

SEO STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING: A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE.

Stickyeyes

CONTENTS

The Report in a Nutshell 3
About Stickyeyes 5
About the Authors 5
Introduction 7
The Search Environment and the Changing Face of SEO 7
SEO Keyword Identification and Landscape Analysis 13
Technical SEO 16
Landing Page Strategies 21
Content Ideation, Creation and Communication for SEO 30
Conclusions 43
Strategy Checklist 44
Disclaimer 45
Find out more 45

THE REPORT IN A NUTSHELL

Whilst five years ago, the search engine optimisation mix was relatively concise, it now represents a more advanced and integrated digital approach. Traditional methods of optimisation, such as link acquisition, now represent only one part of a much larger and more complex jigsaw. For online brands, achieving a strong organic presence requires a multi-faceted, cohesive and integrated SEO campaign and at the heart of this, a creative content strategy.

OUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Ensure SEO is business wide:** SEO is no longer a siloed technical discipline separated from other functions. Successful SEO is about aligning digital objectives with business vision and ambitions, as well as removing organisational barriers by integrating SEO into PR, marketing, brand, product and technical functions *(How Google's algorithmic changes are forcing businesses to reassess their digital business model, Jonny Artis, Stickyeyes, Moz.com).*

- **Adhere to Google's quality guidelines:** The ongoing process of algorithm updates implemented by Google looks to improve search results, and subsequently, the user experience. However, this demands brands to follow suit and improve the quality of their website content and ultimately their onsite customer engagement experience.

- **The importance of a multi-device strategy:** This means selecting relevant related phrases as well as building website content that can respond to the technical structures of differing screen sizes.

- **Build and leverage brand equity:** Reflective of Google's diversified algorithm, brand reputation signals are becoming increasingly relevant. Marketing efforts and assets that are reflective of a typical 'big' brand such as a content rich website, a strong social footprint, a high volume of advocates, owned communities and effective PR, are thought to be influential factors.

- **Maximise SEO investment with landing page and conversion strategy**: Landing page design incorporates visual and functional elements as well as technical build and deployment. For brands to succeed in their SEO strategy they need a great landing page designed for user experience and optimised for accessibility across multiple devices.

- **Create customer centric content:** Understanding the behavioural characterises and motivation of your customer base is fundamental to creating content that is:
    - Relevant i.e. content that is relevant to your product, brand or service
    - Authentic i.e. credible content that people trust
    - Engaging i.e. content that is both useful, interesting and adds value to the customer.

- **Develop a content led approach to SEO:** This involves developing and sharing relevant, valuable, and engaging content to a targeted audience with the goal of acquiring new customers or increasing business from existing customers. A key part of this approach is to ensure that this content is aligned with business priorities, based on clear objectives and relevant market research.

- **Build a content marketing strategy:** Align content to marketing assets and wider campaign activities as well as primary routes to market and channels. This ensures that it remains credible, on brand and maximises its reach and trust with the consumer base. This alignment drives authenticity but most importantly it drives efficiencies across multi-channel online marketing efforts.

- **SEO requires a multi-channel and collaborative communication effort:** Great content must be shared to generate coverage which in turn helps drive brand advocacy, engagement and natural links that will aid SEO rankings. Central to achieving this success is an approach that puts SEO at the heart of digital strategy and leverages other channels to drive direct traffic and engagement. SEO is a multi-channel effort which is built around three key pillars of marketing communication - owned, earned and paid (see Owned, Earned and Paid Media section of this report).

- **Technical optimisation is still important:** This helps to maximise the opportunity for content discovery and the volume of website traffic from organic search. In essence some of the most influential ranking signals include:
    - Time on site (a representation of the level of user engagement).
    - Low % of low quality backlinks (a representation of the quality of websites who are linking).
    - Domain authority (a domain wide quality score).

See The Importance of Strategic Focus in an Evolving Algorithmic Environment, Lee Allen, Stickyeyes, Moz.com.

ABOUT STICKYEYES

With more than 15 years in the industry, we have a world class track record in delivering highly effective acquisition-led enterprise level and international SEO campaigns.

We adopt a content-led approach that leverages the full mix of owned, earned and paid marketing communication channels to deliver SEO and wider business value.

This approach is backed by our dedicated insights team, which gets to the heart of your digital strategy, and our specialist in-house software, which maps out the route to success.

If you have any questions on the findings of this report or, would like to speak to one of the team about maximising the ROI of your search strategy, please get in touch: www.stickyeyes.com/contact or 0113 391 2929.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Sally was a key member of the team behind the development of logic for Stickyeyes' SEO monitoring tool, Roadmap, which monitors algorithm changes and provides quantifiable data insights and competitive analysis to steer natural search strategy. Previously, she has worked as a software development manager for search, display and affiliate marketing solutions as well as a web insight analyst.

INTRODUCTION

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is both competitive and challenging. Not only do brands have to respond and adhere to regulatory changes, but the market often finds itself under the scrutiny of Google.

This means effectively navigating search engine algorithm updates, flexing marketing efforts in line with regulation, and future proofing search engine optimisation (SEO) efforts by reviewing and diversifying current tactics and strategies for acquisition of market share.

Whilst five years ago, the search marketing mix was relatively concise, it now represents a more advanced and integrated digital approach. Traditional methods of optimisation, such as link acquisition, now represent only one part of a much larger and more complex jigsaw.

This report explores the changing face of SEO and provides a comprehensive guide to best practice strategy development and planning. The report highlights some of the key strategic and tactical marketing elements that can help brands to ensure longevity in today's online market. Technical and functional aspects of SEO are also considered in reference to developing and sustaining a search optimised website. Individual elements are contextualised within analysis of customer journey to conversion, and brand and product proposition is discussed in the context of the wider marketing mix.

