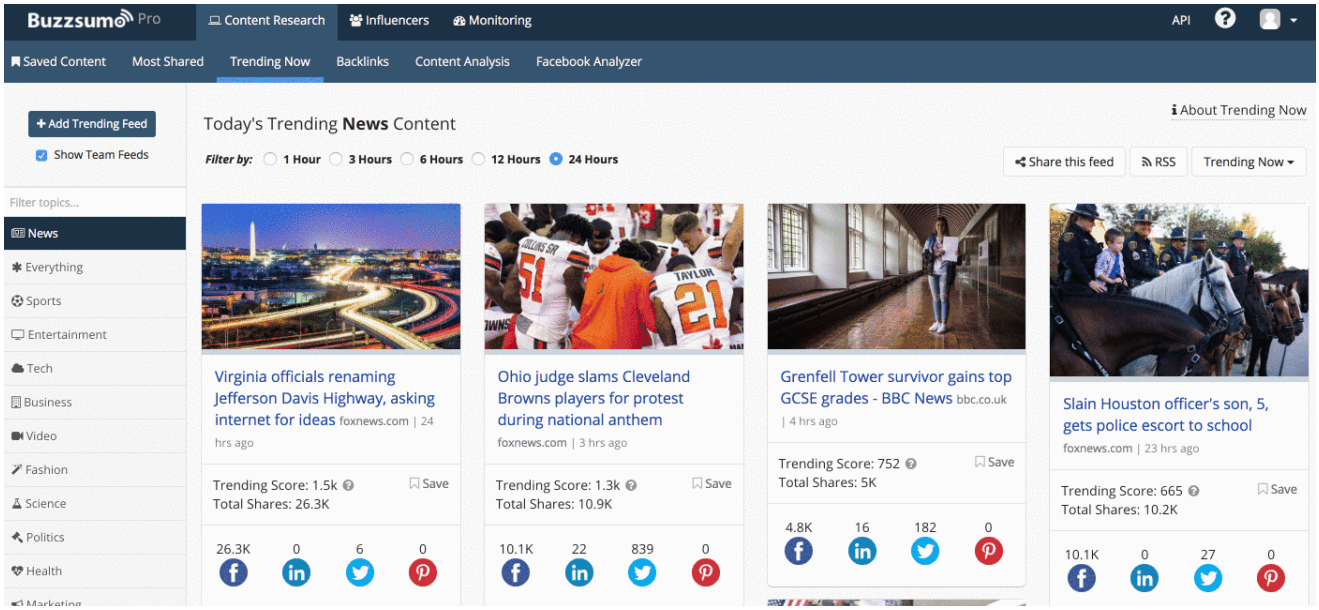
- When should I write an article?
- Would this article perform well?
- Who would read this article?

How do I find these answers?

With some awesome tools.

Here are 27 of my favorite tools that can help SEO noobs (or anyone really) discover what people are searching for and why.

1. Buzzsumo



Buzzsumo is one of my favorite tools because of their 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, founder of MoxieDot, uses Buzzsumo. She 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."**

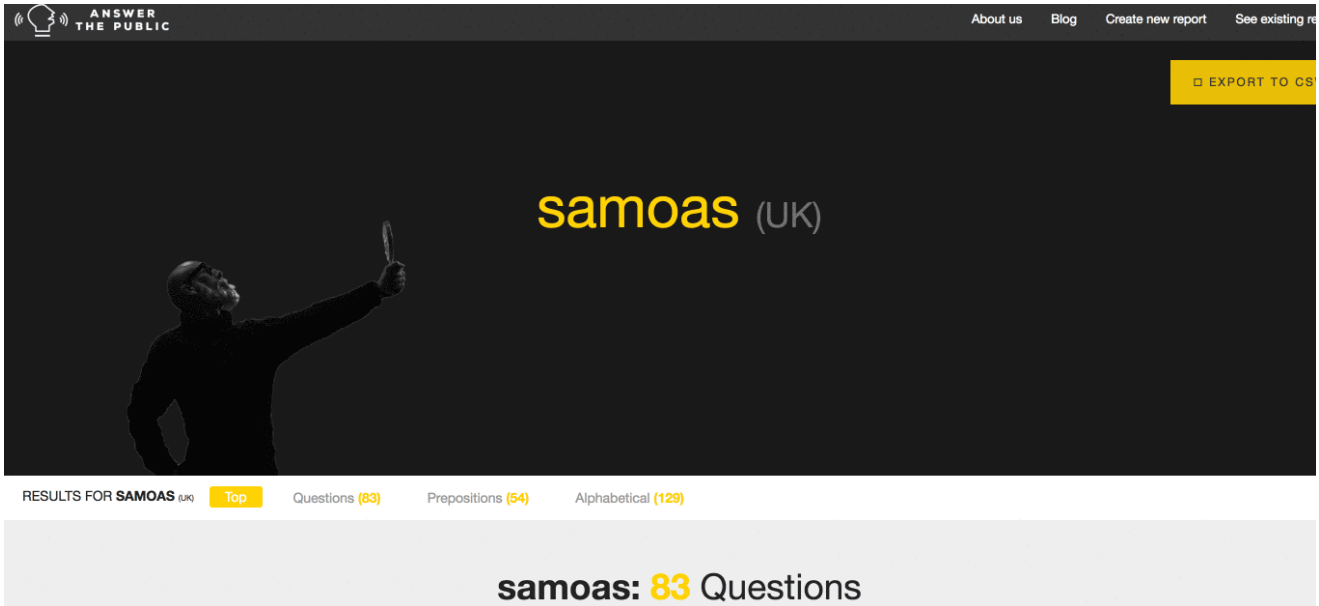
Buzzsumo does offer a free version, but you can upgrade for $99 a month if you want to get alerts on specific topics and all the other goods Kelsey mentioned.

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.

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 Bing and has a massive database that is able to predict what searchers are going to ask.

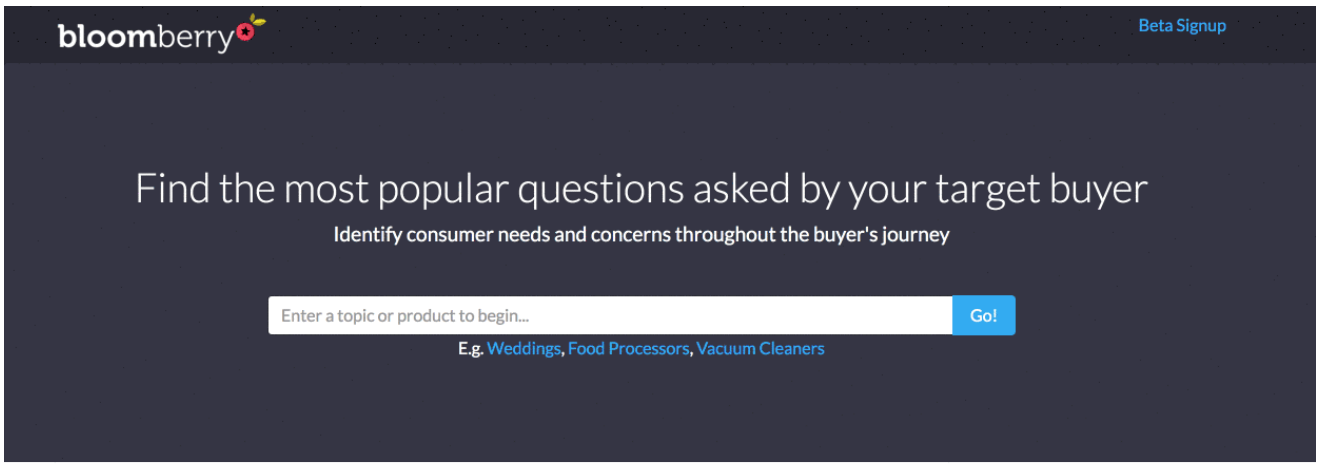
The interface is what makes this tool one of my favorites. While it is a keyword research tool, it displays a beautiful visualization of data.

I had a chance to speak with Casie Gillette, Sr. Director of Digital Marketing over at KoMarketing, about this topic of learning what type of content people search for and why. She says:

> **"We spend a lot of time in 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 of the 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."**

Answer the Public is free and you can export the data to a CVS or Excel file.

4. Bloomberry

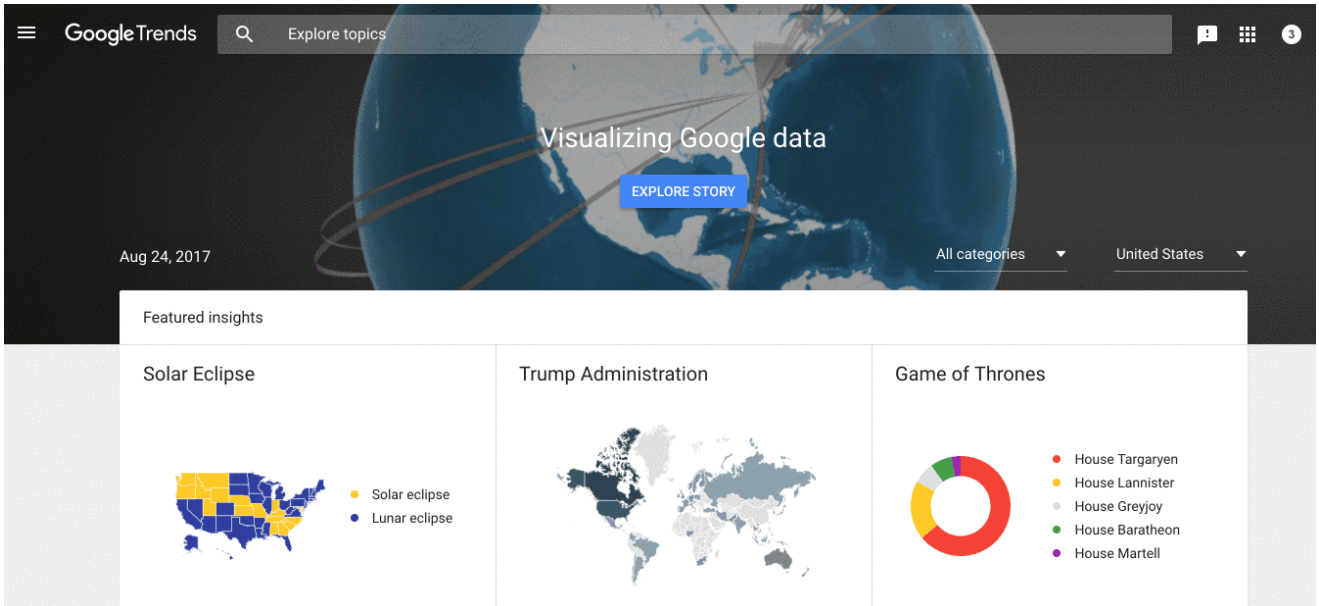


Who's it For?

Bloomberry is just like Answer The Public; the main difference is that Bloomberry displays real questions and topics that people are already talking about on blogs and forums. And, it was created by the team at Buzzsumo, so bonus points!

Bloomberry is useful if you're creating content for Featured Snippets. And, it's free!

5. 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:

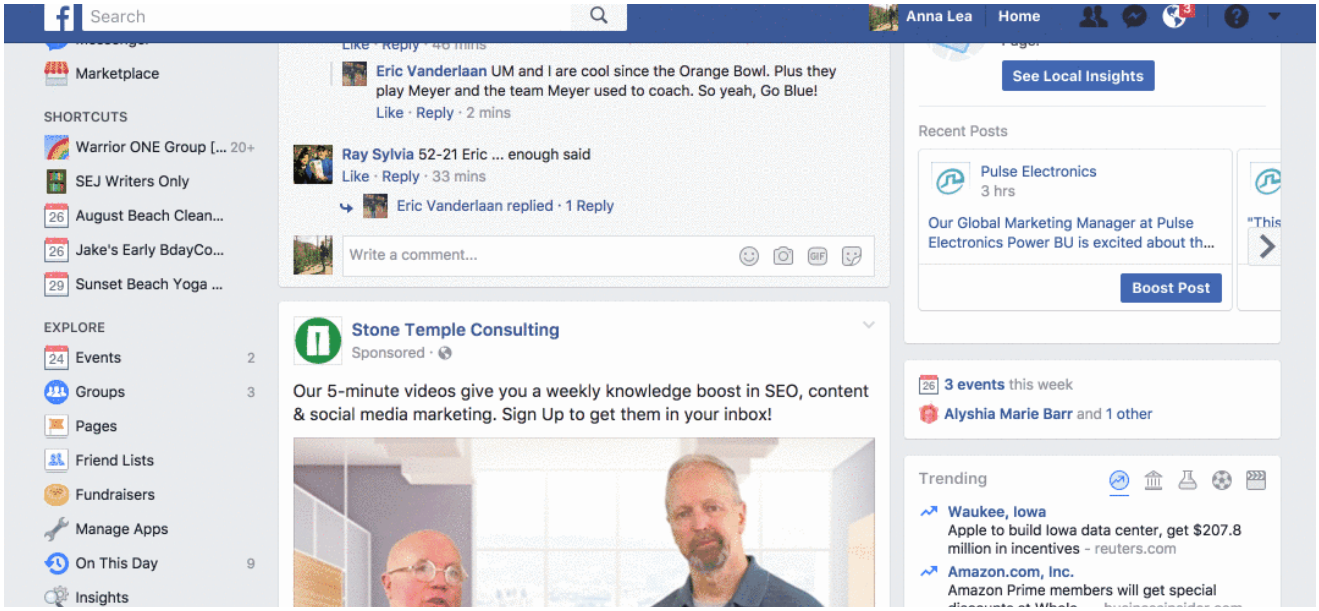
- Type in your keyword in the search box at the top.
- Click compare, then type in your second keyword.
- Adjust the dates if needed.

With Google Trends, you'll also get 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 offers an opportunity to compare different terms and concepts."

6. Facebook

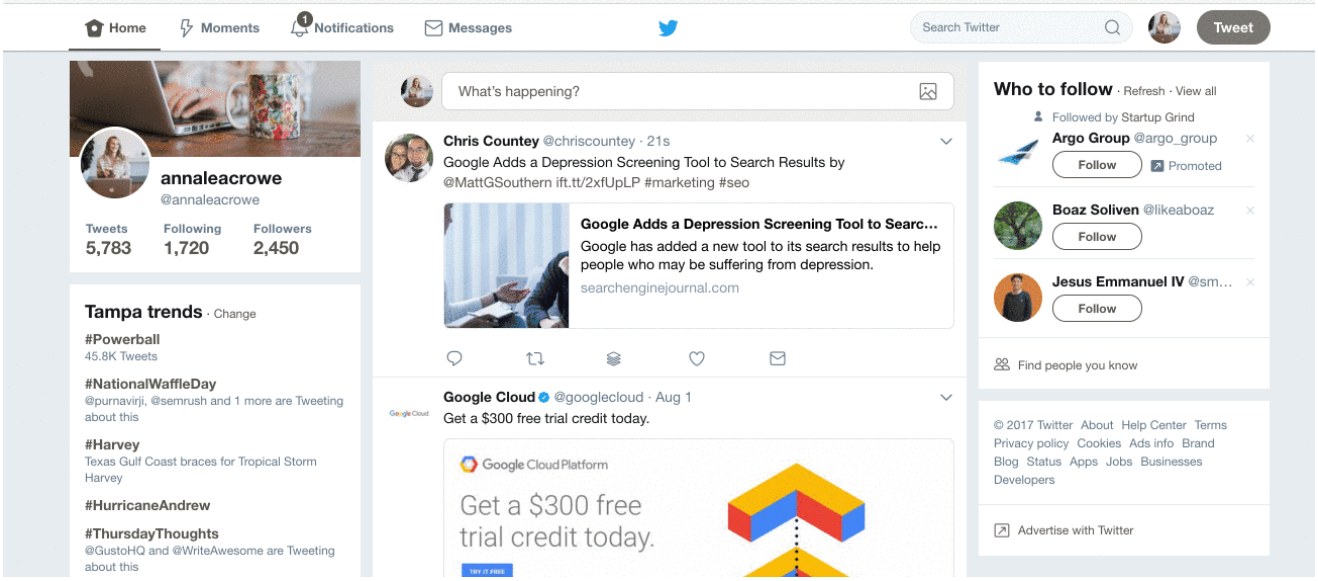


Facebook is one of the easiest free tools for discovered relevant topics. Plus, a lot of people get their news from Facebook. The team at Facebook created Trending topics to provide a list of what is popular on Facebook right now.

If you're on your laptop, Trending is located on the top right side of your News Feed. If you're on your phone, just tap the search bar to see a drop-down list of trends.

Just pick a topic and watch the trending news stories roll on.

7. Twitter



Twitter is another free tool I love to use before creating content.

Similar to Facebook Trends, Twitter Trends use 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.

