

SEO FOR DUMMIES

PDF

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction To SEO & Job Opportunities

What is SEO strategy?

An SEO strategy is a process of organizing a website's content by topic, which helps search engines like Google understand a user's intent when searching. By optimizing a web page around topics, then keywords within that topic, you can increase your expertise in the eyes of a search engine and rank well for long-tail keywords related to that topic.

What is SEO?

Search engine optimizers (SEO) are people who optimize websites to help them show up higher on search engines and gain more "organic traffic." In essence, an SEO is a highly specialized content strategist, and helps a business discover opportunities to answer questions people have about the industry via search engines.

Here are three types of SEO that an SEO strategist can focus on:

On-page SEO: This SEO focuses on the content that's "on the page," and how to optimize that content to help boost the website's ranking for specific keywords.

Off-page SEO: This SEO focuses on the links that are directing to the website from elsewhere on the internet. The number of "backlinks," and the publishers carrying those links, that link to your website help you build trust in the eyes of a search engine. This causes your website to rank higher as a result.

Technical SEO: This SEO focuses on a website's architecture, examining the backend of that website to see how each webpage is "technically" set up. Google cares as much about the code of a website as it does its content, making this specialty quite important to a website's search engine ranking.

Bear in mind that not every business can optimize their website for search the same way, and

therefore not every SEO will have the same optimization process. It's an SEO's job to examine his or her industry, find out what's important to their audience, and develop an SEO strategy that puts the right content in front of that audience.

With that in mind, here are nine steps you can take to make sure all of your SEO bases are covered in 2019. In this PDF, you will be able to learn the SEO techniques, you can also grab your free planning template to master on-page SEO.

What does an SEO specialist do?

An SEO specialist is someone who is an expert on the topic of search engine optimization. They specialize in the optimization of websites to increase the number of visits they gain from search engines.

What does an SEO executive do?

An SEO Executive optimizes websites to make them show up higher on search engines and gain more website visitors. They work on off-page and on-page SEO.

What is an SEO content writer?

An SEO Content Writer is someone who writes content for the purpose of having it show up on search engines and gain website visitors. They are generally knowledgeable in the area of both SEO and content marketing.

What Is the Job of an SEO?

The job of an SEO is to manage the optimization of websites to ensure they gain website traffic from search engines such as Google & Bing.

How do I become an SEO specialist?

To become an SEO specialist, you can study marketing in university or online and/or gain practical experience in optimizing websites. Between on-page SEO, off-page SEO, and technical SEO, there are numerous ways to optimize a website so it ranks for the topics that are important to the publisher.

CHAPTER TWO: SEO PROCESS

- Acquire SEO knowledge
- Make a list of topics.
- Make a list of long-tail keywords based on these topics.
- Build pages for each topic.
- Set up a blog.
- Blog every week to develop page authority.
- Create a link-building plan.
- Compress all media before putting it on your website.
- Stay current on SEO news & practices.
- Measure and track your content's success.



1. Make a list of topics.

Keywords are at the heart of SEO, but they're actually not your first step to an organic growth play anymore. Your first step is to make a list of topics you'd like to cover from one month to the next.

To start, compile a list of about 10 short words and terms associated with your product or service. Use Google's Keyword Tool to identify their search volume and come up with variations that make sense for your business.

You are associating these topics with popular short-tail keywords, as you can tell, but you're not dedicating individual blog posts to these keywords. These keywords are simply too competitive to rank highly for on Google if you're just starting to optimize your website for search. We'll go over how to use these topics in just a minute.

Using search volume and competition as your measure, narrow down your list to 10-15 short-tail keywords that are important to you, and that people within your audience are searching for. Then rank this list in order of priority, based on its monthly search volume and its relevance to your business.

For example, if a swimming pool business is trying to rank for "fiberglass pools" -- which is receiving 110,000 searches per month -- this short-tail keyword can be the one that represents the overarching topic on which they want to create content. The business would then identify a series of long-tail keywords that relate to this short-tail keyword, have reasonable monthly search volume, and help to elaborate on the topic of fiberglass pools. We'll talk more about these long-tails in the next step of this process.