THE SEARCH ENVIRONMENT AND THE CHANGING FACE OF SEO

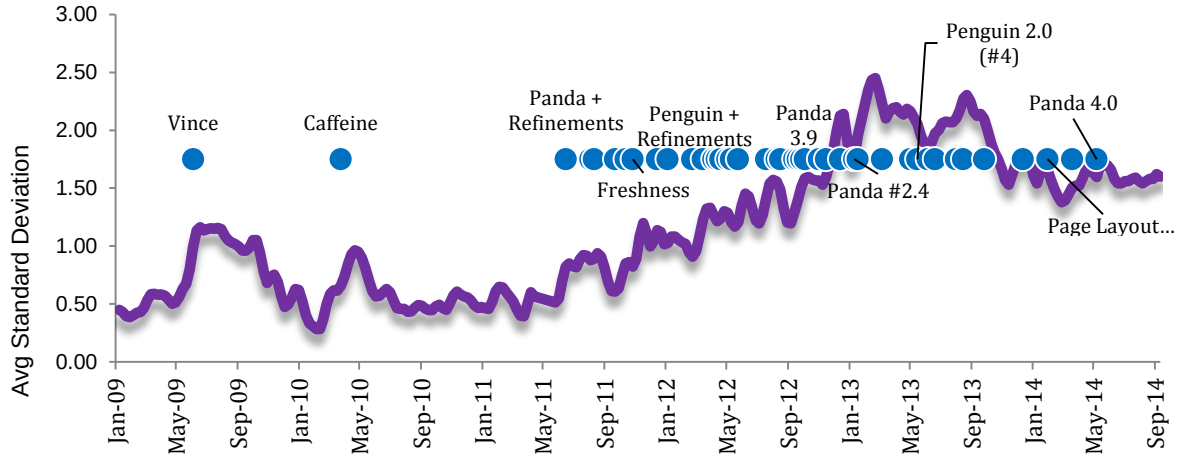
This section of report explores the organic search environment and the development of Google's search engine algorithm. It highlights key challenges and identifies ways in which brands can protect existing search rankings by leveraging content and PR and by deploying best practice on and off site optimisation.

GOOGLE ALGORITHM UPDATES

Google's algorithm updates are typically thematic and up to 600 iterations can be rolled out over a year. Algorithm updates are executed to serve only one purpose – to iteratively determine and present the highest quality and most relevant search results to Google's users. Whilst ensuing changes are often very minor, there are occasions where a 'major' update is rolled out and this significantly affects search results (figure 1).

Some of the most important major algorithm updates over the last two to three years include Vince, Caffeine, Panda and Penguin *(see also Google algorithm change history, Moz.com)*.

Figure 1: Google volatility index 2009 to 2014



Source: Stickyeyes

The above chart leverages data from a number of keyword markets. It plots the deviation in search rankings against key algorithm updates as a representation of the effect of these. One of the most recent, but most influential algorithm updates, Penguin was designed to detect unnatural link profiles and aimed to punish websites who evidenced negative optimisation techniques, such as aggressively acquiring irrelevant or poor quality backlinks. In addition to algorithm updates, structural changes to search results pages also represent a challenge to brands. A key Google update, dubbed 'Domain Diversity', was executed in August 2012. This update reduced the volume of listings on search result pages to seven, and also aimed to prevent a single brand from occupying multiple positions on the first page for generic keywords.

This update served to benefit some brands whilst implying for others that, in order to acquire their historical level of visibility, they either needed to have a presence across a broader range of search terms or had to reduce the scope of search marketing activity to target a small set of value pages.

GUIDELINES AND PENALTIES

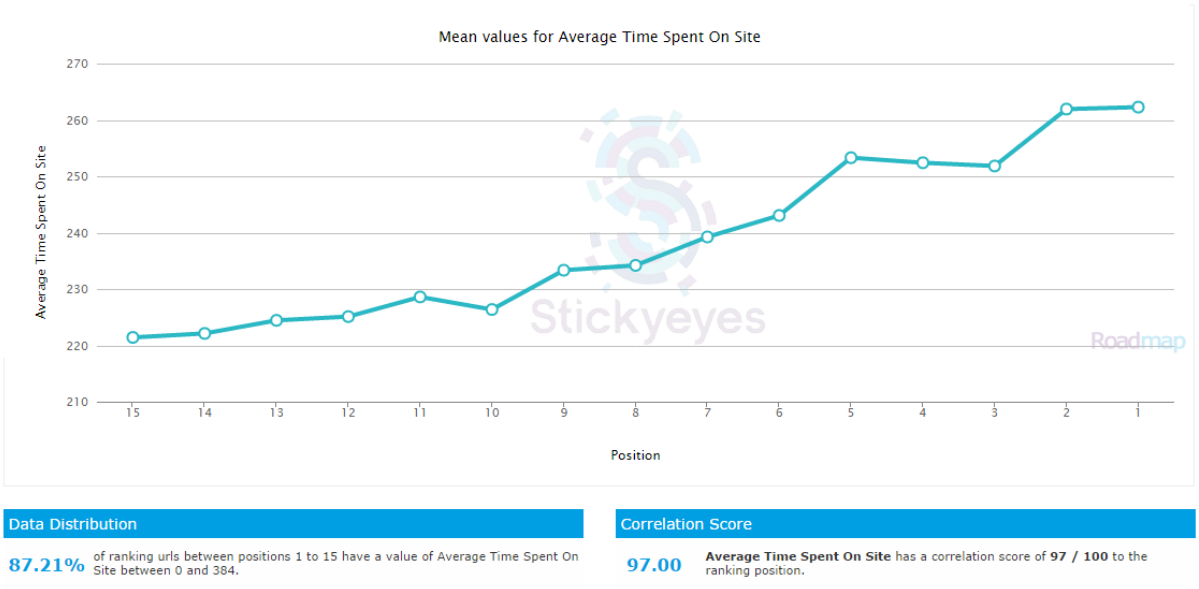
There are a range of practices and ranking manipulation techniques that are deemed to contravene Google guidelines. Some of the most well-known of these are; link manufacturing, hidden text, keyword stuffing and cloaking. These techniques are often collectively referred to as 'black-hat SEO'. If a website is discovered to be utilising any of these methods it is liable to receive a penalty. A penalty strips a website of its current rankings and recuperation is often a