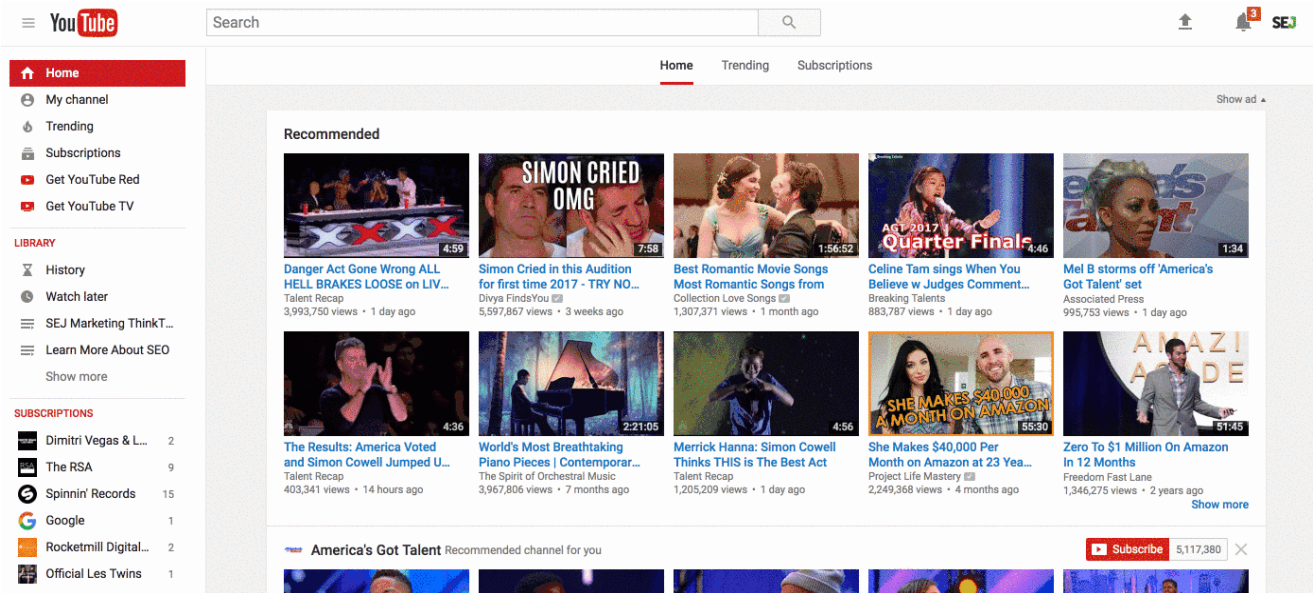
Changing your location is super helpful if you're focusing on local SEO.

You can also use Twitter Moments to search for trending topics. You can learn more about Twitter Moments here.

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."

8. YouTube

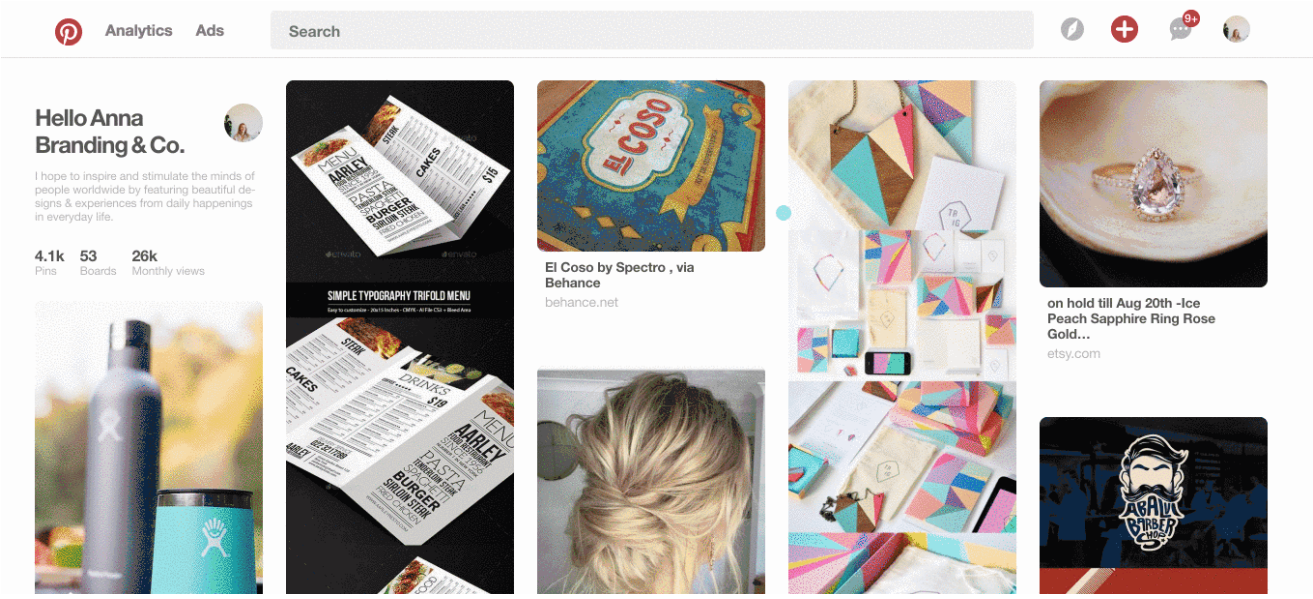


YouTube is mostly known for its cooking videos and workout videos, but it also provides a trending videos section so that you can see what's popular on YouTube right now.

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 in YouTube.

9. Pinterest



In November 2016, Pinterest launched Explore as a feature for Pinners to find out 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.

10-20. Other Social News Sites

10. Digg

11. Reddit

12. Hacker News

13. Product Hunt

14. Inbound.org

15. Instagram's Explore

16. Snapchat Discover

17. Flickr

18. Quora

19. Wikipedia

20. Medium

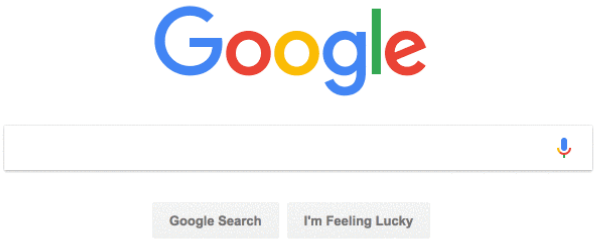
If you're interested in learning more about how to use social media for keyword research, you might like this guide on SEO & Content Strategy.

21. Google Autocomplete

Now, I want to give into 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, while 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.

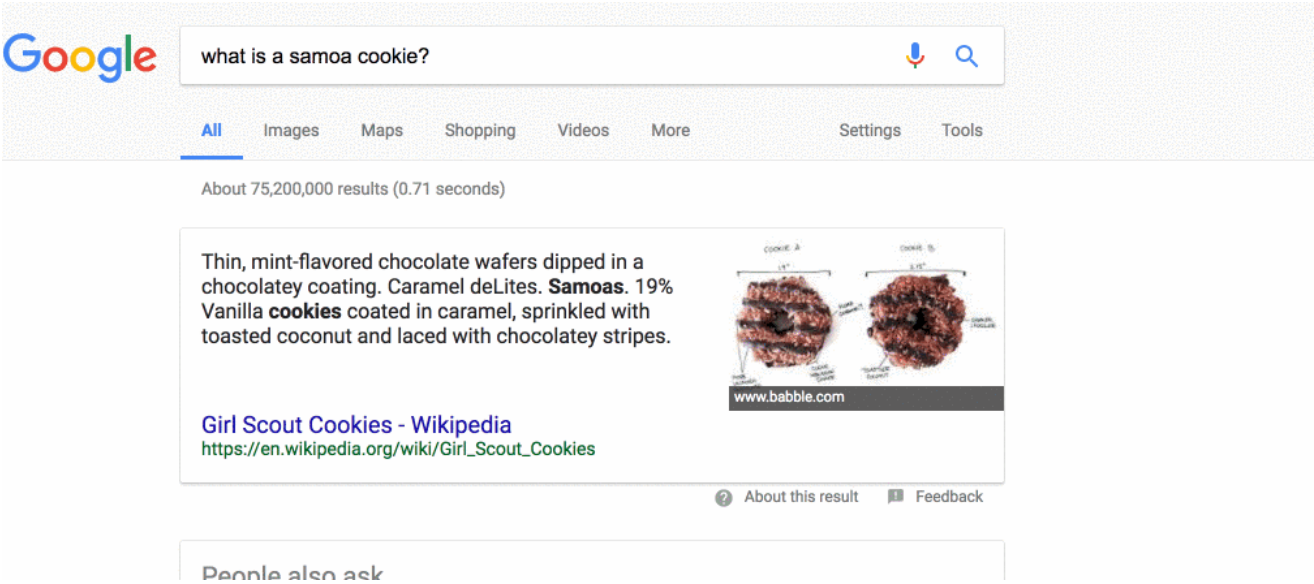


First up, Google Autocomplete. Google Autocomplete is a great tool for finding the best variations of your main keyword phrase.

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.

22. Google People Also Ask

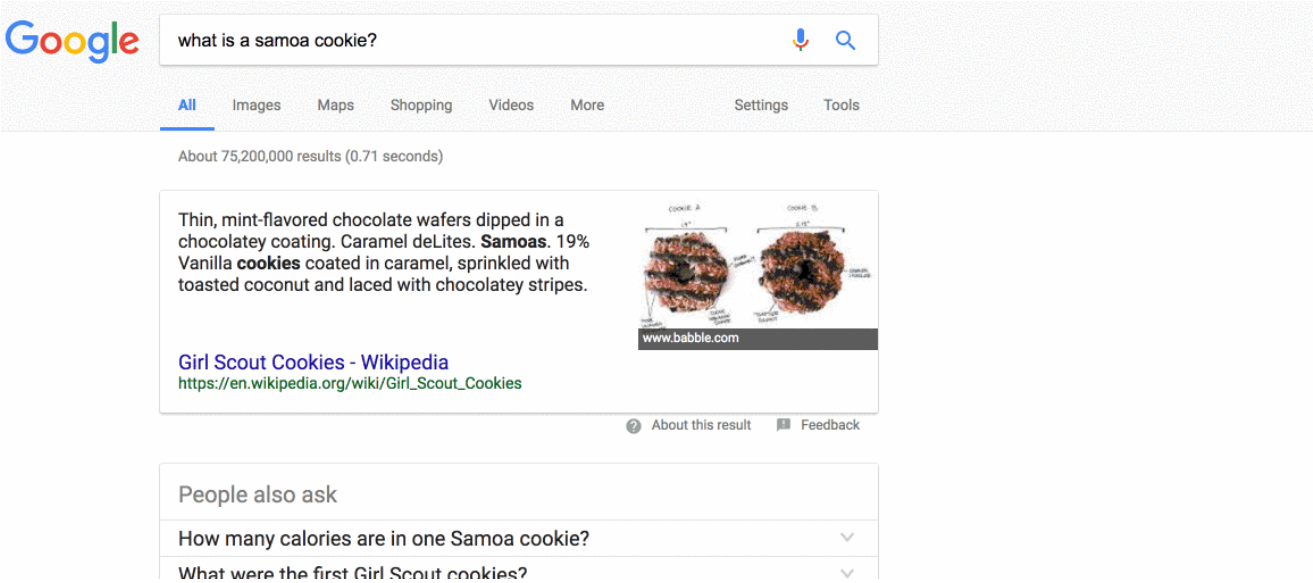


The People Also Ask section is another awesome free tool to use when beginning your keyword research.

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're aiming to achieve Featured Snippet status.

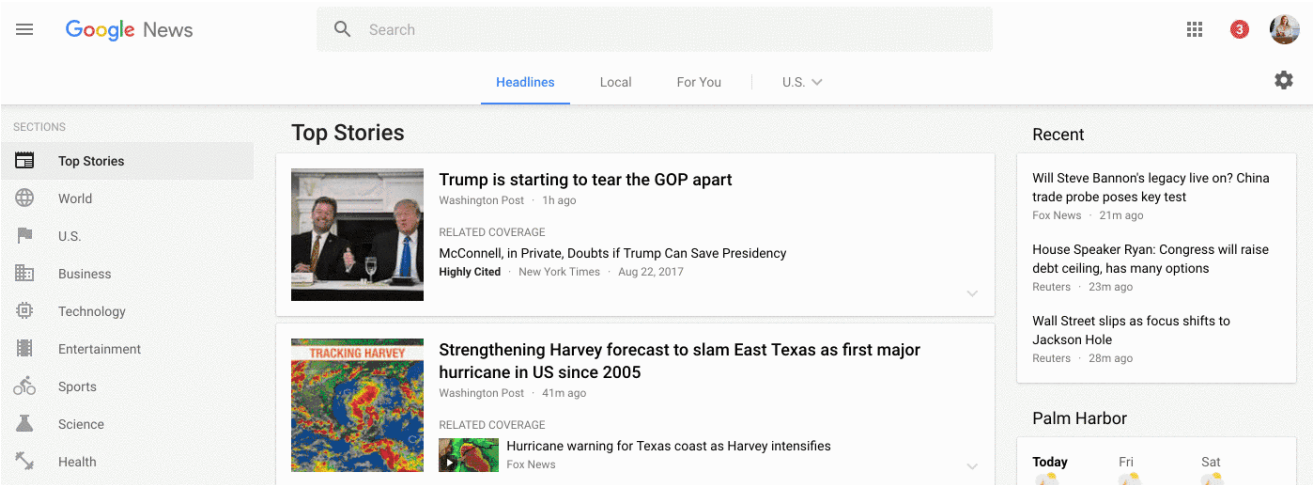
23. Google Searches Related To



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.

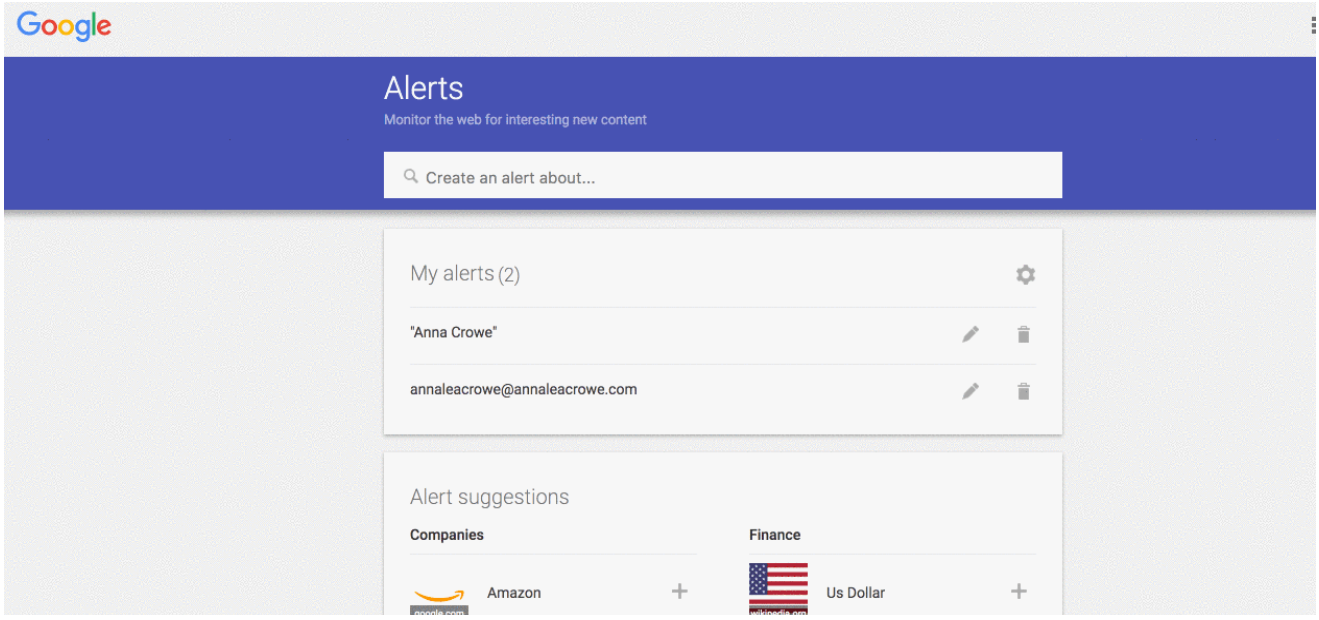
24. Google News



Google News pulls in headlines from news sites worldwide and, like many of the other search engines displays content tailored to your personal interests.

I like using Google News because it presents local interests as well as global news in an easy-to-use interface. You just click on the headline and go directly to the website that published the story.

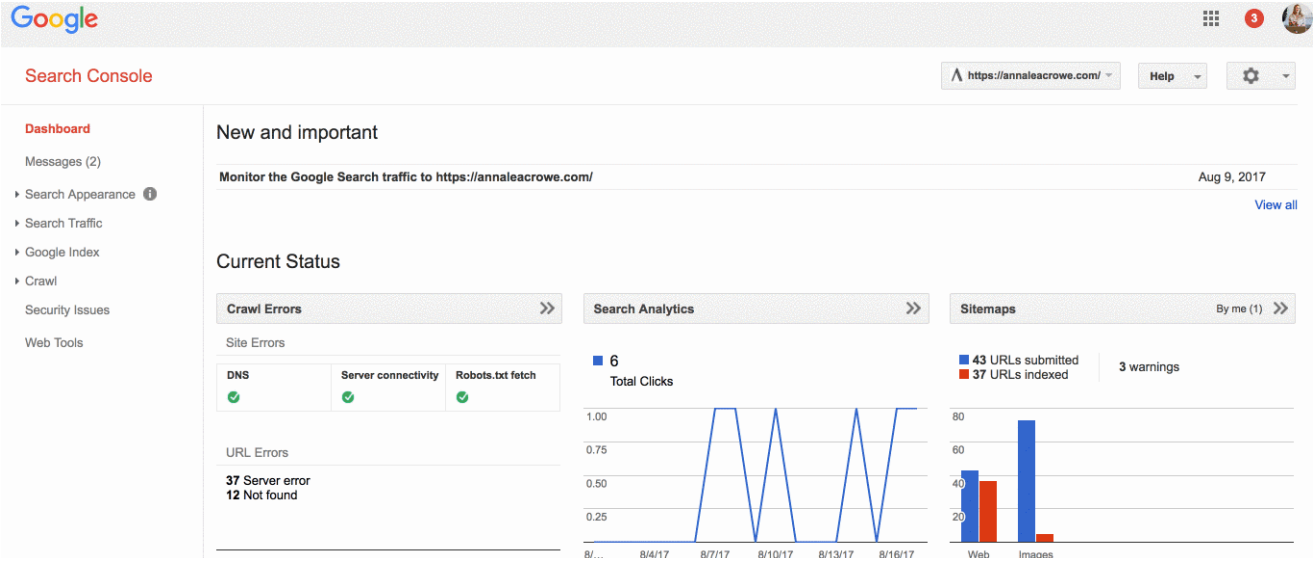
25. Google Alerts + IFTTT



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.