Each of these keywords is called a "pillar," and it serves as the primary support for a larger "cluster" of long-tail keywords, which is what brings us to our next Step ...

2. Make a list of long-tail keywords based on these topics.

Here's where you'll start optimizing your pages for specific keywords. For each pillar you've identified, use your keyword tool to identify five to 10 long-tail keywords that dig deeper into the original topic keyword.

For example, we regularly create content on the topic of "SEO," but it's still very difficult to rank well on Google for such a popular topic on this acronym alone. We also risk competing with our

own content by creating multiple pages that are all targeting the exact same keyword -- and potentially the same search engine results page (SERP). Therefore, we also create content on conducting keyword research, optimizing images for search engines, creating an SEO strategy (which you're reading right now), and other subtopics within SEO.

This allows a business to attract people who have varying interests in and concerns about owning their product -- and ultimately create more entry points for people who are interested in buying something.

Use subtopics to come up with blog post or webpage ideas that explain a specific concept within each larger topic you identified in Step 1. Plug these subtopics into your keyword research tool to identify long-tail keywords on which to base each blog post.

Together, these subtopics create a cluster. So, if you have 10 pillar topics, they should each be prepared to support one cluster of five to 10 subtopics. This SEO model is called a "topic cluster," and modern search engine algorithms depend on them to connect users with the information they're looking for.

Think of it this way: The more specific your content, the more specific the needs of your audience are -- and the more likely you'll convert this traffic into leads. This is how Google finds value in the websites it crawls; the pages that dig into the interworkings of a general topic are seen as the best answer to a person's query, and will rank higher.

3. Build pages for each topic.

When it comes to websites and ranking in search engines, trying to get one page to rank for a handful of keywords can be next to impossible. But here's where the rubber meets the road:

Take the 10 pillar topics you came up with in Step 1 and create a web page for each one that outlines the topic at a high level -- using the long-tail keywords you came up with for each cluster in Step 2. A pillar page on SEO, for example, can describe SEO in brief sections that introduce

keyword research, image optimization, SEO strategy, and other subtopics as they are identified. Think of each pillar page as a table of contents, where you're briefing your readers on subtopics you'll elaborate on in blog posts.

Use your keyword list to determine how many different pillar pages you should create. Ultimately, the number of topics for which you create pillar pages should coincide with how many different products, offerings, and locations your business has. This will make it much easier for your prospects and customers to find you in search engines no matter what keywords they use.

Each web page needs to include relevant content for your prospects and customers and should include pictures and links to pages on your site to enhance the user experience. We'll talk about those links in Step 4.

4. Set up a blog.

Blogging can be an incredible way to rank for keywords and engage your website's users. After all, every blog post is a new web page that gives you another chance to rank in search engines. If your business does not already have a blog, set one up. This is where you'll elaborate on each subtopic and actually start showing up on Google.

As you write each blog post and fill up your clusters, you should do three things:

First, don't include your long-tail keyword more than three or four times throughout the page. Google doesn't consider exact keyword matches as often as it used to. In fact, too many instances of your keyword can be a red flag to search engines that you're "keyword stuffing." This can penalize your website and drop your rank.

Second, link out to the pillar page you created on this topic. You can do this in the form of tags in your content management system (CMS), or as basic anchor text in the body of the article.

Once you publish each blog post, link into it from the pillar page that supports this subtopic. Find the point in your pillar page that introduces this blog's subtopic, and link it here.

By connecting both the pillar and the cluster in this way, you're telling Google there's a relationship between the long-tail keyword and the overarching topic you're trying to rank for.

5. Blog every week to develop page authority.

Not every blog post or web page you write needs to belong to a topic cluster. There's also value in writing about tangential topics your customers care about in order to give your website authority in the eyes of Google. This will cue Google to pay extra attention to your domain as you add content to your primary topics.

With that in mind, make a point to blog at least once a week. Remember, you are blogging primarily for your audience, not the search engines. Write about things your audience and/or prospects are interested in, make sure you're including relevant keywords where appropriate, and your audience will slowly start to notice and click.