long, manual and arduous process. The nature of Panda and Penguin updates have helped to encourage brands to look to more natural methods of optimising their website. Slowly but surely, traditional tactics which were widely leveraged ten years ago, such as link-farming, are now becoming increasingly less commonplace. As Google appears to be attributing more value to user experience, engagement and quality signals (figure 2 and figure 3), reviewing and addressing the following elements are key to avoiding a penalty in future.

- **Link Quality:** A high percentage of links from low quality or irrelevant websites, or links that appear to have been created explicitly for the purpose of linking (i.e. paid / manufactured links).
- **Content Quality:** Duplicate, poorly written content or content that is 'thin' or 'shallow'. The reduction of this represents a key ongoing objective for Google. In essence this underpins the Panda algorithm update.

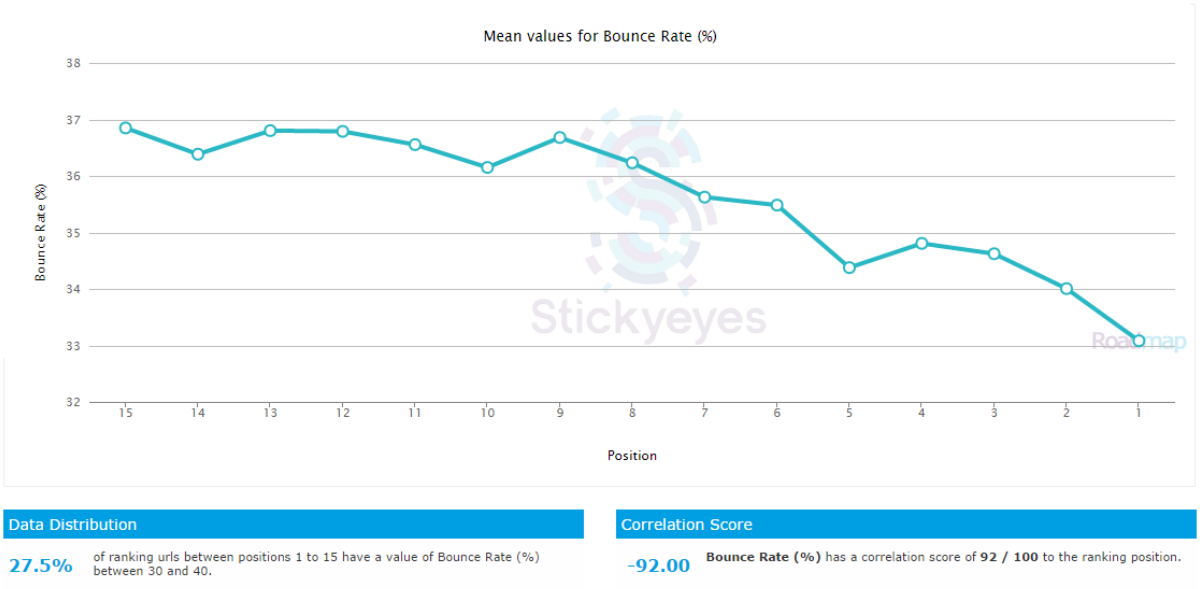
Closely rated to poor quality of content is low level of engagement, which often results in a high bounce rate. Google considers these signals as an indication as to how useful and appropriate page content is, and is thought to up weigh brands who can demonstrate values in line or above their industry average. As demonstrated in figure 2 and figure 3, healthier average visit durations and bounce rate correlate well with high search rankings. This signals a fundamental shift within the SEO industry and represents a more diverse algorithm in which we see an increasing relevance of engagement factors

Figure 2: Mean values for Average Time Spent on Site



Source: Stickyeyes Roadmap Tool

Figure 3: Mean values for Average Bounce Rate



Source: Stickyeyes Roadmap Tool

THE ROLE OF LINKS

Historically, the acquisition of backlinks was one of the few effective and primitive ways to optimise a website for keyword rankings. Whilst links still have their place within the optimisation mix, a healthy, authoritative and natural portfolio is now fundamental to longevity in search results. Quality and relevancy over quantity is the new mantra.

Links need to be authentic and earned as part of a quality content experience and proposition that fulfils the informational needs of users. SEO content to drive links can be deployed in many formats including written word, videos and infographics. It is essential that all content is interesting, credible, useful and ultimately sharable.

A natural and high quality backlink profile includes:

- Links that are authoritative and from trusted sites
- Links that are relevant to your brand, products or services
- A natural anchor text profile (i.e. links are not weighted towards generic keyword anchor text)
- Links embedded in relevant content (i.e. the content in proximity to the link talks about relevant products or your brand)
- Positive brand sentiment

Creative content marketing represents an effective way in which to acquire genuine links and build authority in the market.

CONTENT MARKETING AND SEO

Content marketing is the process of developing and sharing relevant, valuable, and engaging content to a targeted audience, with the goal of acquiring new customers or increasing the volume of business from existing customers. Content marketing should represent the alignment of business goals and consumer demand for information. The discovery of content is supported by SEO activity, which ensures all other marketing efforts are given the greatest opportunity to perform from the onset.

SEO AND THE VALUE OF BRAND EQUITY

Reflective of Google's diversified algorithm, brand reputation signals are becoming increasingly relevant. The exact nature of brand classification is unknown however marketing efforts and assets that are reflective of a typical 'big' brand such as a content rich website, a strong social footprint, a high volume of advocates, owned communities and effective PR, are thought to be influential.