26. 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 currently 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 for you.

Want to dig a little deeper? You can check out my Google Search Console guide.

27. Google Keyword Planner

I left Google Keyword Planner last because I like to use this tool when starting to move into my keyword mapping, but some marketers like to start their 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 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.

28. Rank Tracker by SEO Powersuite

If you're looking to see what keywords your competitors are ranking for, then Rank Tracker by SEO Powersuite is the place to go. You simply add your website URL and plug in your competitor URL to see where the content gaps are your keywords.

You can track up to 10 competitors.

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. It's important to note that these will change every year so it doesn't hurt to sign up for their email newsletters or set-up Google Alerts.

- Top Google Searches (as of March 2017) by Tim Soulo, Ahrefs
- The 100 Most Popular Google Keywords by Ross Hudgens, SeigeMedia
- Here are the Most Popular Search Terms of 2016 by Lisa Eadicicco,Time

CHAPTER 9

WHY LINKS ARE IMPORTANT FOR SEO

WRITTEN BY
BENJ ARRIOLA

In the early days of SEO, 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 in order 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 main 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.

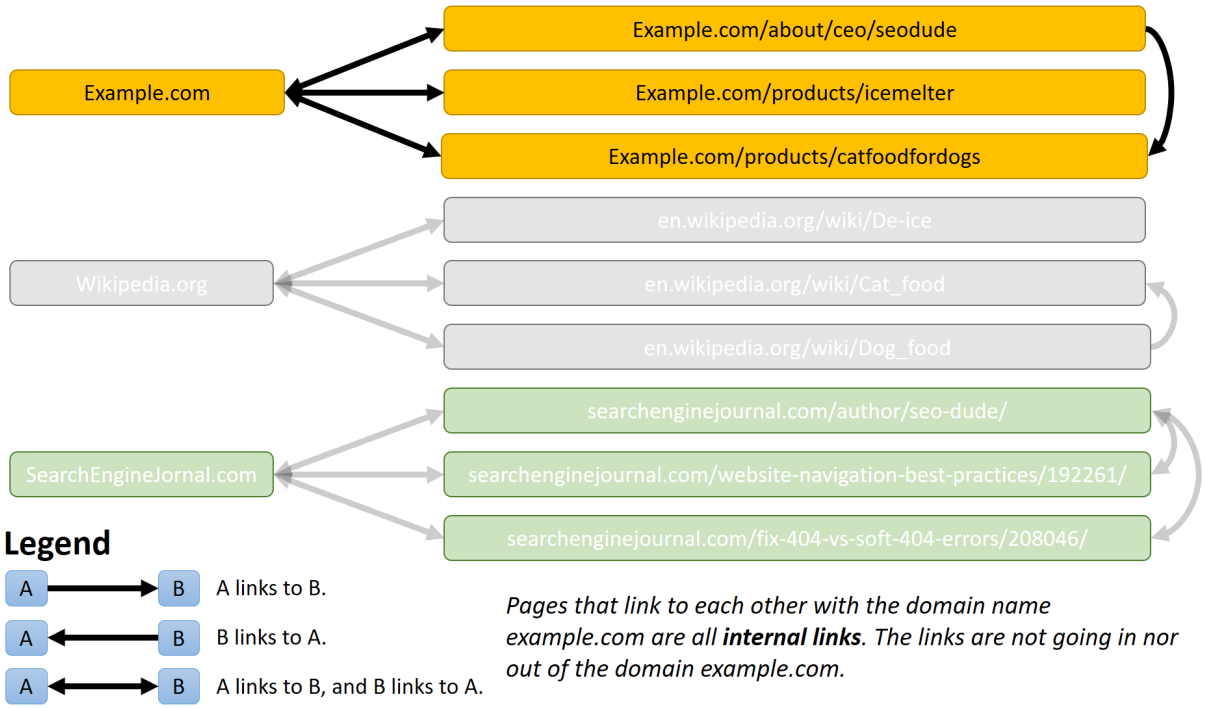
Instead of reading through all of the details behind how Google analyzes and evaluates links, it may be more worthwhile to understand why this algorithm even looks at links in the first place.

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.

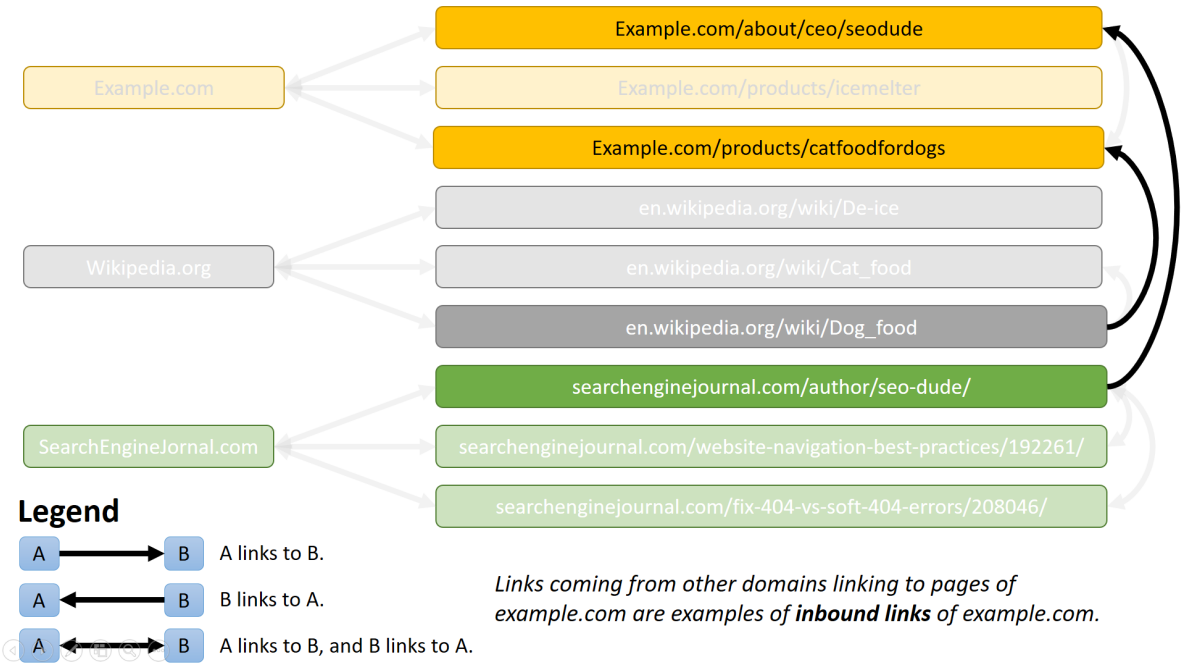
We can classify links based on the destination of the link, whether it leads users to another page on the same site or a different website.

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.



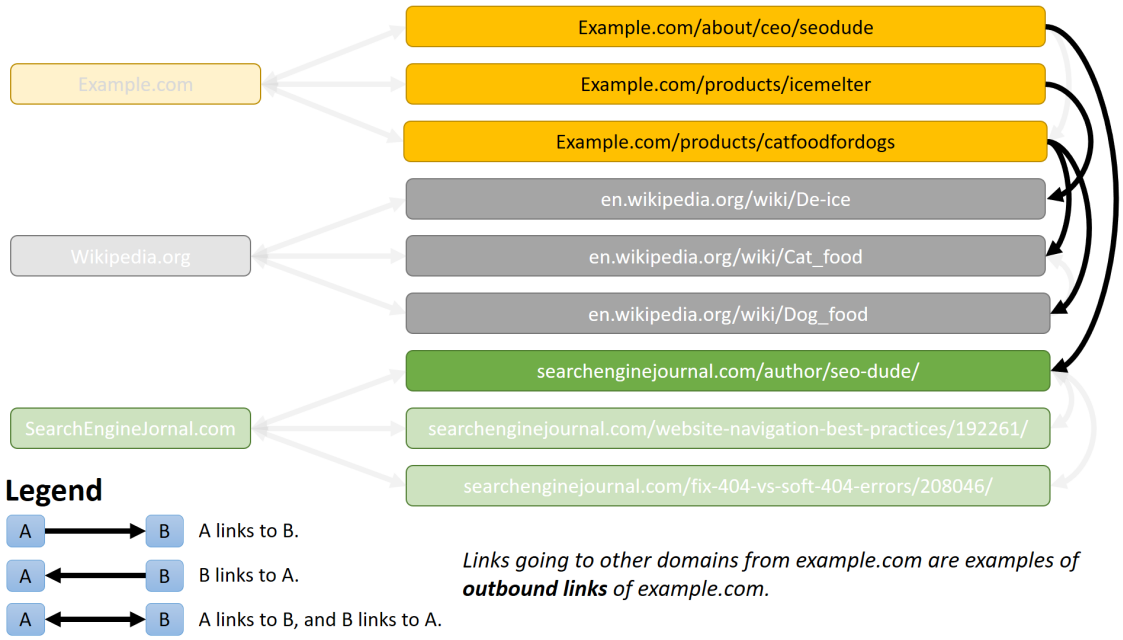
*Pages that link to each other with the domain name example.com are all **internal links**. The links are not going in nor out of the domain example.com.*

Inbound links are links that come from other websites or a different domain name.



*Links coming from other domains linking to pages of example.com are examples of **inbound links** of example.com.*

Outbound links are those links on your website that link out to websites with a different domain name.



*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 web pages. 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 this is not always the case. It can take Google a while to identify artificial links.

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

In recent years, 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.

After this update, some SEO professionals were under the impression that links no longer mattered; however, this is not the case. Links are very 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 has evolved, especially after the Penguin update arrived.

Everyone Doesn't Think 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. This 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 very unnatural and may affect ranking negatively. Ever since the Penguin update came, there has been a strong focus on having natural anchor text in your inbound links.

Here are a few 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 very 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 a chain of links hop 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 exist on all pages. This is usually built upon your site architecture, on 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.

- **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 keep the users a higher 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 the terms 'PageRank hoarding' and 'PageRank channeling' came out.

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. 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, 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, 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 rules here don't seem to be set in stone and is 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 will mainly be link naturally. If it looks bad to humans, most probably it looks bad to search engines.

CHAPTER 10

WHY KEYWORDS ARE PERPETUALLY IMPORTANT FOR SEO

WRITTEN BY
TYLOR HERMANSON

Are keywords still important to search engine optimization? Do they even matter to Google anymore?

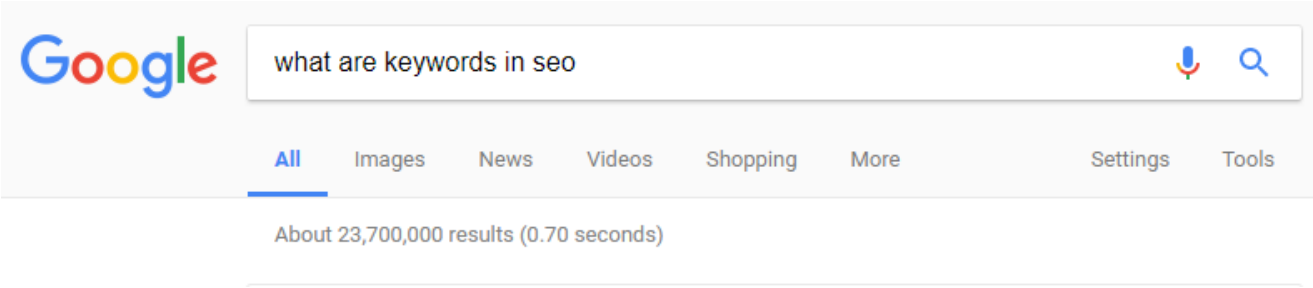
The short answer: Absolutely.

The longer answer: Keep reading.

What are SEO Keywords?

SEO keywords range from singular words to complex phrases and are used in website copy to attract relevant, organic search traffic. However, keyword integration is just the start. When properly leveraged, targeted SEO keywords should be used to inspire all page content in order to satisfy searcher intent.

From a searcher's perspective, keywords are the terms typed or spoken into a search engine. When effectively researched and optimized, keywords act as a conduit for your target audience to find the most appropriate content on your website.



But Aren't Keywords Obsolete?

Whether you've heard this a few times already or your first is yet to come, "Keywords are dead" is a phrase which continues to barge its way into SEO circles. Rather than tip-toe 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.

1. "(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.

I'm not going to lie; it was pretty fantastic. We didn't know how good we had it at the time.

However, things started changing in 2010 when Google began quietly taking steps to remove keyword data from our web analytics. In late 2011 through the following year, keyword data was being removed in a big way. 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	[redacted]	10 (0.08%)	100.00%	10 (0.10%)
3.	google / organic	[redacted]	8 (0.06%)	100.00%	8 (0.08%)
4.	google / organic	[redacted]	5 (0.04%)	100.00%	5 (0.05%)
5.	google / organic	[redacted]	5 (0.04%)	60.00%	3 (0.03%)

Once we lost our keyword data 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 just had less visibility.

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. Hummingbird & RankBrain

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. Now, Google uses these keywords as contextual signals to learn what we really want and often rewrites our query behind the scenes (e.g., "pizza delivery 66062").

Knowing Google often rewrites our search queries may make it seem like their usefulness is all but obsolete. But really, Google just got smarter with what we provided.

Here's another perspective. Have you ever heard the statistic that only 7 percent of communication is through words alone? This was derived from a popular study in the late 1960s and is often used to boost the stature of nonverbal communion, diminishing that which is verbal.

I have a challenge for you. Go through your entire day tomorrow without using words – no typing, saying, or signing them. At the end of the day, let me know if you felt your communication was 93 percent as effective as it normally is. I think you can probably predict the outcome.

It's not that the stat is wrong. There is so much more to communication (and search) than words. It is, however, often misunderstood.

The 7 percent speaks more to quantity than importance. We need that 7 percent, and we need keywords.

Bottom line: Keywords aren't dead. Google's former way of interpreting them is.

3. Voice Search

I love voice search. Even though it's been around for years, I still feel like I'm in the future when Google magically captures my unintelligible stammering.

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 percent 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.

4. Google Planner Grouped Keyword Volumes

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?

We know keywords are alive and well, but why are they so critical to SEO?

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 valuable would those insights be to you?

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 have to 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".

Safest baby cribs 2017

Explicit information

- concerned about safety
- wants more than one crib to choose from
- looking for article published in 2017

Implicit information

- likely first-time parents
- wants to know what makes cribs safe/ unsafe
- understands safety standards change overtime
- 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 401k 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 • Chocolate • Donuts • Chocolate donuts • Uninterrupted sleep • A chip and a chair	**Profile** • 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.

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 some of my recent favorites:

- How To Do Keyword Research in 2017 — Ahrefs' Guide
- Tactical Keyword Research in a RankBrain World
- How To Do Keyword Research in 2017

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 selecting the best keywords for SEO.

- **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.

- **Build a seed 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.

- **Gather current keyword data** (if your site already exists): Generate a list of what is currently (and nearly) driving traffic to your site using Google Search Console click data and any ranking data you have.

- **Expand the list using various keyword tools:** Expand on the list you've built from steps 1-3 by looking for new keyword groups, alternate phrases, common modifiers and long-tail permutations. If you haven't used many keyword research tools up to this point, now's your time.

- **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, phase of the funnel, or any other way that makes sense to you.

- **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 (taking organic SERP visibility into account). Once those are determined, find semantically-related and long-tail modifying terms to help support your primary keywords.

- **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.

What are the Most Common SEO Keyword Types?

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

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.

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:

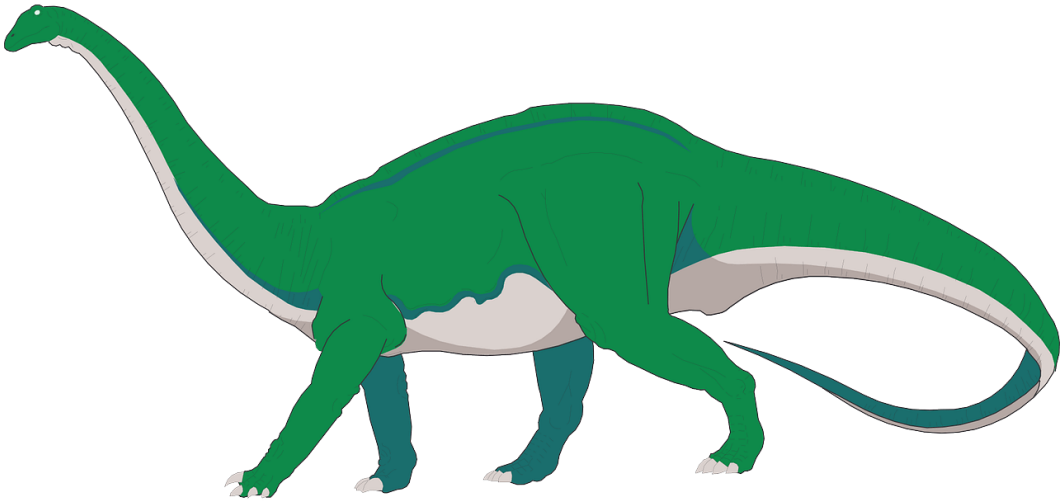
- **Seed:** home improvement store
- **Page-specific:** deck building supplies

Long-tail vs. Head Terms

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 percent 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 terms and long-tail terms tend to have the following contrasting characteristics. However, besides volume, none of these are absolute.