Keep in mind that each topic won't be equal in importance, and as your clusters get off the ground, you'll need to prioritize based on your company's needs. So, create a list of all the different web pages you would like to create and rank them. Then, develop a schedule and devise a plan of attack to get those pages built.

Keep your list updated and prioritized by what web pages will help you to best achieve your business goals.

6. Create a link-building plan.

The topic cluster model is your way forward in SEO this year, but it's not the only way to get your website content to rank higher once it's been created.

Our first five steps were dedicated to on-page SEO tactics. Link-building is the primary objective of off-page SEO, and is also a huge factor in how search engines rank your web pages. What is link-building? Glad you asked.

Link-building is the process of attracting inbound links (also called "backlinks") to your website from elsewhere on the web. As a general rule, the more page authority the origin website has, the bigger affect it will have on the rank of the web page to which it is linking.

Dedicate some time to brainstorm all the different ways you can attract inbound links to your website. Start small -- maybe share your links with other local businesses in exchange for links to their sites. Write a few blog posts and share them on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and LinkedIn. Consider approaching other bloggers for guest blogging opportunities through which you can link back to your website.

Another great way to attract inbound links is to use your blog to post articles related to current events or news. That way, you have shot of getting linked to from an industry influencer or other bloggers in your industry.

7. Compress all media before putting it on your website.

This is a small but important step in the SEO process. As your blog or website grows, you'll undoubtedly have more images, videos, and related media to host there. These visual assets can help retain your visitors' attention, but it's easy to forget these assets are still technically computer files -- and computer files have file sizes.

As a general rule, the bigger the file size, the harder it is for an internet browser to render your website. And it just so happens that page speed is one of the most important ranking factors when search engines decide where to place your content in its index.

So, the smaller the file size, the faster your website will load, and the higher you can rank on Google as a result. But how do you shrink a file size once it's on your computer?

If you're looking to upload an image to a blog post, for example, examine the file for its file size first. If it's anywhere in megabyte (MB) territory, even just 1 MB, it's a good idea to use an image compression tool to reduce the file size before uploading it to your blog. Sites like TinyPNG make it easy to compress images in bulk, while Google's very own Squoosh has been known to shrink image file sizes to microscopic levels.

Ultimately, keeping your files in the kilobytes (KB) can sufficiently protect your website's page speed.

Be careful when compressing your images, and check the file's actual size once you export it back to your computer. While some tools might not be true to the size it shows you, others can sacrifice some image quality when compressing the artwork.

8. Stay current on SEO news & practices.

Like the overall marketing landscape, the search engine space is ever-evolving. Staying on top of current trends and best practices is a difficult task, but there are multiple online resources that can make it easy for you to stay on top of SEO news and changes that may impact your website and your SEO strategy.

9. Measure and track your content's success.

SEO can take a lot of time and effort. What good is spending all this time and effort if you can't see the fruits of your labor? There are many metrics you can track on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis to keep your SEO plan on track and measure your success.

Because the metric you care about is organic traffic (traffic that comes from a given search engine), seek out a tool that allows you to track both your overall organic traffic number and how your pages are ranking under each long-tail keyword your pages are targeting. SEMrush is a great reporting tool for just this purpose.

Create a monthly dashboard using Excel, Google Sheets, or a web analytics package so you can monitor how much traffic comes to your website from organic search.

Also, tracking indexed pages, leads, ROI, inbound links, keywords, and your actual ranking on SERPs (search engine results pages) can help you recognize your success as well as identify areas of opportunity.

CHAPTER THREE: SEARCH ENGINE WORLD

Obviously, there are other search engines aside from the "Giant" Google search engine. This includes: Bing, Yandex, Baidu, DuckDuckGo, Yahoo search, e.t.c

All of these search engines have a different algorithm that determines how a page is being ranked. However, webmasters give more attention to Google. Well, Google Search engine can drive thousands of traffic to web pages if you optimize your page to satisfy their Algorithm. But, you don't need to neglect other search engines especially Bing and DuckDuckGo. In the search engine world, you must ensure your web pages are indexed and optimized on all the major search engines.