Due to the focus on quality and engagement signals within Google's algorithm, PR and SEO have become increasingly dependent on each other. Whilst once these were two very separate marketing functions, an integrated strategy is now critical to building brand reputation and improving search visibility.

MULTI DEVICE USAGE AND SEO

Smartphone and tablet devices are beginning to dominate internet usage and inform how consumers interact with brands across a range of industries. The proliferation of mobile devices has encouraged brands to consider customers within device specific segments and to plan and deploy marketing activity to cater for multi-device consumption. It has forced brands to divorce themselves from the 'desktop first' approach, which is a sure-fire way to unwittingly ignore a high percentage of their active consumer base.

From an SEO perspective, this means that brands are starting to consider mobile search as an entity within itself, and are taking heed of the relative clarity that Google provides on what does and does not affect high search rankings on these devices.

Mobile specific search strategies are becoming increasingly commonplace and are often leveraged to support native apps. The most successful of these strategies are focused on providing great user experience and cater for customer expectation by delivering assets specifically designed for mobile consumption. Technical optimisation for mobile search represents a key part in sending the right signals to Google, although the development of a

digital asset which puts the customer at the heart of all features and functionality decisions is what will ultimately return dividends in helping to improve cross device accessibility and market visibility. *For more information, see section Mobile Keyword Identification and Landscape Analysis in this report.*

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving a strong organic presence requires implementing a multifaceted, cohesive and integrated SEO campaign and at the heart of this, a content creation, distribution and engagement framework. Our key recommendations can be summarised as:

- **Keyword Identification and Selection Process:** Keyword identification and selection is one of the most important, valuable, and high return activities in the search marketing field. Ranking for the "right" keywords can make or break a brand. Identification of these target keywords informs website optimisation and can help to steer content strategy to acquire qualified traffic and leads.
- **Technical optimisation:** Technical optimisation refers to the act of building and deploying specific elements of website architecture, page mark up and site content to send positive signals to search engines to aid keyword rankings.
- **Functional SEO content**: Functional SEO content is onsite copy that communicates information to search engines and is highly relevant to target search queries. Functional content should be designed to reflect brand authority on a subject, theme or area within its market.
- **Landing Page Strategies:** Ultimately the purpose of a landing page is to communicate with a visitor and then convince the visitor to convert into a customer by taking a specific action. To achieve this, landing pages need to have a content and conversion strategy that engages with the target customer and provides conversion signposting.
- **Content Ideation, Creation and Communication:** A content led approach to SEO involves the process of developing and sharing relevant, valuable, and engaging content to a targeted audience with the goal of acquiring new customers or increasing business from existing customers.

SEO KEYWORD IDENTIFICATION AND LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

KEYWORD IDENTIFICATION

Keyword identification and selection is one of the most important, valuable, and high return activities in the search marketing field. Ranking for the "right" keywords can make or break a brand. Identification of these target keywords informs website optimisation and can help to steer content strategy to acquire qualified traffic and leads.

In essence, the process of keyword identification and selection allows brands to define:

- What keywords are relevant to services or products
- What type of keywords visitors are using in the search journey
- What keywords are likely to bring visitors who will convert into customers

In addition, the process of keyword selection also has implications for:

- The technical structure of website content
- The type of content deployed on the websites
- Content used within an SEO campaign

To help the process of identification and selection, SEO strategists will look at keyword “search impression volume” as well as “organic click share” to help understand the potential traffic ROI.

KEYWORD SEARCH IMPRESSION VOLUME

Search impression volume represents the number of times a visitor types in a relevant keyword, product phrase or brand name into a search engine and is typically used as a barometer to gauge the popularity, frequency and strength of activity online. Understanding the volume of searches on a keyword is critical to developing an SEO strategy for the following reasons:

- Its enables the search strategist to understand which keywords to rank for.
- It enables the search strategist to understand the competitive strength of the keyword.
- This in turn provides the search strategist with the ability to calculate the type of investment needed to achieve high rankings.

KEYWORD CLICK SHARE

While search impression represents the number of times a website page is displayed within the search results, organic click share is the number of clicks that an individual brand is expected to achieve against a keyword, as a measure of where they rank for that keyword.

Understanding organic click share is critical to SEO strategy for the following reasons:

- It allows brands to calculate the potential traffic ROI for ranking for a keyword or group of keywords
- It illustrates the relative share of the keyword market when compared to other brands

TYPES OF KEYWORDS AND KEYWORD CUSTOMER JOURNEYS

The keyword search journey comprises a mixture of keyword types that are designed to reflect different stages within the customers purchasing lifecycle. These keywords can be classified into three key groups:

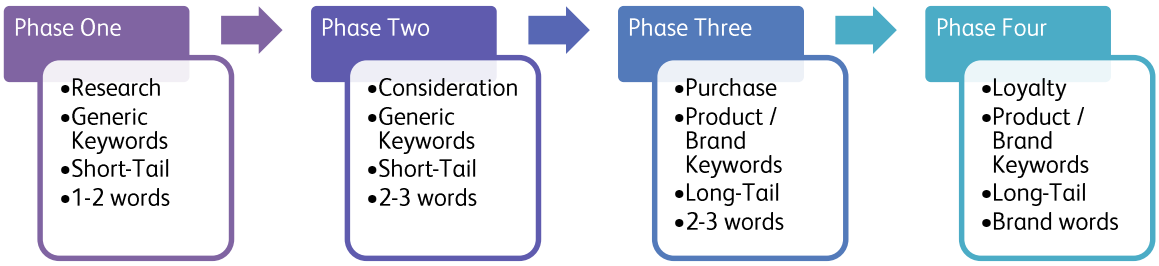
1. **Core, short tail generic phrases:** These are typically one to two words in length and have high search volumes
2. **Long tail generic phrases:** Long tail phrases consist of two or more words and represent a significantly lower volumes of searches
3. **Brand / product related phrases:** This group contains brand and branded keywords.