Head

- High search volume
- High ranking competition
- Low converting traffic
- Few words
- Best for top-level pages
- Multiple search intents

Long-tail

- Low search volume
- Low ranking competition
- High converting traffic
- Many words
- Best for lower-level pages
- Singular search intent

Examples:

- **Head:** Bob Dylan
- **Long-tail:** Who is Jakob Dylan's father?

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

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

Local vs. Global Keywords

Depending on its usage, a local keyword can mean one of two things:

1. **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?".

2. **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.

Examples:

- **Local:** 2-bedroom rentals in Phoenix
- **Global:** Is renters insurance worth it?

Audience Type

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.

If Google's job is to give a searcher what they want, then the target audience for the top results of a query should be the same audience who completed the query.

Examples:

- **Patient:** Is diabetes hereditary?
- **Doctor:** T2DM treatment algorithm

Evergreen vs. Topical

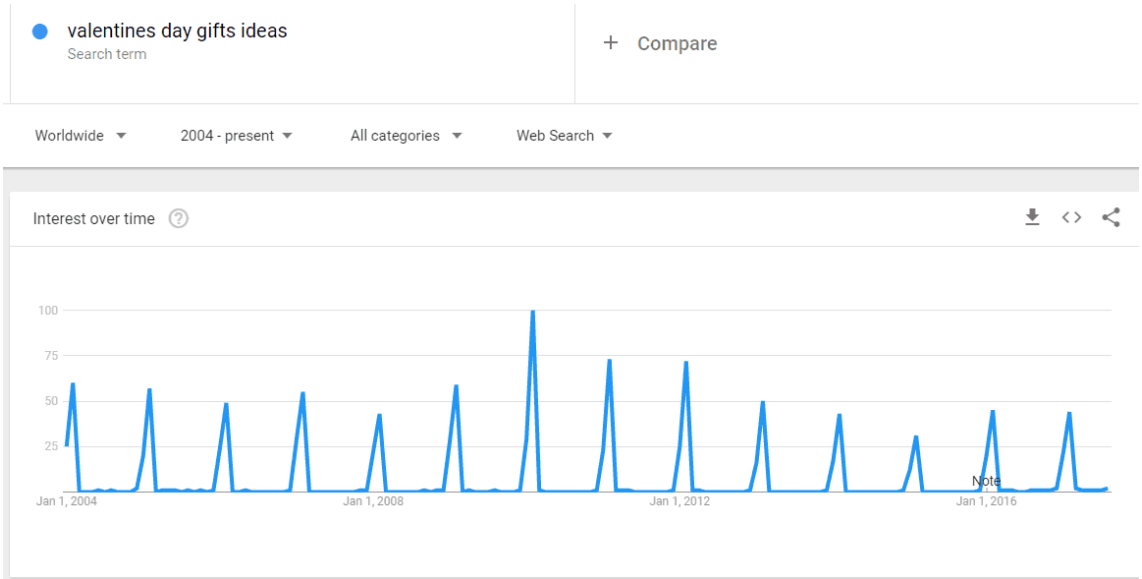
Evergreen keywords have steady search volume with little variance over time. On the other hand, topical keywords are either seasonal (e.g., valentine's day gift ideas), flashes in the pan (e.g., covfefe), or consistently relevant (e.g., Taylor Swift).

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

For the first time since we moved in four years ago, we decided to pay to get our house cleaned. Our searches were very much based in logic:

- 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 me reflect on all the time I was going to save, how this would be one less thing I had to stress about, even the smell of a fresh house when I walked in the door – likely played a role in my 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
- **Care words:** wine enthusiast, ample storage, simple, hosting, durable, man cave

How do You Optimize Your Website for Keywords?

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.

Where to Incorporate 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 indexation.

- **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 from others on the site helps show Google what your page is about. Similarly, content nearby anchor text pointing to your page is also observed by 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.

- **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.

Keyword integration tips

- **Don't overdo it:** Over-optimization 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.

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 20 years, 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 doesn't just want Google to be at the level of a human, he wants it to be superhuman.

The introduction of Google Now 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, but that's for another time.

CHAPTER 11

WHY CONTENT IS IMPORTANT FOR SEO

WRITTEN BY
JULIA MCCOY

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.

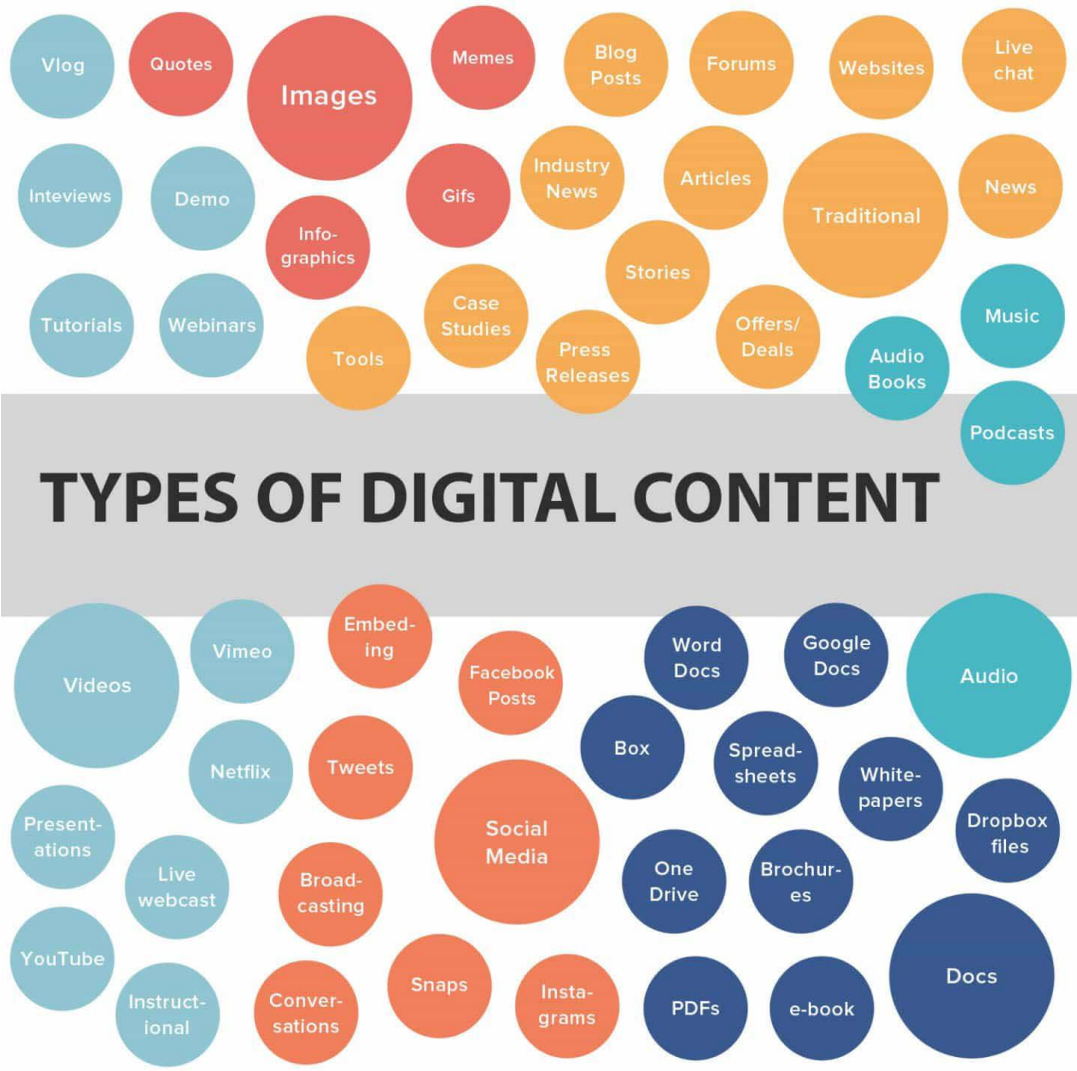
There's a lot of bad content out there that doesn't come close to providing any type of relevancy or usefulness to the reader.

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?

What is the SEO Value of Content?

Google, the king of search engines, processes over 3.5 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.

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.

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, Maddie 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

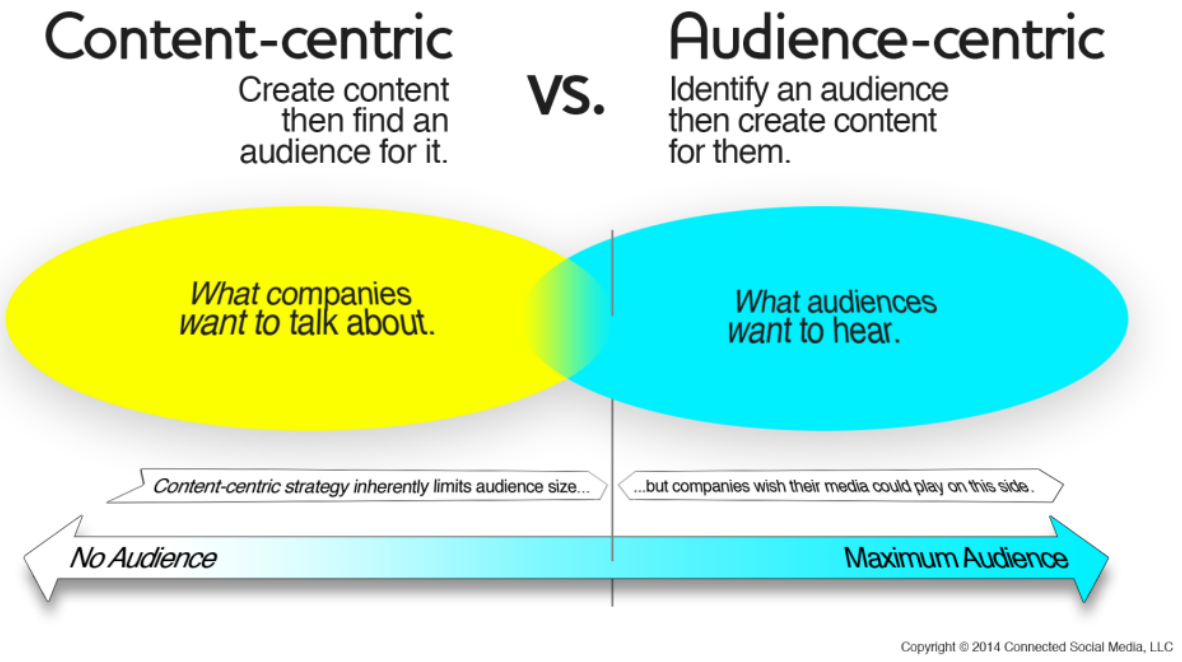
The reason optimized content is important is simple... you won't rank in search engines without it.

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? This graphic does a great job of explaining the difference:



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:

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.

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

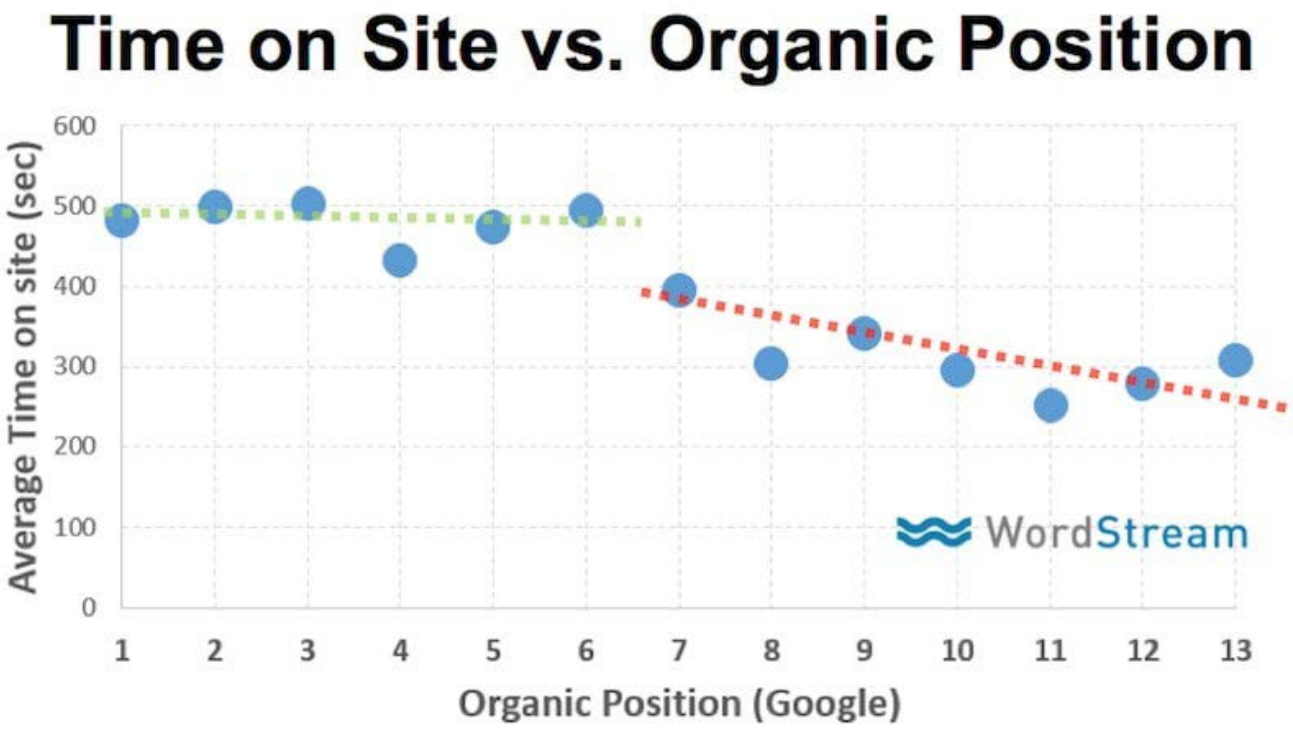
2. Develop Your Outline & Format for Optimal Readability

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 alright 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.

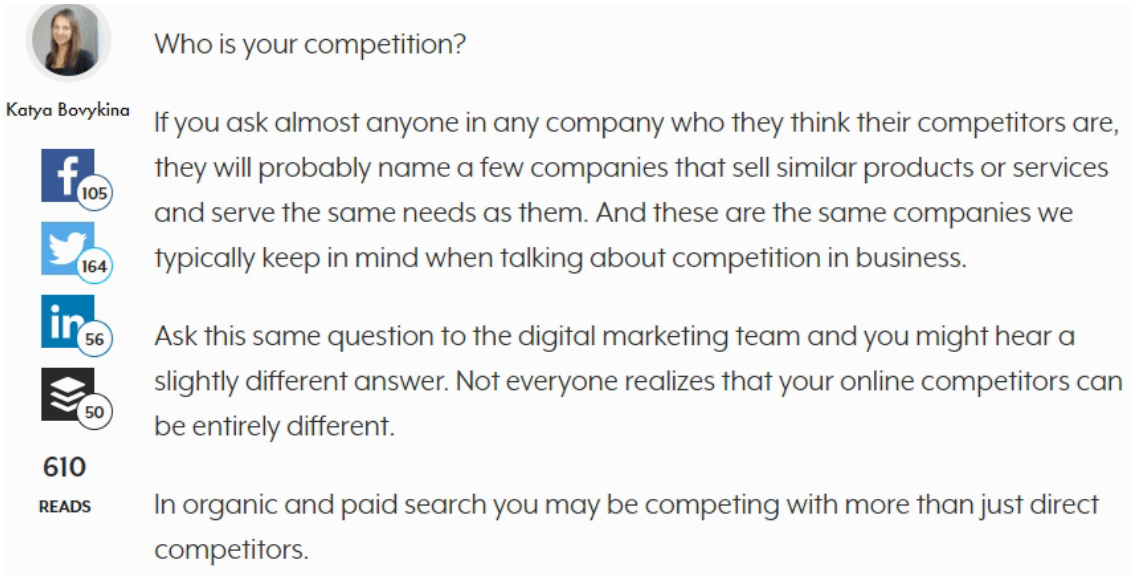
As you can see from the graph below, website engagement impacts organic rankings.



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:



Katya Bovykina

105

164

56

50

610
READS

Who is your competition?

If you ask almost anyone in any company who they think their competitors are, they will probably name a few companies that sell similar products or services and serve the same needs as them. And these are the same companies we typically keep in mind when talking about competition in business.

Ask this same question to the digital marketing team and you might hear a slightly different answer. Not everyone realizes that your online competitors can be entirely different.

In organic and paid search you may be competing with more than just direct competitors.

As you can see, most of the paragraphs are only a sentence or two long. In addition, Bovykina breaks up her content using sub-headings every 100-200 words.

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 pretty 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.

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.

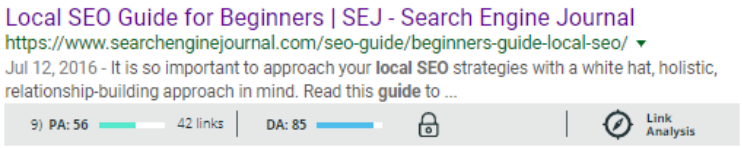
Doing so is not only a huge waste of time, but it prevents you from creating the most "useful and relevant" content on your topic.

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'.



4. Include Backlinks Throughout Your Content

f 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 6 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:

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 ...

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, from Harnish's guide, is a good one.