Yandex

Looking at the search engine itself, Yandex has a similar layout to Google. Other than search, Yandex also provides image hosting, video streaming, a map service, and even a translation tool similar to Google translate. When it comes to user experience, Yandex is one of the more robust

search engines out there, with an interface that is easy to navigate, along with other useful features that make it an effective search engine.

Bing

One of Google's most significant competitors in the United States, Bing is the second largest search engine in the country. While it may have similar features that its competitors have, there are still some stand-out features that set it apart. For example, you can save search results that you want to go back to. There's also a Rewards feature, which allows users to earn points by using services from Bing, which can be converted to purchase various products or receive discounts.

While the search engine may be a distant second to its stateside competitor, Bing is still one of the most popular search engines, with some digital marketing companies creating strategies to optimize websites for the search engine.

Naver

The largest search engine in Korea, Naver is also the company that manages LINE, which is one of the most popular messaging applications in Asia. Like the search engines on this list, Naver provides similar features to Google. While its interface may not be as clean and smooth as its competitors, Naver users are able to see trending news and videos, along with a shopping page and trending posts.

Naver's features allow it to become a viable media platform that can stream music and video, such as TV dramas and cartoons. While its presence may not be as large compared to its regional neighbor, Naver is a search engine that is growing into one of the largest in Asia.

DuckDuckGo

Seen as an alternative to Google, DuckDuckGo provides users with a search engine that is safer and offers more privacy. Unlike other search engines, DuckDuckGo does not track its user's search queries, which means that there is more privacy for users when using it.

The interface is clean and simple, and along with standard web search, you can also access images, videos, and news related to your search terms. There is also a Meanings feature, which acts as a glossary which provides you with a definition of terms related to your search query. If you are looking to do online search privately, this is the search engine for you.

CHAPTER FOUR: DOMAIN AUTHORITY AND PAGE RANK

What is Domain Authority?

Domain Authority (DA) is a search engine ranking score developed by Moz that predicts how well a website will rank on search engine result pages (SERPs). A Domain Authority score ranges from one to 100, with higher scores corresponding to a greater ability to rank.

Domain Authority is calculated by evaluating multiple factors, including linking root domains and number of total links, into a single DA score. This score can then be used when comparing websites or tracking the "ranking strength" of a website over time. Domain Authority is not a metric used by Google in determining search rankings and has no effect on the SERPs.

You can view a website's DA by using MozBar (a free Chrome-extension), Link Explorer (a backlink analysis tool), the SERP Analysis section of Keyword Explorer, and dozens of other SEO tools across the web.

How is Domain Authority scored?

We score Domain Authority on a 100-point logarithmic scale. Thus, it's significantly easier to grow your score from 20 to 30 than it is to grow from 70 to 80.

What is a "good" Domain Authority?

Generally speaking, sites with a very large number of high-quality external links (such as Wikipedia or Google.com) are at the top end of the Domain Authority scale, whereas small businesses and websites with fewer inbound links may have a much lower DA score. Brand-new websites will always start with a Domain Authority score of one.

Because Domain Authority is meant to be a predictor of a site's ranking ability, having a very high DA score shouldn't be your only goal. Look at the DA scores for the sites you're directly competing within the SERPs and aim to have a higher score than your competitors. It's best used as a comparative metric (rather than an absolute, concrete score) when doing research in the search results and determining which sites may have more powerful/important link profiles than others. Because it's a comparative tool, there isn't necessarily a "good" or "bad" Domain Authority score.

How to use Domain Authority correctly

Domain Authority vs. Page Authority

Whereas Domain Authority measures the predictive ranking strength of entire domains or subdomains, Page Authority measures the strength of individual pages.

Where can you find Domain Authority?

Domain Authority metrics are incorporated into dozens of SEO and online marketing platforms across the web.

In the Moz ecosystem, you can measure Domain Authority using Link Explorer, MozBar (Moz's free SEO toolbar), or in the SERP Analysis section of Keyword Explorer. Authority metrics are also incorporated into all Moz Pro campaigns, as well as our API.