In a user journey context, keywords can be segmented into the following four stages:

1. **Research:** This is the discovery phase and visitors may use a range of generic phrases. Research keywords tend to contain one or two words.
2. **Consideration:** This phase is where visitors starts to refine their search. Consideration keywords tend to contain two or three words.
3. **Purchase:** In this phase, visitors will start to include a product or brand name into the search journey. Purchase keywords tend to be long tail.
4. **Loyalty:** These keywords are typically brand or product names and will vary in length depending on the type of product in question.

Brands need to market for every stage of the search journey. The number of keywords, the order of the words and their meaning helps to identify how close to a purchase the customer is. Figure 4 details the types of keyword within each of these stages:

Figure 4: The keyword purchase journey



Brands can look at each of these phases in order to drive a particular part of the SEO strategy, for example they can increase return on investment (ROI) by attracting searchers in the consideration and purchase stages of their journey. Core generic terms play one of the most important roles within the user journey as they are typically used to develop search exposure and help initiate the search journey. As a general rule, a refined keyword phrase is more relevant to the conversion process and more likely to convert into a purchase. Brand or product related terms typically come into play during the later stages of the search process when customers have selected the potential purchase item.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Keyword identification and selection** is one of the most important, valuable, and high return activities in the search marketing field and helps to steer content strategy to acquire qualified traffic and leads.
- **Search impression** helps search strategist to understand which keywords to rank for, their competitive strength and how to calculate the type of investment needed to achieve high rankings.
- **Click share** allows brands to calculate the potential traffic ROI for ranking for a keyword or group of keywords as well as illustrating the relative share of the keyword market when compared to other brands.
- **Keyword types** are critical for search strategists in understanding the types and mix of keywords designed to reflect different stages within the customers purchasing lifecycle.

TECHNICAL SEO

Technical optimisation refers to the act of building and deploying specific elements of website architecture, page mark up and site content to send positive signals to search engines to aid keyword rankings.

It helps to maximise the opportunity for content discovery and the volume of website traffic from organic search. Technical optimisation allows websites to:

- Be indexed (listed) in search engines
- Communicate page content to search engines
- Rank for target keywords in search engines
- Deliver the most appropriate content to a user depending on device
- Match page content to high volume search terms

RANKING SIGNALS

The individual components that comprise search engine optimisation are often referred to as ranking signals. Some of the most influential ranking signals are:

- Time on site (a representation of the level of user engagement)
- Low % of low quality backlinks (a representation of the quality of websites who are linking)
- Domain authority (a domain wide quality score)

It is estimated that over 200 individual ranking signals contribute to a website's position within search results so, this list is certainly not exhaustive but, provides an indication of some of the primary areas of consideration for a brand.

GOOGLE GUIDELINES

It is important to note that Google has provided very clear guidelines on best practice technical optimisation (Google Webmaster Central Blog). Key recommendations are summarised as follows:

- Design websites and content for users, not for search engines
- Avoid tricks intended to improve search engine rankings (commonly known as 'black-hat SEO')
- Think about what makes your website unique, valuable, or engaging and then sufficiently demonstrate this through the use of content and brand proposition

Certain optimisation techniques fall outside of Google's guidelines and can lead to a website penalty. A penalty means that a website loses its search visibility and potentially may never recoup lost rankings.

The following tactics are deemed harmful to search rankings and should be avoided at all costs (more details on the Google Webmaster Central Blog):

- Scraped content
- Auto generated content
- Creating pages with little or no content
- Cloaking
- Hidden text or links (i.e. white text on white background)
- Doorway pages

KEY OPTIMISATION ELEMENTS

This section describes five key optimisation elements and signals that can affect search rankings, keyword-page relevancy, indexation and site efficiency.

DOMAIN AUTHORITY

Domain Authority is a website quality score calculated by Moz (www.moz.com). Whilst Moz has not shared a definitive list of elements that determine Domain Authority, it is thought that content, link quality and engagement metrics form a key part of the logic. Domain Authority is commonly used as a benchmark to compare and analyse performance and improving Domain Authority is often a key goal within a brand's search marketing strategy. Often, high scores (70+) have a consistently strong correlation with high search rankings.

SITE ARCHITECTURE

Site architecture refers to the way in which webpages are linked to and arranged within a website. Benefits of SEO-friendly website architecture include:

- Improved search engine crawl rate
- Optimal Domain Authority flow
- Rich user experience
- Efficient site indexation

SEARCH ENGINE CRAWL RATE

A streamlined and optimised architecture can provide efficiencies in crawl rate. For example, a website which hosts pages only three subfolders deep will be crawled faster compared to one

in which pages are ten subfolders deep. This means that more pages are indexed faster and more content is accessible from organic search results.

DOMAIN AUTHORITY FLOW

Domain Authority can be passed throughout a website however the higher the volume of pages, the less 'juice' there is to distribute across the site. A relatively shallow and coherent structure is vital to restrict unnecessary dilution of Domain Authority and for deep pages to benefit from the overall website score.

USER EXPERIENCE

Site architecture is also important from a user experience perspective. If users are able to find and digest content easily onsite this will have a positive effect on bounce rate, volume of pages consumed and time on site – which are all considered within search engine ranking algorithms.

SITE LINKS

Another effect of optimised site architecture is Google's ability to define sitelinks. Sitelinks are displayed beneath a ranking URL in search results and can point users to the most relevant information. They also help to increase click through rate. Sitelinks can only be awarded by Google based on great site structure.