Here's an example of a tag that fails to follow these guidelines:

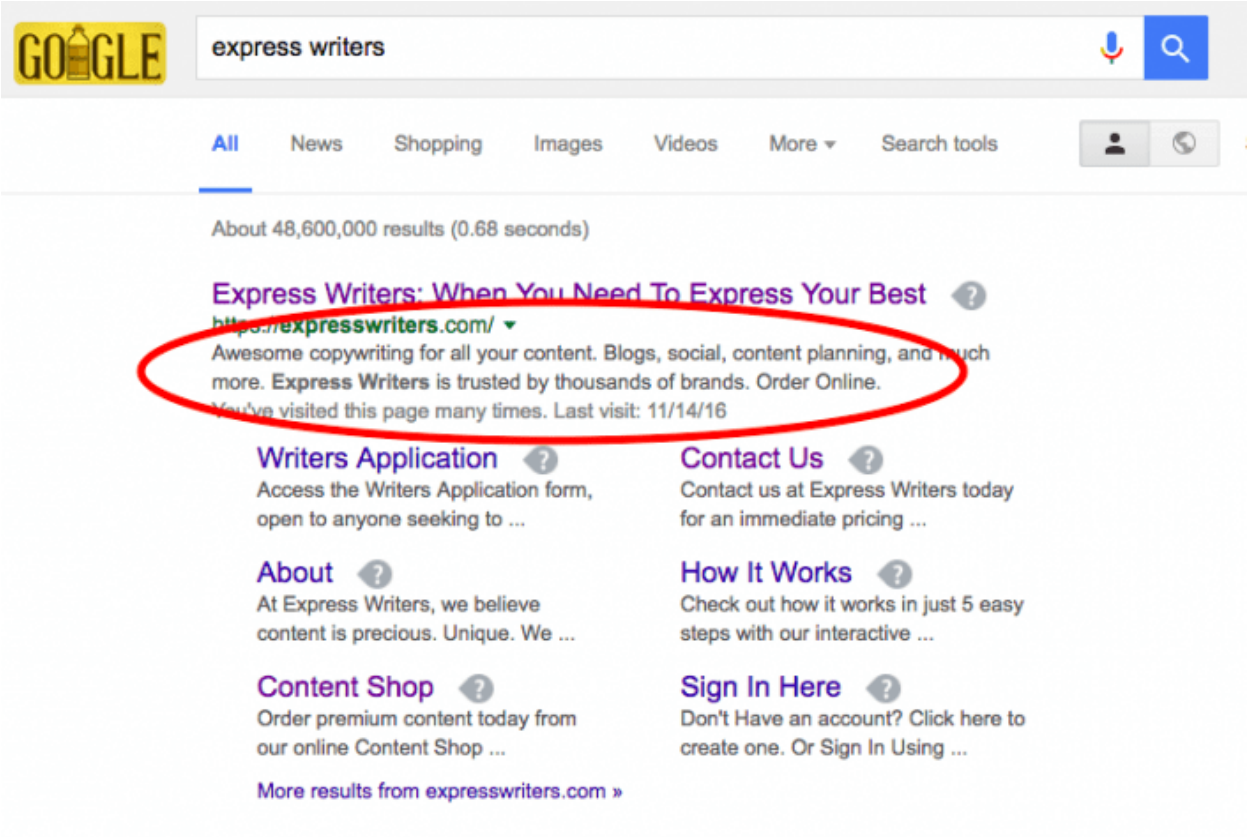
Trainer Sale – great savings on Sneakers, including discounts on ...
www.offspring.co.uk/view/category/offspring_catalog/6
Items 1 - 24 of 743 - **Trainer** sale now on at Offspring. Savings on **Nike**, Converse and many other brands. Shop now for great discounts on **trainers**.

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:

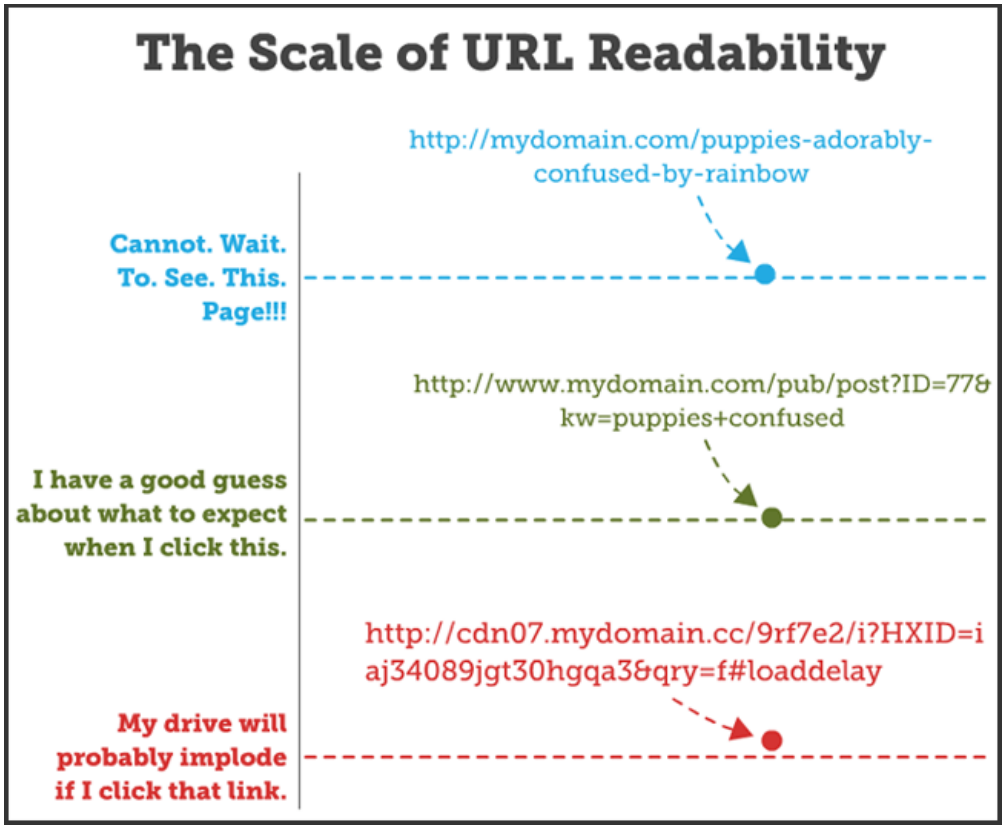
River Valley Ranch Inc. Horseback Riding & Pasture Boarding
rivervalley**horse**ranch.com/
River Valley **Horse** Ranch "Saddle Up!" RIVER VALLEY RANCH, INC. | Carver, **Minnesota** 55315 | 952.361.3361. TRAIL RIDE HOURS: OPEN WEEKENDS ...

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.



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.

CHAPTER 12

9 ESSENTIAL TYPES OF WEBPAGES EVERY SEO NEEDS TO KNOW

WRITTEN BY
STONEY 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, will attract different audiences, and will direct visitors to different goals. 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.

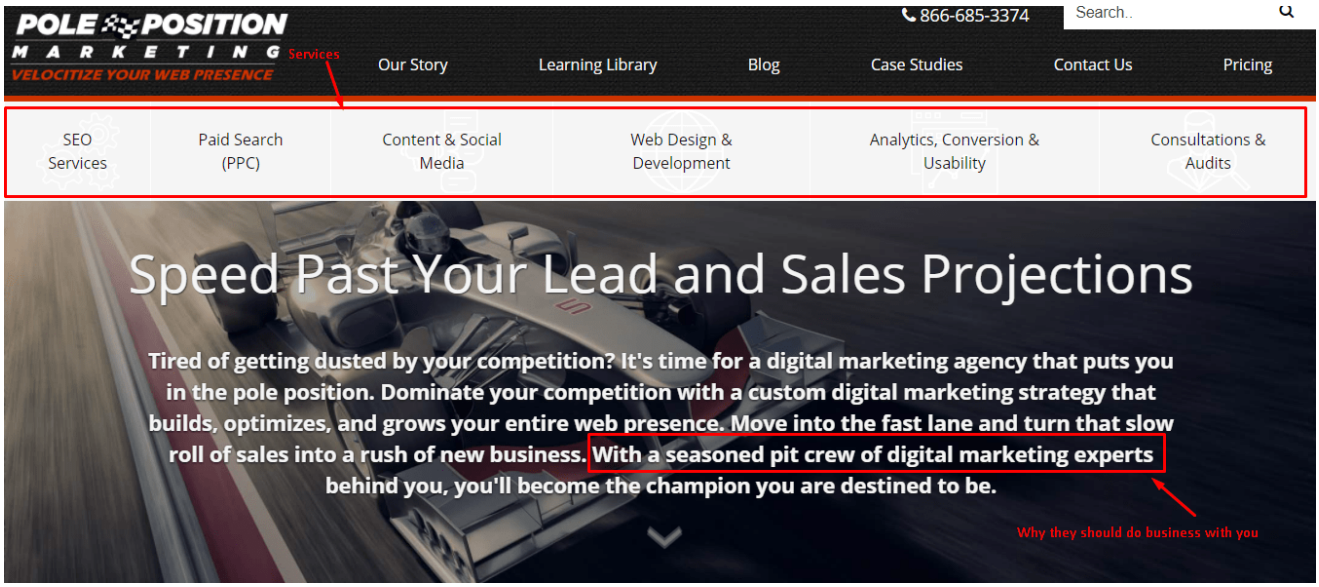
With that in mind, let's discuss what are typically the most important pages to an optimization campaign and why.

Pages Every SEO Must Pay Attention To

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. It 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 SEOs 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. And 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. But what do searchers see in the search results? Does it compel them to click into the site?
And once they are there, is the messaging on point, giving visitors a

reason to dig further into the site? As the SEO, 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.

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.

- **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. And like any good landing page, it 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.

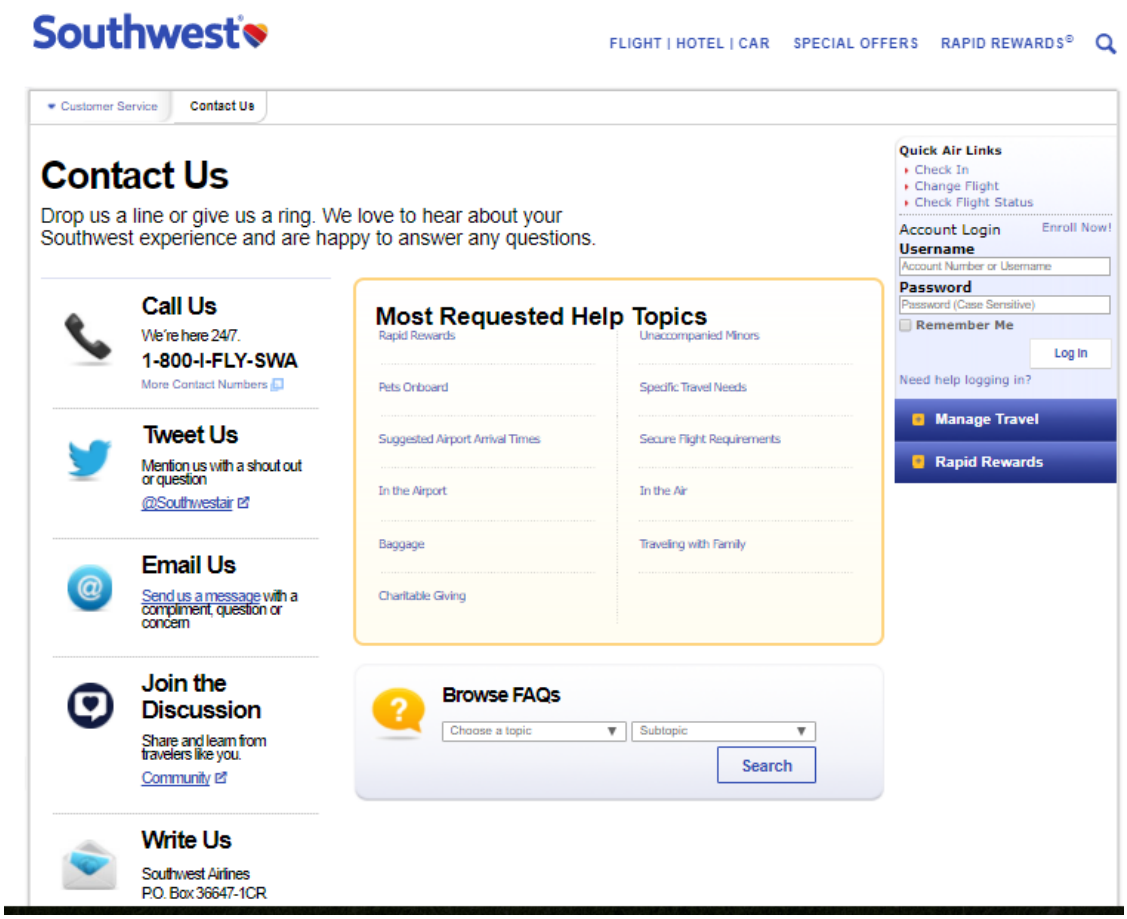
3. Contact Us Page

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.



4. Product Category & Sub-Category Pages

Product category and sub-category pages provide fantastic optimization 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.

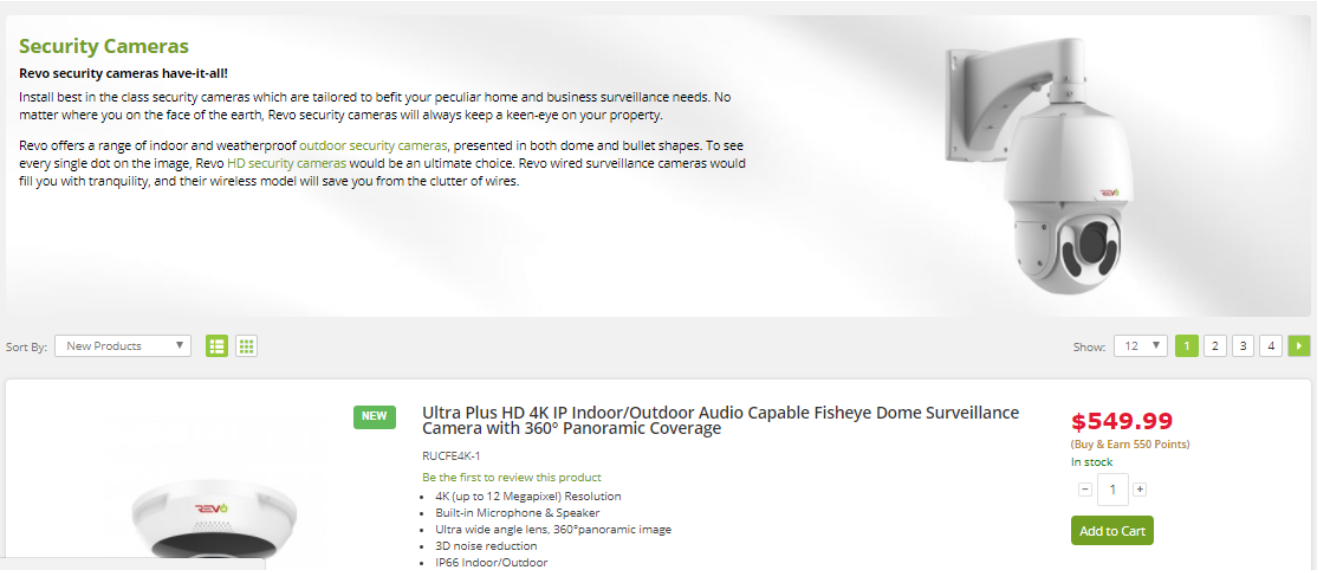
The goal of the page is to give the visitor access to those options, which are usually the actual product detail pages themselves. For the most part, the product category pages are nothing more than pass-through pages. Visitors may revisit the page frequently, but only so you can pass them through to 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 for many SEOs. 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 do 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 still 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.



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.
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. And they 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 which aren't 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?

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 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

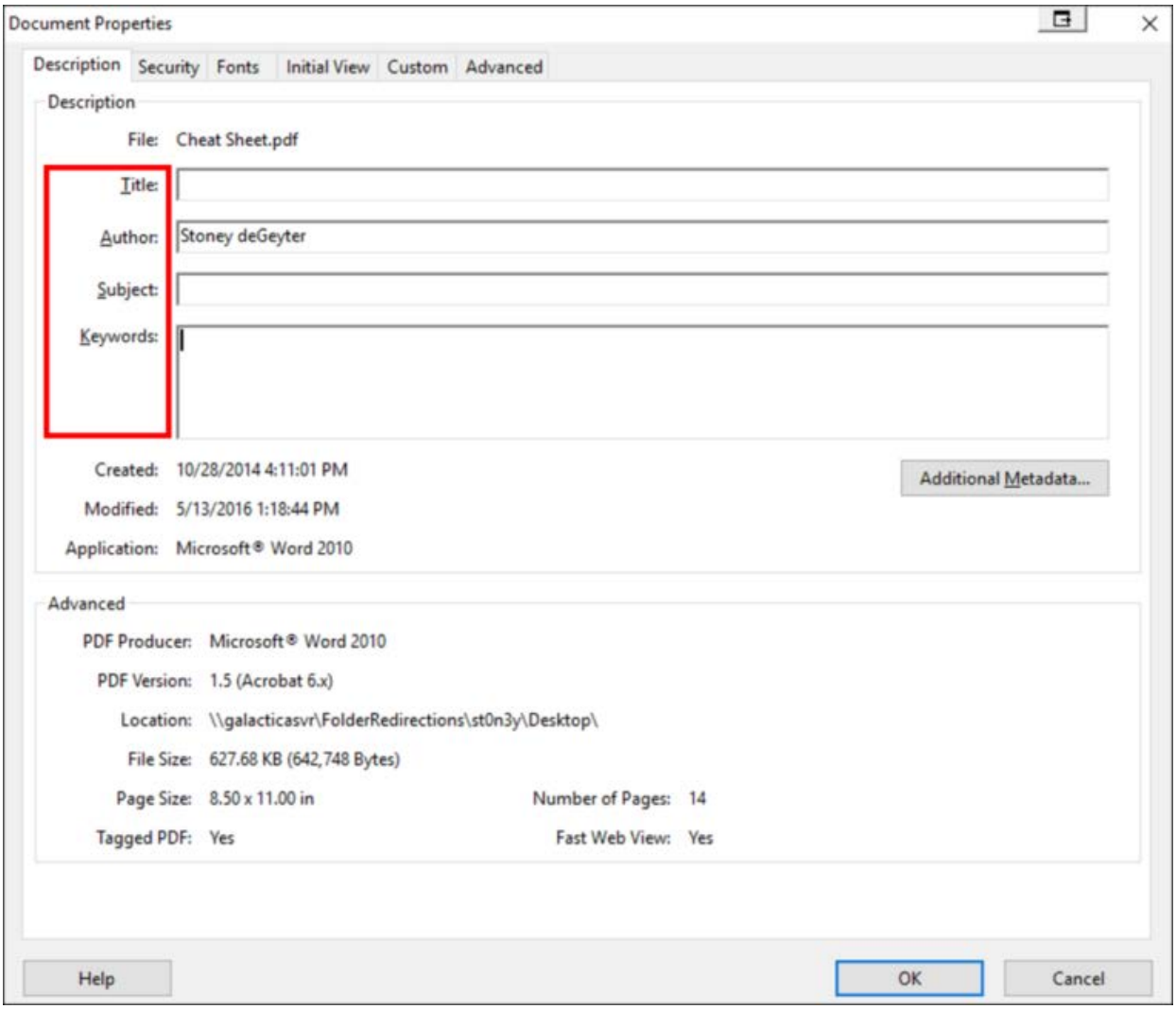
Your strategy document will be very individual to your business, which is why it's almost impossible for us to create a one-size-fits-all digital marketing strategy template. Remember, the purpose of your strategy document is to map out the actions you're going to take to achieve your goal over a period 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.