The technical definition of Domain Authority

Domain Authority is based on data from our Link Explorer web index and uses dozens of factors in its calculations. The actual Domain Authority calculation itself uses a machine learning model to predictively find a "best fit" algorithm that most closely correlates our link data with rankings across thousands of actual search results that we use as standards to scale against.

Since Authority is based on machine learning calculations, your site's score will often fluctuate as more, less, or different data points are used in the calculation — for instance, if Facebook were to acquire a billion new links, everyone's PA and DA would drop relative to Facebook. For this reason, keep in mind that you should always use Domain Authority as a relative metric to compare against the link profiles of other sites, as opposed to an absolute value scoring the efficacy of your internal SEO efforts.

How do I influence Domain Authority?

Domain Authority is difficult to influence directly. It is made up of an aggregate of metrics and link data that have an impact on the authority score. This was done intentionally; this metric is meant to approximate how competitive a given site is in Google search results. Since Google takes a lot of factors into account, a metric that tries to calculate it must incorporate a lot of factors as well.

The best way to influence the Domain Authority metric is to improve your overall SEO. In particular, you should focus on your link profile by getting more links from other well-linked-to pages.

Why did my Authority change?

Because Domain Authority (and, for that matter, Page Authority) is comprised of multiple metrics and calculations, pinpointing the exact cause of a change can be a challenge. If your score has gone up or down, there are many potential influencing factors including things like:

Your link profile growth hasn't yet been captured in our web index.

The highest-authority sites experienced substantial link growth, skewing the scaling process.

You earned links from places that don't contribute to Google ranking.

We crawled (and included in our index) more or fewer of your linking domains than we had previously.

Your Domain Authority is on the lower end of the scoring spectrum and is thus more impacted by scaling fluctuation.

You can read more about how to interpret these (and other) fluctuations in Authority scores [here](#).

The key to understanding Page and Domain Authority fluctuations is that these metrics don't exist in a vacuum – they depend on many positive and negative factors so that even if a given site improves its SEO, its Authority score(s) may not always reflect it. A good metaphor to help understand why is how "best of" rankings work. Let's look at an example:

If Singapore has the best air quality in 2015, and improves it even further in 2016, are they guaranteed to remain at #1? What if Denmark also improves its air quality, or New Zealand (which, say, had been left out of the rankings in 2015) joins the rating system? Maybe countries 2–10 all improved dramatically and Singapore has now fallen to #11, even though they technically got better, not worse. Because there are many other factors at play, Singapore's ranking could change in spite of any action (or inaction) whatsoever on their part.

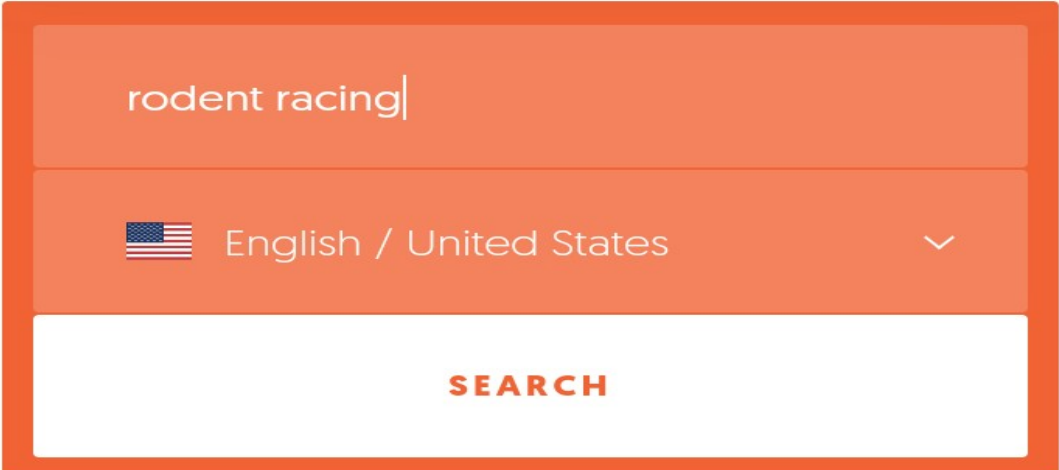
Domain Authority (and Page Authority) work in a similar fashion. Since they're scaled on a 100-

point system, after each update, the recalculations mean that Authority score of a given page/site could go down even if that page/site has improved their link quantity and quality.