Key recommendations for optimised site structure:

- Ensure URL structure follows the navigation menu hierarchy.
- Create the navigation menu element in HTML or CSS so that it is readable and executable across all devices.
- Try to keep 'deep pages' shallow - no more than three clicks from the homepage.
- Utilise a fixed header that remains at the top of the page when a user scrolls.
- Utilise breadcrumbs which show users how they have traversed the website and provide links back to previously viewed content.
- Avoid duplicate content by restricting the use of page anchors.
- Link to and from all pages on the website and avoid 'floating' pages.

META DATA

Meta data is a selection of code designed to provide specific, contextual information about a HTML webpage. This information is used by browsers in many ways, including to determine how to display content or which URL to load, and search engines for identification of keyword-

page relevancy and SERP content. Within this code, the title and image alt tags are the most important.

TITLE TAG

The title tag is used to communicate page content to users and search engines. It should represent a concise and accurate description of the page and contain one or two primary target keywords. Optimised title tags create value in the following areas:

- Relevancy.
- Browsing.
- Search engine results pages.

The title tag is often the first piece of information that a user sees when browsing search results therefore it should be readable and convey a positive message where possible. A descriptive and optimised title tag can help to increase click through rate.

Title tags should be:

- Unique to each page of a website.
- No more than 60 characters or 512 pixels wide.

IMAGE ALT TAGS

The image alt tag is used to describe image content if an image fails to load. It helps to communicate contextual page content to search engines and provides a semantic description of images. Appropriate alt tags can also help to drive additional traffic through Google Image search.

Alt tags should be:

- Short
- Describe the image and contextual content, or if contained in a link element, the content on the destination page
- Not stuffed with keywords

The alt tag attribute is one of many on-page elements that are becoming increasingly more relevant to search engine rankings (http://moz.com/search-ranking-factors/survey), but is often an overlooked part of website mark up.

TIME ON SITE

Time on site is a key ranking signal in both desktop and mobile search algorithms. This value is reflective of many individual marketing efforts and page elements such as engaging content,

page-keyword relevancy, navigation and usability. High time on site correlates very strongly to high search rankings and a session duration of four minutes is the average for brands that rank in position one.

Time on site is a key metric that should be monitored from within an analytics solution and can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of site content.

FUNCTIONAL CONTENT AUDIT

Functional SEO content is onsite copy that communicates information to search engines and is highly relevant to target search queries. Functional content should be designed to reflect brand authority on a subject, theme or area within its market.

The development of functional content is underpinned by the following methods:

- Content depth analysis and content audit.
- Technical SEO review.

A functional content audit is a method of identifying the most relevant pages for keywords or keyword clusters. When performance is benchmarked against competitors, it is an easy way to identify content areas in which a website is lacking, or areas of opportunity to improve page relevancy for specific keywords. It can help to prioritise areas of development or marketing investment.

A content audit should consider many elements including:

- Page title.
- H1 – H5 keyword occurrence.
- Body copy keyword density.
- Keyword occurrence in URL.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Technical optimisation represents a key part of modern day search strategy, but alone is not enough to provide brands with the level of engagement that Google demands in order to up weight presence in search results. Technical optimisation strategies need to be complemented by functional and engaging content strategies.

Key recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- **Google's Policy Guidelines.** Google has provided very clear guidelines on best practice technical optimisation (Google Webmaster Central Blog). It is important to not only understand the exact details of these guideless but also to keep up to



date on the nuances between each algorithm update and what their objectives are.

- **Domain Authority:** It is important to use domain authority as a benchmark metric to compare and analyse performance.
- **Site Architecture**: Site architecture refers to the way in which webpages are linked to and arranged within a website. Deploying a SEO-friendly website architecture helps improve search engine crawl rate, optimal domain authority flow as well as the user experience and site indexation.
- **Site Links:** Sitelinks are displayed beneath a ranking URL in search results and can be used to point users to the most relevant information as well as helping to increase click through rate.
- **Meta data:** Meta data is still relevant to technical SEO as it provides specific, contextual information about a HTML webpage. This information is used to determine how to display content or which URL to load, and search engines for identification of keyword-page relevancy and SERP content.
- **Time on site**: Time on site is a key ranking signal in both desktop and mobile search algorithms. Time on site is a key metric that should be monitored from within an analytics solution and can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of site content
- **Functional Content Audit:** Functional SEO content is onsite copy that communicates information to search engines and is highly relevant to target search queries. Functional content should be designed to reflect brand authority on a subject, theme or area within its market.

LANDING PAGE STRATEGIES

LANDING PAGES AND SEO

This section looks at the best practice SEO landing page strategies with specific consideration of two key types:

- Landing page strategies for desktop computers.
- Landing page strategies for mobile / tablet devices.

Landing page design incorporates visual and functional elements as well as technical build and deployment. A great landing page designed for user experience and optimised for accessibility across multiple devices is critical for maximising SEO investment. Poor landing pages can have

a negative effect on search engine rankings, and often result in a high bounce rate and low dwell time.

From a user perspective, if the initial perception of a landing page is poor they are less likely to return, even if the page ranks well. This scenario could also be harmful to SEO activity as high bounce rate is also a negative signal to search engines.

SEO LANDING PAGES AND CONVERSION STRATEGY

Ultimately the purpose of a landing page is to communicate with a visitor and then convince the visitor to convert into becoming a customer by taking a specific action. To achieve this, landing pages need to have a content and conversion strategy that engages with the target customer and provides conversion signposting.

Landing pages can generally be classified into 3 main groups:

- Stand-alone landing pages: click through, lead capture, infomercial and viral landing pages.
- Microsites: a small multi-page website usually created as a supplement to the main website.
- Internal website landing pages: homepages and product detail pages.