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 web page. 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.

CHAPTER 13

HOW LONG DOES SEO TAKE?

WRITTEN BY
JEREMY KNAUFF

While there are many questions about SEO, few are as difficult to answer as "How long does it take?"

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.

The short answer is "it depends."

Unfortunately, I won't be giving you a specific timeframe for SEO results because that's impossible. Nor will I be sharing some secret formula to answer this question because one simply doesn't exist.

However, there is a lot more to answering it than guesswork. The truth is that how long it takes comes down to analyzing several variables for your own website compared to the same variables for your competitors' websites.

There are three specific criteria that play a significant role on how long your SEO will take: *competition, inbound links,* and *content.*

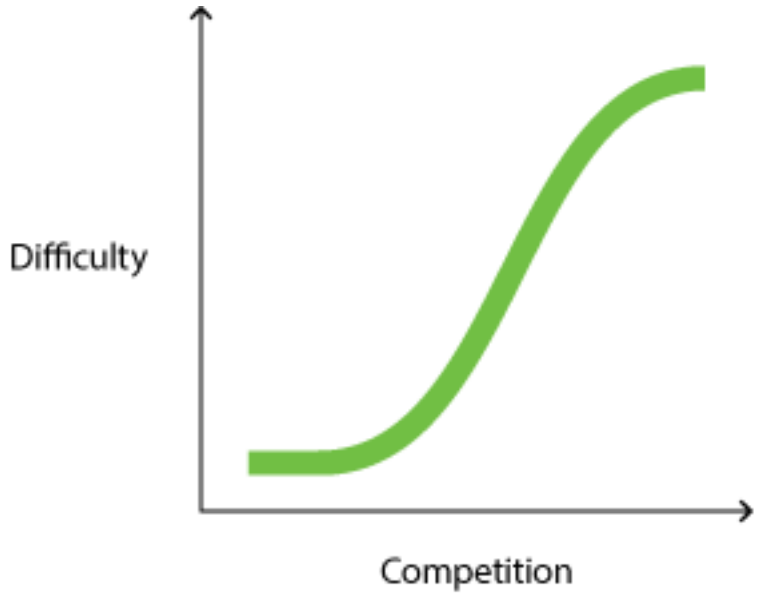
Competition

If you're selling something like salmon-flavored toaster pastries, 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 in the same 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 get results.

Both the difficulty and time necessary will usually follow a bell curve, in that the webpages ranked lower will be easier to outrank, and it will become progressively more difficult and take longer to outrank the webpages the closer you get to the first page.



There's another important and often overlooked aspect of competition that most people don't even realize, and 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.

Inbound Links

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.

A plethora of links from low-quality websites not only won't help your ranking — *they could actually hurt it,* slowing down your progress. Instead, you need to focus on quality links from relevant websites.

Finally, both the speed at which you earn links and the speed at which you have historically earned links, are also factors because, generally, an abrupt increase indicates an unnatural attempt to manipulate ranking.

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 a killer content marketing campaign, it *could* be completely natural:

Maybe Natural Link Growth

This looks about as natural as orange 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.

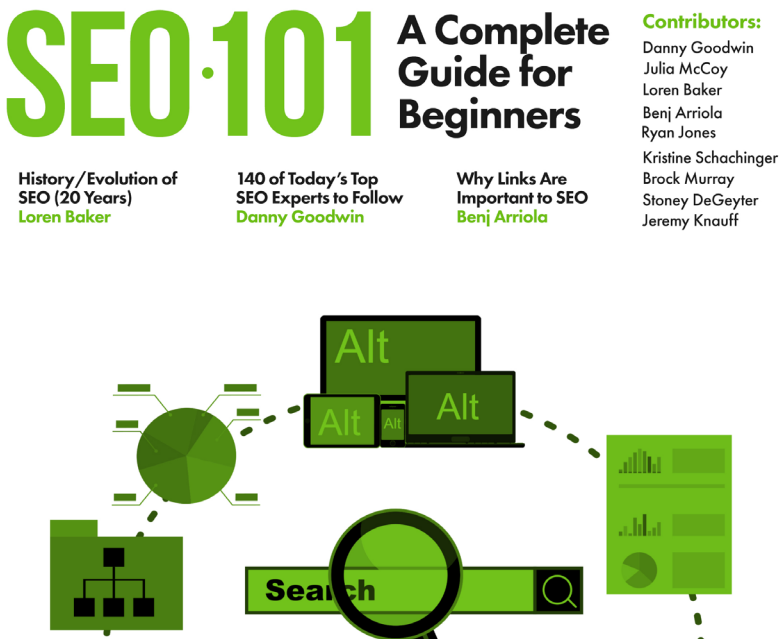
If your link building tactics follow Google's guidelines, that should happen naturally. It's usually only when you use black hat tactics that you see unnatural patterns that could slow down your progress.

Content

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.



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.

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, further speed up your SEO efforts.

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. 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. In fact, according to a comprehensive statistical analysis by Tim Soulo, only 5.7 percent of all newly published pages will get to Google's top 10 within a year.

This is an ongoing effort that will never really be complete, as Webcology host Jim Hedger explains:

> Pages will start to show for their URL fairly quickly, and for their branded keyword targets shortly thereafter. Competing for non-branded keyword targets, or for more exposure in local search, is a long-term effort that is never really complete

Conclusion

You can't accurately predict exactly when you'll achieve top ranking for a particular keyword or topic. However, you can make a highly educated guess based on certain variables. Over time, you can get a better idea of how long it may take within your particular niche.

CHAPTER 14

15 SEO MYTHS THAT JUST WON'T DIE

WRITTEN BY
KRISTINE SCHACHINGER

In digital marketing, and specifically search engine optimization (SEO), there are tidbits of information that in their retelling lose context and become what we call in other circles "Zombie Lies" or in this case "Zombie Myths".

Zombie SEO Myths

Zombie SEO myths are myths that, despite being debunked over and over again, never seem to die. They take on a life of their own and leave site owners confused as to what is true and what is not.

So this chapter is going to look at some of those myths that never seem to die – no matter how hard experts try to kill them.

Mostly, we're going to focus on Google because that is where most sites get their traffic (and where most of the myths revolve around).

Myth 1: SEO is Voodoo or Snake Oil

There is a low bar to entry into the field of digital marketing, including and especially SEO. There are no real certification processes (because how would you certify something that changes every day?) and Google never publishes the algorithms, so there is no way to test an individual's knowledge against what they contain.

Basically, when you hire an SEO it has to be based on trust.
This is why the myth that SEO is voodoo prevails. It prevails because

bad practitioners did bad work and the client is left with no other way to explain their lack of results. In fact, it is often these bad practitioners who use the myth to explain their poor results.

That being said, SEO isn't voodoo (or magic or "bovine feces"). Real SEO is the process of making sites adhere better to Google's algorithms, for specific query strings, in order to increase relevant site traffic and/or company revenues.

These algorithms aren't completely unknowable things.

While Google never publishes the details of that information, informed SEO professionals have a good understanding of what will bring a site in compliance with those algorithms (or, in the case of black hat SEO, how they can game those algorithms). They are after all based on math and processes governed by logic.

A trustworthy SEO professional lives and breathes algorithm changes, which can amount to multiple changes a day. They know why the algorithms do what they do as best as anyone not working at Google can do.

This is the opposite of voodoo and magic. It is called earned knowledge. It is also a very hard earned knowledge.

When you pay an SEO you aren't paying for their time. You are paying for their knowledge and results. Prices are set accordingly.

Myth 2: Content Is All You Need

"Content is KING!"

You will find many articles that make this statement. While they are not completely untrue, content is less king and more like a valuable business partner to links, design, and usability.

Mostly, though, content and links are the like the conjoined twins of the SEO world. **You must have both.** One will not work without the other (at least not well and not for the long term).

Now, Google will tell you many long-tail queries rank without links. That is likely true. It is also likely that these long-tail queries are so unique that there is no competition for them, so links don't play an active role the way they do in a competitive query.

If you're trying to rank for the Walking Dead, you better have links* or don't expect anyone to find you.

**Good links. Not poor, $99 links bought from a link farm.*

So while content is very important, content needs links. Just like links need content.

Bonus Tip! Content is not king. Content is special, but not king. Like peanut butter and jelly you can have one without the other, but it isn't as good. Add technical to this duo and you have the triad that is the basis of all good core SEO.

Myth 3: Speed Isn't That Important

Google said a while back that page speed is only a tie-breaker when all other factors are equal. This is one of those cases where I can say that this is not borne out in real-world testing.

Personally, I had a client increase their traffic by over 200,000 sessions a day when they cut their page speed by 50 percent during a likely Panda update. So while it is true that it acts as a tie-breaker when all things are equal it can also dramatically improve rankings when your site has a severe page speed issue.

Now when I say a page speed issue, I don't mean you cut your 5-second site load time down to 2 seconds. I mean when you dramatically cut your page load, say a 22-second site load time down to 8 seconds, which is what happened in this case.

Know What is Being Measured

It is also important to know what Google is measuring when they are evaluating page speed. While they are looking at overall speed the issue they are most "critical" of is how long the DOM (Direct Object Model) takes to load. The DOM items are the visible items on the page excluding ads, if you have stacked your load right.

This means that if you can cut your DOM load from 22 seconds to 8 seconds as in the example, Google will likely reward you for the dramatic decrease in page load because you are now dramatically faster. This is an additional benefit of improving page speed unrelated to breaking a tie on a specific query result.

A faster site is much easier for Googlebot to crawl. When the site is not slowing the crawl down, more of your site is getting indexed either in number of pages or in depth of page crawl.

Note: The Google Page Speed Insight tool only measures items in the DOM, so you could have a higher page speed score than another site, but still perform more poorly in the rankings because your overall page load is too slow. Page speed is very important and will become even more so as we move into mobile first. So never discount it.

Myth 4: Links Are Dead

I once had a call from a potential client that asked me if I could remove all his links.

"Remove all your links? May I ask why you would want to do that," I asked.

"Because I heard links were bad and I need to remove them," he told me.

"Did you buy the links or get them from some nefarious method?"

"No they are all legit."

"Then, sir, whatever you do, use me or don't for other reasons, do not get rid of your links!"

True story.

Links aren't dead.

Links aren't close to dead.

If you have the best content in the world and no links, your site won't get much visibility. Links and content are correlated with rankings. Great content still needs great links (or a lot of mediocre ones).

If you're buying links for $99 and expecting to get to the top spots in Google, you're barking up a very dead tree.

Remember, good links require topical relevancy and legitimacy. If it isn't natural and it comes from an unrelated page or site, it probably won't help much.

Bonus tip! Reciprocal linking died circa 2007, maybe earlier. Linking to your buddy and them linking to you won't do you much good.

Myth 5: Keyword Density

There was a time keyword density have some validity.

Really, if it did not work why do you think all those people were stuffing white text on white backgrounds for ranking purposes? Then Google got smarter and it did away with keyword stuffing as a viable practice and even people who got good results from applying density testing to much smaller keyword placements no longer could count on knowing what keyword density would help.

In both cases, this no longer exists.

While you can still put any word on the page too many times, there is no set range of what makes a page rank. In fact, you can find results

now where the keyword does not exist in the visible portion of the page. It might be in the links or in the image tagging or somewhere else that is not part of the content it might even be a similar not exact match. This is not typical, but it does exist.

Bottom line: placing a keyword X times per page is no longer something worth spending your time on. There are far better fish to fry.

Bonus Tip! Better to make relevant content that you can link to internally and others can link to externally than to waste time on optimizing keywords. That being said your title tag is still highly relevant. Spend some time adding your query set there. That might give you a boost.

Myth 6: You Must Submit Your Site

At least twice a week I get an email from an SEO site submission company telling me I need to pay them to submit my site to the search engines.

Seriously? No, you do not.

Now, are there times when it is good to submit your site URLs? Sure when you need the search engines to come back to the site to do things like pick up a new piece of content or re-evaluate a page, however, you never need to submit your site.

Google is advanced enough now – and especially with its status as registrar – that it can find you minutes after not only that site is live, but also when the domain is registered.

Now if you've been live for a few weeks and have an inbound link to the site and Google has not come by as evident by your logs it can't hurt to submit it via Google Search Console Fetch and Render, but never ever pay someone to submit your site.

Bonus Tip! When in doubt just use Google's URL submit form or "fetch and render/submit" in Google Search Console.

Myth 7: You Don't Need a Sitemap

Sitemaps are not a nice to have add-on for sites today. This gets even more important as we move to the mobile-first algorithms in 2018. Why? When Google cannot easily crawl a portion of your site, the sitemap allows the crawler to better find these pages.

Bonus Tip! Google is going to have a harder time finding pages due to the reduced size of navigational elements in mobile-first indexing. Sitemaps – both XML and HTML – will be the best way for them to find all the pages on the site you want indexed and ranked.

Myth 8: Query Must Have Freshness

QDF, or Query Deserves Freshness, most certainly applies to queries that need fresh results. For instance, from a news site or say the most recent Powerball numbers. That does not mean you have to change every element on your homepage every day or even very often.

While there are sites that absolutely must have fresh content on their main site pages on a daily or weekly basis, most do not. Evergreen pages are evergreen for a reason. If you write an article on mobile-first indexing and that information has not changed, you do not need to change that page to give it "freshness".

You do, however, need to have some fresh content on your site. So a good content strategy is how you address having fresh content without trying to meet some unnatural goal for daily content changes.

Bonus Tip! For smaller sites that have small teams or little money and do not need to have fresh content daily, you can just invest in adding pages to the site when needed but keeping an active blog presence. Adding 2-3 blog posts a week will keep the site relevant without adding the demands and costs of continually updating pages.

Myth 9: Because Big Brands Do It, It Must Be Good!

Remember your parents saying to you when you were little, "Would you jump off a bridge just because Johnny told you to?!" Same thing goes here.

There is a long history of sites copying bad website decisions from each other simply because they thought the other site knew something they didn't.

Don't be a lemming.

What one site does may work for them and may not. What if they tell you it is the best thing since sliced bread? Unless you're looking at their metrics, don't believe them and even if it is the best thing for them, the chances of that being right for you are slim.

Why? Because you're a different company. Your users have different queries and user intent. Just because Facebook and Twitter use infinite scroll doesn't mean you should.

In fact, because big brands don't suffer as much from user and Googlebot discontent when they get it wrong, they are more likely to – get it wrong.

Don't copy big brands. Find what works for your users and stick to that.

Bonus Tip! If you want to try something that you see on another site, find a section of yours that isn't bringing in a lot of traffic and then A/B test the idea on your own pages. Your data will show you what works best for you. Never assume because a big brand does it, you will benefit from following their path.

Myth 10: Algorithm Devaluations = Penalties

Google has two types of site devaluations.

Penguin, Panda, Pirate, Pigeon, Layout etc. are all algorithms. Algorithms can giveth and they can taketh away. This means that not every site sees devaluations from the update of these processes. Many sites see positive results. This is called an "algorithmic change" not a penalty.

What are penalties then?

Penalties are manual actions you can find in Google Search Console. This is when Google took a look at your site and decided it was in violation of the Webmaster Guidelines and devalued the site. You know this happened by checking your messages in Google Search Console. When it happens they will tell you.

Penalties also require you "submit a reconsideration request" to regain your site status and remove the penalty.

Algorithmic devaluations have no such consideration. You fix what you think went wrong. Then you wait to see if Google gives you back your rankings when that algorithm or set of algorithms comes back through and re-evaluates the site.

Myth 11: Duplicate Content is a Penalty

There is NO duplicate content penalty!

There has never been a duplicate content penalty.

Google does have a duplicate content filter, which simply means that if there is more than one item of content that is the same Google will not rank both for the same query. It will only rank one.

This makes perfect sense. Why would you want the results for a query to bring back the same content multiple times? It is simply easier to rewrite the piece than try to guess what those might be.