CHAPTER FIVE: KEYWORD RESEARCH TOOL FOR BEGINNERS

I was talking with a client the other day who wanted to have his site rank well in the search engines. (I've changed the details of this story a tad to protect the client's privacy.) Let's say the client is a company with annual revenues in the millions of dollars (as indeed this client is), in the business of, oh, I dunno . . . staging rodent-racing events. I did a little research and found that most people searching for rodent-racing events use the keywords rodent racing. (Big surprise, huh?) I took a look at the client's Web site and discovered that the words rodent racing didn't appear anywhere on the site's Web pages. "You have a little problem," I said. "Your site doesn't use the words rodent racing, so it's unlikely that any search engine will find your site when people search for that. "Oh, well," was the client's reply, "our marketing department objects to the term. We have a company policy to use the term furry friend events. The term rodent is too demeaning, and if we say we're racing them, the animal-rights people will get upset." This is a true story, well, except for the bit about rodent racing and the furry friends' thing. But in principle it happened. This company had a policy not to use the words that most of its potential clients were using to search for it.

New Feature: Type in a competitor's domain to get better keyword ideas



The image shows a screenshot of a keyword research tool interface. It features a search box with the text "rodent racing" entered. Below the search box is a dropdown menu showing "English / United States" with a small American flag icon and a downward arrow. At the bottom of the interface is a prominent "SEARCH" button.

What is keyword research?

Keyword research is the process of finding and analyzing actual search terms that people enter into search engines. The insight you can get into these actual search terms can help inform content strategy, as well as your larger marketing strategy.

Why is keyword research important?

More and more, we hear how much SEO has evolved over just the last 10 years, and how unimportant keywords themselves have become to our ability to rank well for the searches people make every day.

And to some extent, this is true; using keywords that exactly match a person's search is no longer the most important ranking factor in the eyes of an SEO professional. Rather, it's the intent behind that keyword, and whether or not a piece of content solves for that intent (we'll talk more about intent in just a minute).

But that doesn't mean keyword research is an outdated process. Let me explain:

Keyword research tells you what topics people care about and, assuming you use the right SEO tool, how popular those topics actually are among your audience. The operative term here is topics -- by researching keywords that are getting a high volume of searches per month, you can identify and sort your content into topics that you want to create content on. Then, you can use these topics to dictate which keywords you look for and target.

By researching keywords for their popularity, search volume, and general intent, you can tackle the questions that most people in your audience want answers to.

How does intent affect keyword research?

Like I said in the previous section, user intent is now one of the most pivotal factors in your ability to rank well on search engines like Google. Today, it's more important that your webpage addresses the problem a searcher intended to solve than simply carries the keyword the searcher used. So, how does this affect the keyword research you do?

It's easy to take keywords for face value, and unfortunately, keywords can have many different meanings beneath the surface. Because the intent behind a search is so important to your ranking

potential, you need to be extra careful how you interpret the keywords you target.

Let's say, for example, you're researching the keyword "how to start a blog" for an article you want to create. "Blog" can mean a blog post or the blog website itself, and what a searcher's intent is behind that keyword will influence the direction of your article. Does the searcher want to learn how to start an individual blog post? Or do they want to know how to actually launch a website domain for the purposes of blogging? If your content strategy is only targeting people interested in the latter, you'll need to make sure of the keyword's intent before committing to it.

To verify what a user's intent is in a keyword, it's a good idea to simply enter this keyword into a search engine yourself, and see what types of results come up.

I'm going to lay out a keyword research process you can follow to help you come up with and narrow down a list of terms you should be targeting. That way, you'll be able to establish and execute a strong keyword strategy that helps you get found for the search terms you actually care about.