Regardless of the type of landing page, the strategy underpinning its creation should contain the following key elements:

- Objective and commercial goals
- Landing page persona
- Content hierarchy
- SEO technicals
- Conversion process
- Measurement goals

PAGE OBJECTIVE AND COMMERCIALS GOALS

The identification of commercial goals underpins the development of landing page and conversion strategy. Brands need to develop a clear understanding of what they would like their visitors to do onsite and then optimise to encourage this.

Objectives can vary across different parts of the site and can be designed with specific consumer segments and keyword targets in mind.

To help define and shape landing page objectives, it is important to consider the following key questions:

- Who is the target customer and/or persona?
- What content will encourage visitors to convert?
- Are there any foreseeable objections that need to be addressed in order to persuade visitors to convert?
- How does the page need to work to enable visitors to take positive actions?
- What content will help visitors make decisions?
- How can the content and functional components be organised to make the page easy to follow?
- Where are the possible dead-ends and how can these be adapted to continue the customer journey?

With these challenges in mind it is very important not to lose sight of the following two key questions:

- What is the commercial proposition of the landing page?
- What is the commercial end goal of the landing page?

In order to address these queries, brands need to map landing page content strategy onto sales and marketing processes.

Key stages within this include:

- Awareness
- Consideration
- Decision
- Loyalty

LANDING PAGE PERSONA

A marketing persona is a fully realised description of the target customer. Developing a landing page around the key attribute of target personal helps to ensure that content appeals to the ideal customer at each stage of the sales funnel.

The following questions can be used to help create a target persona for landing pages:

- What gender is the customer?
- What is the customer's age bracket?
- What kind of educational background does the customer have?
- What is their income bracket?
- What activities outside of work does the customer participate in?
- What geographic region does the customer come from?
- What does the customer's day usually look like?
- Does the customer have children?

- What are the customer's hobbies and interests?
- What is your customer's most pressing concern at work or home?

These questions will not only help shape the content that is deployed on the landing page but will be fundamental in terms of defining the look and feel of the page and the conversion journey, as well as the type of content mediums used, such as video.

In essence, the personas need to address 5 key criteria:

1. Priority needs
2. Trust and credibility drivers
3. Decision making criteria
4. Purchase barriers
5. Buying process

CONTENT HIERARCHY

On site conversion is determined by the user's ability to empathise with the site content and subsequently find what they are looking for. Many web sites typically have a large amount of product information to communicate. However many fail to address several key questions when a customer lands on the site:

- Is what I'm looking for on this page?
- Where is it and how do I complete my task?

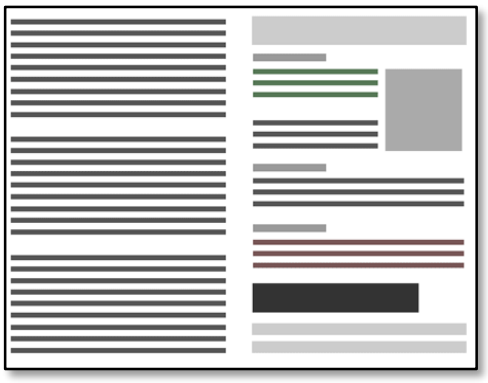
Using a clearly defined content hierarchy aids comprehension, reinforces the message and guides the visitor through the site. A content hierarchy looks to organise page elements into levels of relative importance. This organisation is typically sequential in nature. The basic design principle is to emphasise one element and guide the customer towards the most important content items. A visual hierarchy can create a centre of interest on a page, communicate additional meaning through convention and repetition, highlight actions that visitors should take and establish patterns of movement and flow (figure 5).

The mechanisms for content hierarchy include:

- Layers and alignment: stacking or connecting page elements to define priority on the page.
- Contrast and colour: emphasising the importance of elements within a page.
- Equalising: instantly communicating what elements are at the same level in the hierarchy.
- Proximity: grouping elements within a hierarchy and sub hierarchy.
- Size: larger elements carry more weight.

- Density: Packing more elements into a given space to give emphasis towards that space.

Figure 5: Content Hierarchy



Above: The page on the left has no hierarchy and as a result anyone visiting the page will need to do a lot of work to determine if this page is what they want. The page on the right has a set of content layers that allows the visitor to determine the relative importance of content elements.

CONVERSION PROCESS

The conversion process describes what methods are used to facilitate an action by a visitor or potential customer. Actions can be varied and will differ depending on where the individual is within the buying cycle. They can range from:

- Searching for information
- Evaluation of alternatives
- Explore pricing and/or product options
- Making a direct acquisition decision
- Post-purchase behaviour and evaluation

Within these actions in mind, the conversion process should be designed to address the following key questions:

- Can the user navigation the site with ease?
- Can they find what they are looking for?
- Do customers get the relevant information they need?
- Does the site encourage brand loyalty and trust?
- Is the site secure, safe and trustworthy?
- Does the site offer great products as well as compelling promotions?
- Is the acquisition process quick and easy?
- Do customer get access to support and help?

Once the conversion process is defined, appropriate goals can be set in order to maximise conversion. These goals need to be carefully considered alongside what customer needs, what they are prepared to do and where in the buying process they are likely to be. The criteria that underpins the conversion process will touch on almost every aspect of a landing page, however the key components can be summarised as follows:

- Type, size and location of call to actions (CTA's)
- Benefits and unique selling points
- Structure and location of primary and secondary navigation
- Structure of search facilities and breadcrumb trail
- Site colourisation
- Customer support features
- Credibility drivers
- Registration facilities
- Types of registration processes
- Registration isolation techniques
- Registration forms
- Number of data capture fields
- Error trapping
- Fulfilment processes
- Deposit and payment facilities
- Payment facilities/options
- Security features including 3D payment
- Customer support for payment issues
- Email campaigns and management of deposit abandonment
- Account management features and functionality

Of these criteria, a call to action is the most fundamental element of a landing page. Best practice techniques stipulate that calls to action need to be visually salient i.e. they should stand out from the rest of the page, as well as being visually isolated so that other buttons are not inadvertently clicked by mistake. Calls to actions can be created to engage with customers at different points within the buying cycle, and then encourage them to make a decision to move on to the next step within the conversion process. They can be classified into two categories:

- **Direct CTA:** These require an explicit commitment from visitors and will typically have lower conversion rates. Example calls to action include buy now, download, subscription, free trial and connect to us.