All that said, too much duplicate content can affect you with the Panda algorithm, but that is more about site quality rather than manual actions.

Bonus tip! The duplicate content filter applies to titles and meta descriptions as well. Make sure to make all your titles and descriptions unique.

Myth 12: Social Media Helps You Rank

Social media, done well, will get you exposure. That exposure can get you links and citations. Those links and citations can get you better rankings.

That doesn't mean that social media postings are inherently helpful to getting you rank.

Social media doesn't give you links, but it encourages others to link to you. It also means that the social media post may escape its ecosystem and provide you a true site link. But don't hold your breath.

Social media is about visibility. Getting those people to share your content and link to or mention your site in a way that Google counts it as a "link"? That is SEO.

Myth 13: Buying Google Ads Helps with Organic Ranking

No. Just no. Investing in PPC won't boost your organic search rankings.

These two divisions are in two separate buildings and not allowed to engage with each other about these things.

Personally, I have worked with sites that have had massive budgets in Google AdWords. Their site still lived and died in organic by the organic algorithms. They received no bonus placements from buying Ads.

Bonus Tip! What buying ads can do is promote brand validation. In user experiments, it has been shown that when a user sees an ad and the site in the organic rankings together, they believe it to have more authority. This can increase click-through rates.

Myth 14: Google Uses AI in All its Algorithms

No. Google doesn't use AI in the live algorithms except for RankBrain.

Now, Google does use AI to train the algorithms and in ways internally we are not privy to. However, Google doesn't use AI in terms of the live algorithms.

Why?

Very simply put, because if it breaks they would not know how to fix it. AI operates on a self-learning model.

If it were to break something on search and that broken piece hurt Google's ability to make money there would be no easy way to fix it. More than 95 percent of Google's revenue still comes from ads, so it would be extremely dangerous to allow AI to take over without oversight.

Myth 15: RankBrain

So much has been written about RankBrain that is simply incorrect it would be difficult to state it as one myth. So, in general, let's just talk about what RankBrain is and isn't.

RankBrain is a top ranking factor that you don't optimize to meet.

What does that mean? Basically, when Google went from strings to things (i.e., entity search), it needed better ways to determine what a query meant to the user and how the words in the query set related to each other. By doing this analysis, Google could better match the user's intent.

To this end, they developed a system of processes to determine relationships between entities. For those queries they understand, they bring back a standard SERP. Hopefully, one that best matches your intent as a user.

However, 15 percent of the queries Google sees every day are new. So Google needed a way to deal with entities whose relationship was unclear or unknown when trying to match user intent.

Enter RankBrain!

RankBrain is a machine-learning algorithm that tries to understand what you mean when Google is unsure. It uses entity match and known relationships to infer meaning/intent from those queries it doesn't understand.
For instance, back when the drought in California was severe if you

looked up “water rights Las Vegas NV” (we share water) you would get back all sorts of information about water rights and the history of water rights in the Las Vegas area. However, if you put in a much lesser known area of Nevada, like Mesquite, Google wasn’t sure what you wanted to know.

Why? Because while Google understands Las Vegas as a city (entity) in a geological area (Clark County) and can associate that with water rights, a known topic of interest due to search data. It cannot, however, do the same for Mesquite.

Why? Because no one likely searched for water rights in Mesquite before or very often. The query intent was unknown.

To Google, Mesquite is a city in Nevada, but also a tree/charcoal/flavor/BBQ sauce and it brought back all of these results ignoring the delimiter “water rights” for all but one result. This is RankBrain.

Google is giving you a “kitchen sink.” Over time, if enough people search for that information or the training Google feeds it tells it differently, it will know that you specifically wanted x, not y.

RankBrain is about using AI to determine intent between entities with unknown or loosely formed relationships. So it is a ranking factor, but not really a ranking factor.

Bonus Tip! While there are a few niche cases where it might make sense to optimize for RankBrain, it really doesn’t for most. The query is a living dynamic result that is Google’s best guess at user intent. You

would do far better to simply optimize the site properly than trying to gain from optimizing specifically for RankBrain.

RECOMMENDED READING:

- 10 'Hidden' Ranking Facts, 1 Is A Lie

CHAPTER 15

THE 25 BEST BLOGS & PUBLICATIONS TO LEARN SEO

WRITTEN BY
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.

After all, in the fast-moving world of SEO the only constant is change.

While there is no shortage of places where you can find advice about SEO online, some blogs and publications offer more trustworthy and reliable advice than others. Unfortunately, the web makes it easy for anyone to create a blog and claim to be an SEO expert.

That's why, as you read any SEO tips or advice online, you should always remember this:

Don't trust everything you read.

In fact, that's why we've compiled this list of places where you can learn SEO. We want to make sure you don't listen to any bad advice that will hurt your SEO efforts.

While these SEO blogs and publications are usually pretty reliable and accurate, again, it's important to think about and test any strategies, tactics, or ideas you read about.

Every brand, business, and website is unique – there is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution.

Here are the 25 best blogs and publications to learn about SEO.

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.

In addition, you'll discover when new features are coming to the organic search results; get helpful reminders on topics like hacking and following Google's Webmaster Guidelines; and learn about the latest updates to popular tools like the Search Console.

Bonus resource: Check out Google's Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide (PDF). Although it hasn't been updated since 2010, the info you'll find in here is definitely worth a read (this guide originally appeared on Google's blog).

2. Search Engine Journal

Founded in 2003 by Loren Baker, Search Engine Journal – the site you're on right now – provides industry news, analysis, insights, and guides for search marketers. Our core editorial focus is all things SEO, PPC, social media, and content marketing

Every day, you'll find a steady stream of stories featuring tips and advice from SEJ staff, as well as a variety of respected and experienced voices from the search community. We also run regular webinars on today's hottest topics and talk to the top industry authorities, experts, and influencers on our Search Engine Nerds podcast.

In addition, SEJ also hosts SEJ Summit, an intensive one-day conference filled with quality education and networking.

3. Search Engine Land

Launched in 2007 by Danny Sullivan (one of the most influential people in the history of the search industry) after he left Search Engine Watch, Search Engine Land provides daily breaking news and coverage of all aspects of the search industry.

In addition to having an experienced editorial team, SEL features a variety of industry experts who share tips, tactics, and strategies, mainly on the topics of SEO and PPC. SEL's parent company, Third Door Media, also runs a popular conference series, SMX.

4. 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.

5. The SEM Post

Respected industry veteran Jennifer Slegg is editor of The SEM Post, which she founded in June 2014. In addition to providing daily news updates on the latest in SEO, Slegg regularly spots many features Google and Bing are testing and often takes a deep and comprehensive dive into major algorithm updates and changes to Google's quality rater guidelines.

6. Stone Temple Digital Marketing Excellence Blog

The Digital Marketing Excellence Blog is from Stone Temple Consulting, a digital marketing agency founded in 1997 by CEO Eric Enge, one of the most respected people in the search industry. You can expect a new post or two every week from this blog.

You can read about SEO, content marketing, analytics, and social media. In addition to conducting original research, Stone Temple also produces a popular video series called "Here's Why" featuring Enge and Mark Traphagen, Stone Temple's senior director of brand evangelism.

7. GSQi Blog

Glenn Gabe, president of digital consulting service G-Squared Interactive, writes the GSQi blog. You'll find posts on digital marketing strategy, PPC and social media advertising, and analytics.

However, Gabe mainly writes on advanced technical SEO topics. He also is constantly watching Google's algorithm for updates and fluctuations. Whenever a major algorithm update happens, you'll want to check out Gabe's analysis.

8. The 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.

One of their most popular features is Whiteboard Friday, where an expert (usually Moz co-founder Rand Fishkin) will break down a large topic via a whiteboard.

9. SEO Theory

Michael Martinez, president and co-founder of Reflective Dynamics, started SEO Theory in 2006. Here, you'll find lots of great posts that all aim to explain how SEO and search works. Fair warning: the stuff you'll read here isn't aimed at beginners.

10. Understanding Google My Business & Local Search / LocalU

This has been the go-to place for local businesses since 2006. It's all local, all the time. Mike Blumenthal's blog will keep you up to date on all the latest developments in local search.

For even more of Blumenthal, check out his weekly video recaps at Local University.

11. State of Digital

Founded in 2010 by Bas van den Beld, State of Digital offers articles on SEO and more digital marketing topics (social, content, etc.). Although this site is more geared toward a European audience, you'll find lots of great insights here. Plus, the concept of State of Digital is pretty brilliant.

12. Search Engine Watch

Launched in 1997 (also by Danny Sullivan), Search Engine Watch is the longest-running publication dedicated to the search industry. Lately, SEW has been publishing about one post a day, mostly on the topics of SEO, social media, and content marketing.

13. Portent

Portent is a Seattle-based digital marketing agency run by Ian Lurie (one of my personal favorite writers in SEO). On the Portent blog, you'll find tips, guides, and some unique takes on all things SEO and digital marketing.

14. SEMrush Blog

The SEMrush blog comes from the maker of the popular keyword and competitive research tool. Covering SEO, PPC, and content marketing, you'll find a new article post here every day from members of the SEMrush team and industry experts.

15. Go Fish Digital Blog

You'll find Bill Slawski (of SEO by the Sea fame) writing here, often about patents, as well as other members of the Go Fish Digital team about once a week on various search and digital marketing topics.

16. 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 opinions stories of the week from a variety of websites.

17. Yoast SEO Blog

Yoast, founded by Joost de Valk, 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. Usually, Yoast publishes two to three posts a week.

18. Distilled

This blog comes from online marketing agency Distilled, founded by Will Critchlow. Once or twice a week you'll find a post from a Distilled team member about SEO, mobile, social, CRO, and other digital marketing topics.

19. WebmasterWorld

Webmaster World is one of the longest-running and most trusted forums among SEOs and webmasters. You'll find up to the minute discussion and debate on the latest news as well as questions from webmasters trying to solve problems and improve their SEO.

Other forums worth checking out:

- Google Webmaster Central Help Forum
- Cre8asite
- Inbound.org
- Big SEO – Reddit

20. Backlinko

Brian Dean is the founder of Backlinko. Typically, you'll find one or two new or updated posts per month on the blog, usually featuring actionable strategies or data-backed case studies.

21. Branded3

This blog from UK-based digital marketing agency Branded3 features insights on SEO, PPC, content marketing, digital PR, and CRO. On average, Branded3 publishes about three posts per week.

22. BrightEdge

BrightEdge, based out of San Mateo, California, makes a popular SEO and content platform. On their blog, you'll find posts on SEO, content, and commentary on the latest developments in digital marketing.

23. SEO by the Sea

If you love reading about 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.

Although Slawski is only publishing a couple times a month right now, when he does, it's almost always a must-read. Plus there's a treasure trove of information from past years on SEO by the Sea that will help you understand search engines and SEO today.

24. Blind Five Year Old

Blind Five Year Old is a blog from A.J. Kohn. Posts are usually few and far between, but when Kohn publishes something, you can be sure it will be high-quality and worth your time.

25. ViperChill

ViperChill is a blog from Glen Allsopp, which focuses mainly on SEO, viral marketing, and blogging advice. Although the blog has gone quiet in recent months, you'll find some great and in-depth insights and advice – although be warned: some riskier tactics outside of Google's guidelines are discussed here, so proceed with caution.

CHAPTER 16

THE BEST SEO CONFERENCES TO ATTEND

WRITTEN BY
DANNY GOODWIN

Attending conferences will help keep you up to date on the latest SEO strategies, trends, tips, and tools.

Plus, SEO conferences are a fantastic way to grow your professional network and connect with potential clients. This can happen between sessions, during official networking events, or sometimes even at a pub after hours.

Whether you want to seek out help from SEO experts, exchange ideas with peers, or get some ideas inspiration that you can implement once you're back in the office, there are plenty of SEO conferences to choose from.

Click here to view an up to date listing of the best SEO conferences to learn more about SEO (and digital marketing).

CHAPTER 17

140 OF TODAY'S TOP SEO EXPERTS TO FOLLOW

WRITTEN BY
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, blog posts.

You will definitely learn something new every day from this list of 140 SEO experts. Follow them if you want a free SEO education.

How This List Was Compiled

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 I wanted to put together this list of today's top authorities and experts you should be following if you want to learn about SEO today.

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 content that confuses expertise with social media follower counts.

The people on this list are all actively doing SEO now – or they're sharing SEO information, knowledge, and insights (either via social media, contributing to publications or blogs, or speaking at conferences).

These SEO people really know their stuff. Follow them if you want to grow your skill set and knowledge.

1. Barry Adams

Follow @badams on Twitter
Follow Barry on Facebook

2. Jono Alderson

Follow @jonoalderson on Twitter
Follow Jono on Facebook

3. Alicia Anderson

Follow @A_K_Anderson on Twitter

4. Dawn Anderson

Follow @dawnieando on Twitter
Follow Dawn on Facebook

5. Benj Arriola

Follow @BenjArriola on Twitter
Follow Benj on Facebook
Read Benj on Search Engine Journal

6. Adam Audette

Follow @audette on Twitter

7. Loren Baker

Follow @lorenbaker on Twitter

Follow Loren on Facebook

Read Loren on Search Engine Journal

8. Aleh Barysevich

Follow @ab80 on Twitter

Follow Aleh on Facebook

Read Aleh on Search Engine Journal

9. Ashley Berman Hale

Follow @BermanHale on Twitter

Follow Ashley on Facebook

10. Seth Besmertnik

Follow @Besmertnik on Twitter

Follow Seth on Facebook

11. Andy Betts

Follow @andybetts1 on Twitter

Follow Andy on Facebook

12. Alan Bleiweiss

Follow @AlanBleiweiss on Twitter

Follow Alan on Facebook

Read Alan on Search Engine Journal

13. Mike Blumenthal

Follow @mblumenthal on Twitter
Follow Mike on Facebook

14. Chris Boggs

Follow @boggles on Twitter
Follow Chris on Facebook

15. Michael Bonfils

Follow @michaelbonfils on Twitter
Follow Michael on Facebook

16. Elmer Boutin

Follow @rehor on Twitter
Follow Elmer on Facebook

17. Jim Boykin

Follow @jimboykin on Twitter
Follow Jim on Facebook

18. Rob Bucci

Follow @STATrob on Twitter
Follow Rob on Facebook

19. Doc Sheldon Campbell

Follow @DocSheldon on Twitter

Follow Doc on Facebook

20. Christine Churchill

Follow @ChrisChurchill on Twitter

Follow Christine on Facebook

21. Catfish Comstock

Follow @SEOCatfish on Twitter

Follow Catfish on Facebook

22. Jon Cooper

Follow @PointBlankSEO on Twitter

23. Will Critchlow

Follow @willcritchlow on Twitter

Follow Will on Facebook

24. Anna Crowe

Follow @annaleacrowe on Twitter

Follow Anna on Facebook

Read Anna on Search Engine Journal

25. Brent Csutoras

Follow @brentcsutoras on Twitter

Follow Brent on Facebook

Read Brent on Search Engine Journal

26. Annie Cushing

Follow Annie on Twitter

Follow Annie on Facebook

27. Dave Davies

Follow @beanstalkim on Twitter

Follow Dave on Facebook

Read Dave on Search Engine Journal

28. Brian Dean

Follow @Backlinko on Twitter

Follow Brian on Facebook

29. Stoney deGeyter

Follow @StoneyD on Twitter

Read Stoney on Search Engine Journal

30. Joost de Valk

Follow @jdevalk on Twitter

Follow Joost on Facebook

31. Pratik Dholakiya

Follow @DholakiyaPratik on Twitter
Follow Pratik on Facebook
Read Pratik on Search Engine Journal

32. John Doherty

Follow @dohertyjf on Twitter
Follow John on Facebook

33. Rae Dolan

Follow @sugarrae on Twitter
Follow Rae on Facebook

34. Rhea Drysdale

Follow @Rhea on Twitter
Follow Rhea on Facebook

35. Victoria Edwards

Follow @TallChickVic on Twitter
Follow Victoria on Facebook

36. Eric Enge

Follow @stonetemple on Twitter
Follow Eric on Facebook
Read Eric on Search Engine Journal

37. Erin Everhart

Follow @erinever on Twitter
Follow Erin on Facebook

38. Melissa Fach

Follow @SEOAware on Twitter
Follow Melissa on Facebook

39. Shelly Fagin

Follow @shellyfagin on Twitter
Follow Shelly on Facebook

40. Gianluca Fiorelli

Follow @gfiorelli1 on Twitter
Follow Gianluca on Facebook

41. Rand Fishkin

Follow @randfish on Twitter
Follow Rand on Facebook

42. Duane Forrester

Follow @DuaneForrester on Twitter
Follow Duane on Facebook

43. Glenn Gabe

Follow @glenngabe on Twitter
Follow Glenn on Facebook

44. Greg Gifford

Follow @GregGifford on Twitter
Follow Greg on Facebook

45. Casie Gillette

Follow @Casieg on Twitter
Follow Casie on Facebook

46. Andrew Girdwood

Follow @AndrewGirdwood on Twitter
Follow Andrew on Facebook

47. Damon Gochneaur

Follow @DamonGochneaur on Twitter
Follow Damon on Facebook

48. Dennis Goedegebuure

Follow @TheNextCorner on Twitter
Follow Dennis on Facebook

49. Keith Goode

Follow @keithgoode on Twitter
Follow Keith on Facebook

50. Bartosz Góralewicz

Follow @bart_goralewicz on Twitter
Follow Bartosz on Facebook

51. Mike Grehan

Follow @mikegrehan on Twitter
Follow Mike on Facebook

52. Emily Grossman

Follow @goutaste on Twitter
Follow Emily on Facebook

53. Jenny Halasz

Follow @jennyhalasz on Twitter
Follow Jenny on Facebook
Read Jenny on Search Engine Journal