How to Research Keywords for Your SEO Strategy

Step 1: Make a list of important, relevant topics based on what you know about your business.

To kick off this process, think about the topics you want to rank for in terms of generic buckets. You'll come up with about 5-10 topic buckets you think are important to your business, and then you'll use those topic buckets to help come up with some specific keywords later in the process.

If you're a regular blogger, these are probably the topics you blog about most frequently. Or perhaps they're the topics that come up the most in sales conversations. Put yourself in the shoes of your buyer personas -- what types of topics would your target audience search that you'd want your business to get found for? If you were a company like HubSpot, for example -- selling marketing software (which happens to have some awesome SEO tools ... but I digress ... you might have general topic buckets like:

- Inbound marketing (21K)
- Blogging (19K)
- Email marketing (30K)

- Lead generation (17K)
- SEO (214K)
- Social media marketing (71K)
- Marketing analytics (6.2K)
- Marketing automation (8.5K)

See those numbers in parentheses to the right of each keyword? That's their monthly search volume. This data allows you to gauge how important these topics are to your audience, and how many different sub-topics you might need to create content on to be successful with that keyword. To learn more about these sub-topics, we move onto step 2 ...

Step 2: Fill in those topic buckets with keywords.

Now that you have a few topic buckets you want to focus on, it's time to identify some keywords that fall into those buckets. These are keyword phrases you think are important to rank for in the SERPs (search engine results pages) because your target customer is probably conducting searches for those specific terms.

For instance, if I took that last topic bucket for an inbound marketing software company -- "marketing automation" -- I'd brainstorm some keyword phrases that I think people would type in related to that topic. Those might include:

marketing automation tools

how to use marketing automation software

what is marketing automation?

how to tell if I need marketing automation software

lead nurturing

email marketing automation

top automation tools

And so on and so on. The point of this step isn't to come up with your final list of keyword phrases. You just want to end up with a brain dump of phrases you think potential customers might use to

search for content related to that particular topic bucket. We'll narrow the lists down later in the process so you don't have something too unwieldy. Once you have your final list, there are several data-driven tools available to you for finding out which keywords you're most likely to rank well for.

Although more and more keywords are getting encrypted by Google every day, another smart way to come up with keyword ideas is to figure out which keywords your website is already getting found for. To do this, you'll need website analytics software like Google Analytics or HubSpot's Sources report, available in the Traffic Analytics tool. Drill down into your website's traffic sources, and sift through your organic search traffic bucket to identify the keywords people are using to arrive at your site.

Repeat this exercise for as many topic buckets as you have. And remember, if you're having trouble coming up with relevant search terms, you can always head on over to your customer-facing colleagues -- those who are in Sales or Service -- and ask them what types of terms their prospects and customers use, or common questions they have. Those are often great starting points for keyword research.

Step 3: Research related search terms.

This is a creative step you may have already thought of when doing keyword research. If not, it's a great way to fill out those lists.

If you're struggling to think of more keywords people might be searching about a specific topic, go to Google.com and take a look at the related search terms that appear when you plug in a keyword. When you type in your phrase and scroll to the bottom of Google's results, you'll notice some suggestions for searches related to your original input. These keywords can spark ideas for other keywords you may want to take into consideration.

related searches

Want a bonus? Type in some of those related search terms and look at their related search terms.

Want another bonus? HubSpot customers can get suggestions for keywords and topics to consider within the Content Strategy tool.

Step 4: Check for a mix of head terms and long-tail keywords in each bucket.

If you don't know the difference between head terms and long-tail keywords, let me explain. Head terms are keywords phrases that are generally shorter and more generic – they're typically just one to three words in length, depending on who you talk to. Long-tail keywords, on the other hand, are longer keyword phrases usually containing three or more words.

It's important to check that you have a mix of head terms and long-tail terms because it'll give you a keyword strategy that's well balanced with long-term goals and short-term wins. That's because head terms are generally searched more frequently, making them often (not always, but often) much more competitive and harder to rank for than long-tail terms. Think about it: Without even looking up search volume or difficulty, which of the following terms do you think would be harder to rank for?

How to write a great blog post

blogging

If you answered #2, you're absolutely right. But don't get discouraged. While head terms generally boast the most search volume (meaning greater potential to send you traffic), frankly, the traffic you'll get from the term "how to write a great blog post" is usually more desirable.

Why?

Because someone who is looking for something that specific is probably a much more qualified searcher for your product or service (presuming you're in the blogging space) than someone looking for something really generic. And because long-tail keywords tend to be more specific, it's usually easier to tell what people who search for those keywords are really looking for. Someone searching for the head term "blogging," on the other hand, could be searching it for a whole host of reasons unrelated to your business.

So check your keyword lists to make sure you have a healthy mix of head terms and long-tail keywords. You definitely want some quick wins that long-tail keywords will afford you, but you should also try to chip away at more difficult head terms over the long haul.

Step 5: See how competitors are ranking for these keywords.

Just because your competitor is doing something doesn't mean you need to. The same goes for keywords. Just because a keyword is important to your competitor, doesn't mean it's important to you. However, understanding what keywords your competitors are trying to rank for is a great way to help you give your list of keywords another evaluation.

If your competitor is ranking for certain keywords that are on your list, too, it definitely makes sense to work on improving your ranking for those. However, don't ignore the ones your competitors don't seem to care about. This could be a great opportunity for you to own market share on important terms, too.

Understanding the balance of terms that might be a little more difficult due to competition, versus those terms that are a little more realistic, will help you maintain a similar balance that the mix of long-tail and head terms allows. Remember, the goal is to end up with a list of keywords that provide some quick wins but also helps you make progress toward bigger, more challenging SEO goals.

How do you figure out what keywords your competitors are ranking for, you ask? Aside from manually searching for keywords in an incognito browser and seeing what positions your competitors are in, it allows you to run a number of free reports that show you the top keywords for the domain you enter. This is a quick way to get a sense of the types of terms your competitors are ranking for.

Step 6: Use the Google AdWords Keyword Planner to cut down your keyword list.

Now that you've got the right mix of keywords, it's time to narrow down your lists with some more quantitative data. You have a lot of tools at your disposal to do this, but let me share my favorite methodology.

I like to use a mix of the Google AdWords Keyword Planner (you'll need to set up an AdWords account for this, but that doesn't mean you have to create an ad), and Google Trends.

In Keyword Planner, formerly known as the Keyword Tool, you can get search volume and traffic estimates for keywords you're considering. Unfortunately, when Google transitioned from Keyword Tool to Keyword Planner, they stripped out a lot of the more interesting functionality. But you can make up for it a bit if you take the information you learn from Keyword Planner and use Google Trends to fill in some blanks.

Use the Keyword Planner to flag any terms on your list that have way too little (or way too much) search volume, and don't help you maintain a healthy mix like we talked about above. But before you delete anything, check out their trend history and projections in Google Trends. You can see whether, say, some low-volume terms might actually be something you should invest in now -- and reap the benefits for later.

Or perhaps you're just looking at a list of terms that is way too unwieldy, and you have to narrow it down somehow ... Google Trends can help you determine which terms are trending upward, and are thus worth more of your focus.

And ... You're done!

Congratulations! You've now got a list of keywords that'll help you focus on the right topics for your business, and get you some short-term and long-term gains. You can even download our free SEO template to help you organize your keywords and track which terms you're focusing on for different pages of your website.

Be sure to re-evaluate these keywords every few months -- once a quarter is a good benchmark, but some businesses like to do it even more often than that. As you gain even more authority in the SERPs, you'll find that you can add more and more keywords to your lists to tackle as you work on maintaining your current presence, and then growing in new areas on top of that.

What is a meta description in SEO?

An SEO meta description is a brief description of content found on a web page. The meta description is shown to users in search engine results pages to help them decide which search result to click on. Meta descriptions are not a ranking factor in the eyes of a search engine, but they can influence how many people click on a result -- which directly affects the result's organic ranking.

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