54. Joe Hall

Follow @joehall on Twitter
Follow Joe on Facebook

55. Brian Harnish

Follow @BrianHarnish on Twitter
Follow Brian on Facebook
Read Brian on Search Engine Journal

56. Christopher Hart

Follow @chris_hart on Twitter
Follow Chris on Facebook
Read Chris on Search Engine Journal

57. Bill Hartzer

Follow @bhartzer on Twitter
Follow Bill on Facebook
Read Bill on Search Engine Journal

58. Joy Hawkins

Follow @JoyanneHawkins on Twitter

59. Marie Haynes

Follow @Marie_Haynes on Twitter
Follow Marie on Facebook

60. Jim Hedger

Follow @jimhedger on Twitter
Follow Jim on Facebook

61. Jon Henshaw

Follow @RavenJon on Twitter
Follow Jon on Facebook

62. Simon Heseltine

Follow @SimonHeseltine on Twitter
Follow Simon on Facebook

63. Carrie Hill

Follow @CarrieHill on Twitter
Follow Carrie on Facebook

64. Bill Hunt

Follow @billhunt on Twitter
Follow Bill on Facebook

65. Gary Illyes

Follow @methode on Twitter
Follow Gary on Facebook

66. Mark Jackson

Follow @MarkJackson on Twitter
Follow Mark on Facebook

67. Ammon Johns

Follow @Ammon_Johns on Twitter
Follow Ammon on Facebook

68. Dixon Jones

Follow @Dixon_Jones on Twitter
Follow Dixon on Facebook

69. Kelsey Jones

Follow @wonderwall7 on Twitter
Follow Kelsey on Facebook
Read Kelsey on Search Engine Journal

70. Kristopher Jones

Follow @krisjonescom on Twitter
Follow Kris on Facebook
Read Kris on Search Engine Journal

71. Ryan Jones

Follow @RyanJones on Twitter
Follow Ryan on Facebook
Read Ryan on Search Engine Journal

72. Julie Joyce

Follow @JulieJoyce on Twitter
Follow Julie on Facebook

73. Jordan Kasteler

Follow @JordanKasteler on Twitter
Follow Jordan on Facebook

74. Michael King

Follow @iPullRank on Twitter
Follow Mike on Facebook

75. Jeremy Knauff

Follow @JeremyKnauff on Twitter
Follow Jeremy on Facebook
Read Jeremy on Search Engine Journal

76. Topher Kohan

Follow @Topheratl on Twitter
Follow Topher on Facebook

77. AJ Kohn

Follow @ajkohn on Twitter
Follow AJ on Facebook

78. Kim Krause Berg

Follow @kim_cre8pc on Twitter
Follow Kim on Facebook

79. Cindy Krum

Follow @Suzzicks on Twitter
Follow Cindy on Facebook

80. Brian LaFrance

Follow @blafrance on Twitter
Follow Brian on Facebook

81. Joe Laratro

Follow @jlaratro on Twitter
Follow Joe on Facebook

82. Heather Lloyd-Martin

Follow @heatherlloyd on Twitter
Follow Heather on Facebook

83. Laura Lippay

Follow @lauralippay on Twitter
Follow Laura on Facebook

84. Ian Lurie

Follow @portentint on Twitter
Follow Ian on Facebook

85. Trond Lyngbø

Follow @TrondLyngbo on Twitter
Follow Trond on Facebook

86. Casey Markee

Follow @MediaWyse on Twitter
Follow Casey on Facebook

87. Debra Mastaler

Follow @debramastaler on Twitter
Follow Debra on Facebook

88. Josh McCoy

Follow @JoshuaCMcCoy on Twitter
Follow Josh on Facebook
Read Josh on Search Engine Journal

89. Brian McDowell

Follow @brian_mcdowell on Twitter
Follow Brian on Facebook

90. Sha Menz

Follow @ShahMenz on Twitter
Follow Sha on Facebook

91. Bryson Meunier

Follow @brysonmeunier on Twitter
Follow Bryson on Facebook

92. David Mihm

Follow @davidmihm on Twitter
Follow David on Facebook

93. Roger Montti

Follow @martinibuster on Twitter
Follow Roger on Facebook
Read Roger on Search Engine Journal

94. Paddy Moogan

Follow @paddymoogan on Twitter
Follow Paddy on Facebook

95. Kate Morris

Follow @katemorris on Twitter

96. John Mueller

Follow @JohnMu on Twitter

97. Britney Muller

Follow @BritneyMuller on Twitter

98. Lisa D. Myers

Follow @LisaDMyers on Twitter

Follow Lisa on Facebook

99. Dr. Pete Myers

Follow @dr_pete on Twitter

Follow Pete on Facebook

100. Lee Odden

Follow @leeodden on Twitter

Follow Lee on Facebook

101. Beau Pedraza

Follow @beaupedraza on Twitter

Follow Beau on Facebook

Read Beau on Search Engine Journal

102. Scott Polk

Follow @scottpolk on Twitter

Follow Scott on Facebook

103. Jeff Preston

Follow @jeffreypreston on Twitter
Follow Jeffrey on Facebook

104. Bridget Randolph

Follow @BridgetRandolph on Twitter
Follow Bridget on Facebook

105. Wil Reynolds

Follow @wilreynolds on Twitter
Follow Wil on Facebook

106. Adam Riemer

Follow @rollerblader on Twitter
Follow Adam on Facebook
Read Adam on Search Engine Journal

107. Dave Rohrer

Follow @daver on Twitter
Follow Dave on Facebook

108. Conrad Saam

Follow @ConradSaam on Twitter
Follow Conrad on Facebook

109. Kristine Schachinger

Follow @schachin on Twitter
Follow Kristine on Facebook

110. Barry Schwartz

Follow @rustybrick on Twitter
Follow Barry on Facebook

111. Eli Schwartz

Follow @5le on Twitter
Follow Eli on Facebook
Read Eli on Search Engine Journal

112. Paul Shapiro

Follow @fighto on Twitter
Follow Paul on Facebook

113. John Shehata

Follow @JShehata on Twitter
Follow John on Facebook

114. Carolyn Shelby

Follow @cshel on Twitter
Follow Carolyn on Facebook

115. Chris Sherman

Follow @CJSherman on Twitter
Follow Chris on Facebook

116. Andrew Shotland

Follow @localseoguide on Twitter
Follow Andrew on Facebook

117. Omi Sido

Follow @OmiSido on Twitter
Follow Omi on Facebook

118. Matt Siltala

Follow @Matt_Siltala on Twitter
Follow Matt on Facebook

119. Grant Simmons

Follow @simmonet on Twitter
Follow Grant on Facebook

120. Bill Slawski

Follow @bill_slawski on Twitter
Follow Bill on Facebook

121. Jennifer Slegg

Follow @jenstar on Twitter
Follow Jennifer on Facebook

122. Ann Smarty

Follow @seosmarty on Twitter
Follow Ann on Facebook

123. Aleyda Solis

Follow @aleyda on Twitter
Follow Aleyda on Facebook

124. Stephan Spencer

Follow @sspencer on Twitter
Follow Stephan on Facebook

125. Patrick Stox

Follow @patrickstox on Twitter
Follow Patrick on Facebook
Read Patrick on Search Engine Journal

126. Michael Stricker

Follow @RadioMS on Twitter
Follow Michael on Facebook

127. Kaspar Szymanski

Follow @kas_tweets on Twitter

Follow Kaspar on Facebook

128. Brett Tabke

Follow @btabke on Twitter

Follow Brett on Facebook

129. Dan Taylor

Follow @TaylorDanRW on Twitter

Read Dan on Search Engine Journal

130. Shari Thurow

Follow @sharithurow on Twitter

Follow Shari on Facebook

131. Leslie To

Follow @itsleslieto on Twitter

132. Marcus Tober

Follow @marcustober on Twitter

Follow Marcus on Facebook

133. Bas van den Beld

Follow @basvandenbeld on Twitter
Follow Bas on Facebook

134. Ashley Ward

Follow @ashleymadhatter on Twitter
Follow Ashley on Facebook
Read Ashley on Search Engine Journal

135. Frank Watson

Follow@AussieWebmaster on Twitter
Follow Frank on Facebook

136. Mindy Weinstein

Follow @mindyweinstein on Twitter
Follow Mindy on Facebook
Read Mindy on Search Engine Journal

137. Fili Wiese

Follow @filiwiese on Twitter
Follow Fili on Facebook

138. Rob Woods

Follow @robdwoods on Twitter
Follow Rob on Facebook

139. Tony Wright

Follow @tonynwright on Twitter
Follow Tony on Facebook
Read Tony on Search Engine Journal

140. Joe Youngblood

Follow @YoungbloodJoe on Twitter
Follow Joe on Facebook
Read Joe on Search Engine Journal

CHAPTER 18

11 BIG SEO CHALLENGES YOU'LL FACE IN YOUR CAREER

WRITTEN BY
BROCK MURRAY

Whether you run a solo operation and personally handle every detail of a campaign for a small number of clients, or oversee a wide roster of projects as part of an agency, there are certain challenges that you will face in the course of your SEO career.

No matter how diligent, organized, or proactive you are, there will be angry clients. There will be website malfunctions. There will be SEO campaigns that crater with no explanation. There will be internal issues and logistical dilemmas.

Most of these challenges can be resolved when handled with poise, but it's always good to know what's on the horizon as you embark on your SEO career.

How will you handle these 11 common challenges?

1. Project Management, a.k.a Balancing Client Load & Task Load

You need to be ultra-organized if you are going to be a successful SEO professional.

There are going to be times when you feel you have taken on too much or it simply isn't possible to achieve everything you have promised on schedule, with appropriate quality control.

To confront this challenge, it's essential to have proper project and task management structure. This will allow you to spread the workload across your resources and reduce burnout.
In SEO, a successful campaign is not a means but an end; it comes

from small, manageable tasks performed over a stretch of time. In neglecting these little moments – weekly rankings audits, routine speed optimizations, regular content publication – your whole campaign will never achieve what it needs.

You can't pull an all nighter before a client review meeting and expect there to be results. Digestible tasks spread between your team over a wide window of time is the recipe for success.

As you grow from one to multiple team members, it will be critical that you document your processes, continually improve them, integrate them into your project management structure. Listen to your staff and value their insights about how to improve day-to-day workflow and audit the process regularly.

Don't rely on yesterday's tactics for too long, or you will fall behind.

2. Managing Client Expectations

This is not a lesson you want to learn the hard way, after over-promising and under-delivering to a client. This is especially common if you are chasing a "big fish" client who you feel you have to impress.

Make no mistake: failing to live up to impossible expectations will never impress the client in the end, so keep your promises realistic. Stay in your wheelhouse. Wow them with results, not words.

Whether it's an exploratory call with a potential client, a quote or proposal, or upselling an existing client, I always try to set the correct ex-

pectations. You may not get the sale every time, but that's the right outcome because you were transparent.

Clients and would-be clients will appreciate that honesty in the long run. You'd be amazed at the number of times a prospect calls up six months later to reopen the conversation with adjusted expectations.

In addition to setting the right expectations when it comes to deliverables and campaign goals, learn to set the right expectations for project scope and communication. A needy client who takes advantage with hours of free work out-of-scope, or who oversteps boundaries by emailing, calling, or texting at all hours can rarely be reeled in.

Set these expectations early, value your work, value your time, and you can manage this challenge successfully.

3. Unexpected Rankings Drops

You can be managing a successful campaign, generating great results, witnessing great traffic increases, and enjoying a smooth relationship with an ecstatic client. All of a sudden, all that success comes crashing down.

Sometimes this cause is technical, like a search engine algorithm change. Perhaps it is caused by a change in client direction – they might be experiencing budget issues or are in the midst of getting acquired.

You need to be able to rise to the occasion and pivot at a moment's notice. For a search issue, have a protocol in place to investigate and rescue a rankings drop. For a client-side issue, identify ways you can support them through the transition and prove your value.

4. Staying Up to Date

The expectation to stay current with the search industry, algorithm updates, and Google features can place enormous pressure on your shoulders. This can be especially challenging when you're trying to grow your company, trying to network, and having to deal with staff issues and logistics. Suddenly that daily research on the industry becomes a lot harder to find.

When time becomes limited, investing in tools becomes absolutely critical. Don't be afraid to invest in that new keyword research tool, tracking tool, or heat map software.
Talk to your team and ask what resources will make their days easier, more productive, and more efficient. The minute you believe you know all there is to know is the minute you're over the hill.

There's always a new social media network, CMS, and search feature just around the corner. How can you make it work for you?

5. Relying on a Single Channel Approach

While there is great value in specialization, it is a mistake to rely on a single channel approach. You can't have only one tactic and expect to be successful in SEO today and in the future, no matter how well you do it.

In reframing your approach from search engine optimization to online presence optimization, you will generate better, more stable results for clients.

Optimize not just client websites but also social profiles, citations, and directories, remembering that everything from Amazon to Instagram has a search engine.

Think smart: optimize Yelp for restaurants and businesses that want to be listed in iPhone search. With a Foursquare profile, your client can be tagged in a location on Instagram. More than ever, it's critical to optimize your online presence across these different outlets to have success.

6. Overstepping a Multi-Service Approach

SEO goes hand-in-hand with web design, content writing, paid ads, email marketing, and social media management. Offering all of these services in tandem makes logical sense and allows clients to have a consistent web presence with the convenience of having it all done in one place.

However, if you start providing related services outside of your area of expertise at a client's request, no one wins. If you aren't careful, you could end up knee-deep in a failed email migration with an angry client, and they won't care one bit about their SEO rankings.

Stick to what you know. It's OK to refer email support, brochure design, and event management elsewhere while you focus on excelling at what you do best.

7. Prioritizing Vanity Metrics Over Leads & Sales

Over the years, you'll learn that most clients only care about two things – leads and sales.

You can tell them about the amazing SEO audit you completed, update them on all the technical change you made on their website, or share that you got their website load time down to one second. At the end of the day, the only thing that truly matters is results. If their phone isn't ringing, or sales are down year-over-year, a client will not care that the bounce rate is down 6 percent.

Focus on what actions can increase leads and sales. Don't get caught up in just rankings or vanity metrics.

8. Getting Too Comfortable

You will go into a client meeting, ecstatic to share the results. Leads are up 200 percent, traffic is up 500 percent, rankings are higher than ever, and the new site you just launched looks beautiful. You will boast about these results, unaware that the client is about to fire you.

No matter the results, constant communication is so important. Never take a client for granted and never assume results, effort, or achievements guarantee a client for life. Be confident in your abilities and service, but don't be so full of yourself that you miss when a client is unhappy.

Warning signs like a sudden lack of responsiveness, longer than usual delays in paying invoices, or uncharacteristic push-back are signs that they may be discontent.

9. Breaking Through Client Plateau

No matter the quality of your work, there is typically a lifecycle in an SEO-client relationship.

After two or three years, many clients want to try new things and change things up. Sometimes, it is financially motivated. Even though you've done great work for them, they're ready to invest their money elsewhere.

In other instances, they consider the SEO work a success and are ready to move on. They have reached a plateau and don't see how things can continue improving – where do you go from top of page one?

You won't be able to keep every client, but try to reduce your churn by being a proactive communicator and you will have much better client retention. Work together to position SEO as another tool in the arsenal to help them achieve their wider business goals. You want to be seen as a partner in continued success.

10. Choosing the Right Tools

When launching an agency, it is never too early to invoice in a proper CRM (customer relationship management) software and invoicing tool.

When you start and only have a handful of clients, you may think you can get away with DIY invoicing or a CRM that's little more than a

to-do list and address book. You'll learn early on that these methods are unscalable and will leave you in a world of hurt if something gets missed.

Though SaaS like Salesforce is no small investment, it will deliver measurable ROI by allowing you to grow our client base and hire more staff members. Being able to track contacts, leads, opportunities, accounts, and projects in one centralized, collaborative location is so important.
As your agency scales, you'll thank yourself for laying a strong foundation. Should you choose a fly-by-night CRM, or none at all, it could hold back growth considerably.

Though there are plenty of good options on the market, you have to invest in the right email platform, CRM, rankings software/tracking tools, competitor research tools/backlink checkers, and invoicing software at the bare minimum. They'll make your job easier and give you the flexibility to scale.

11. Handling Adversity

Even with utmost preparation, processes perfected to the smallest detail, and a nimble approach, you're still going to encounter obstacles, if not disasters, on the way.

Your biggest client could walk away. An aggressive competitor may eat at your market share. Staff turnover, leasing issues, client malaise... every day brings something new, not to mention wider issues like a recession where client budgets inevitably tighten and the value of online marketing services becomes less apparent.

You will face adversity, that much is inevitable. The question is, will you rise or fall in face of these challenges, big and small?

You must be creative, flexible, poised, and open. Build a safety net so no client loss, staff loss, or data loss causes you to crumble.

BONUS: Scaling Campaigns

Getting great results locally is one thing, but can you take it to the next level and scale to several cities or find national success? This can be a bigger challenge.

With local SEO, you can use a lot of crutches that simply don't scale, like optimizing the homepage title and H1 to an individual location. Ultimately, you'll see that having strong processes in place and a solid project management structure will help you scale, but there will be complications along the way that you may not have anticipated.

Conclusion

SEO is a rewarding industry, where your entrepreneurship, creativity, technical prowess, and thirst for knowledge can take you far.

Nothing good comes easy, and such is the case with a career in this field. Though you can't predict every obstacle you will face, these 11 challenges are common, especially as you grow from a small consultant role to a larger agency serving dozens if not hundreds of clients.

By understanding what may lie on the road ahead, you can better prepare to face such challenges not with fear or apprehension, but poise and composure.