- **Indirect CTA:** These actions are the completion of a non-committal task or a softer action, such as watching a video or requesting product information. They are typically used in conjunction with more direct calls to action and are designed to specifically to facilitate or reinforce. For example, product reviews are an indirect CTA as the main purpose is to build trust and credibility in order for the visitors to take the next step.

MEASUREMENT GOALS

Tracking the performance of landing pages is essential for optimising conversions. Packages like Google Analytics provide a number of useful metrics that can help brands to understand visitor behaviour on landing pages.

These measurement goals can be broken into two key categories

ENGAGEMENT METRICS

These look specifically at how visitors are engaging with on page content. For example, page views are typically used as an indicator of patterns in traffic and most popular pages. Page views can also be used to help marketers decide which pages to target with calls-to-action, regularly update with fresh and relevant content, and include in visitor funnels. Typical engagement metrics include:

- Page views
- Bounce and exit rate
- Time on site

ACQUISITION METRICS

Acquisition metrics include traffic as well as conversion goal metrics. For example, conversion rate is measured by the number of potential visitors performing the desired action, whether the action is buying a product, filling out a web form, or some other goal of the website. Typical engagement metrics include:

- Sessions/CTR
- Number of form submissions
- Number of leads
- Number of sales

At the heart of a mobile landing page strategy is the choice of mobile site solution. There are two popular types:

- **Fully Responsive:** A responsive design which utilises one URL on which copy and styling elements are switched based on user agent.



- **Mobile Version:** A separate mobile site which is the equivalent of a desktop site but sits on a different URL, often a subdomain.

While Google supports all three technical configurations it has a preference for a fully responsive design *(Recommendation for Building Smartphone-optimized website, Google, Webmaster Central Blog 2012 and What to do if you get a Google Mobile Usability Warning, 2015)* for the following reasons:

- It keeps desktop and mobile content on a single URL, which is easier for users to interact with, share, and link to and for Google's algorithms to assign the indexing properties to content.
- Google can discover content more efficiently

In addition to a responsive design, other factors that underpin best practice landing page strategy include:

- **Keyword and content relevance:** In order to maximise ranking opportunity it is important to ensure that the landing page and its content are relevant to the keyword search terms.
- **Optimise titles and meta descriptions**: Remember that you're working with less screen space when a user searches using a mobile device. To show off your best work in SERPS, be as concise as possible (without sacrificing the quality of the information) when creating titles, URLs, and meta descriptions.
- **Responsive content:** Content for mobile users does not necessarily need to be the same seen on desktop versions. It should be optimised only to include the absolute essentials needed to ensure that visitors are presented with useful and relevant information.
- **Content legibility and order:** Users should be able to read the page without zooming. A simple colour palette, strong contrast between text and backgrounds, and adequate negative space between elements play a large part in legibility. For smartphone consumption, present a single-column layout with the priority content at the top. Mobile users are goal-oriented versus the more benefit-oriented desktop users, so always feature call-to-action content (e.g. play now, make a deposit, register now) above the first fold or within the top 100 pixels.
- **Form structure:** Mobile landing page forms should be extremely short. Only show fields imperative for urgent data collection, and evaluate options to otherwise capture or compute data at a later time. The key is to get users to submit the minimum lead data (like name and email) necessary for response.
- **Calls to action:** To optimise for landing page conversion, limit the number of actions to three or less. An action constitutes any task the user could do on the

page – a link, a like, a share, a video view, a form submission, a menu expand, or any other tap/click/swipe gesture.

- **Site accessibility:** Ensure content is available and visible for mobile devices. For example, some embedded videos or interactive graphics aren't accessible to all mobile users. Flash, for example, will not work on iPhones or Android versions 4.1 and above. Either create these elements using native HTML5 elements or eliminate them from mobile pages altogether.
- **Site speed:** Page speed is important for mobile website optimisation. Mobile users often have slow data networks and less tolerance for slow sites. Mobile pages need to be lightweight and have rapid download speeds in order to optimise the user experience. For example, CCS script consolidation and image compression as well as resizing image resolution according to mobile device type are some of the techniques that can be used to improve page speed.
- **Avoid faulty redirects:** Some websites use separate URLs to serve desktop and smartphone users. A faulty redirect is when a desktop page redirects smartphone users to an irrelevant page on the smartphone-optimized website. A typical example is when all pages on the desktop site redirect smartphone users to the homepage of the smartphone-optimized site. This kind of redirect disrupts a user's workflow and may lead them to stop using the site and go elsewhere.
- **Interstitials:** Promoting your smartphone app on a mobile site is essential to maximising downloads but popular methods such as interstitials are not conducive to conversion. An interstitial is an intermediate page that interrupts the path between two related pages and can cause indexing issues.

Mobile tactics should focus on simple usability (reading/clicking), fast performance, minimal yet compelling action, and mobile-specific features.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- **Landing Page Strategy:** Ultimately the purpose of a landing page is to communicate with a visitor and then convince the visitor to convert into becoming a customer by taking a specific action. To achieve this, landing pages need to have a content and conversion strategy that engages with the target customer and provides conversion signposting.
- **Page Objective and Commercials Goals:** The identification of commercial goals underpins the development of landing page and conversion strategy. Brands need to develop a clear understanding of what they would like their visitors to do onsite and then optimise to encourage this.

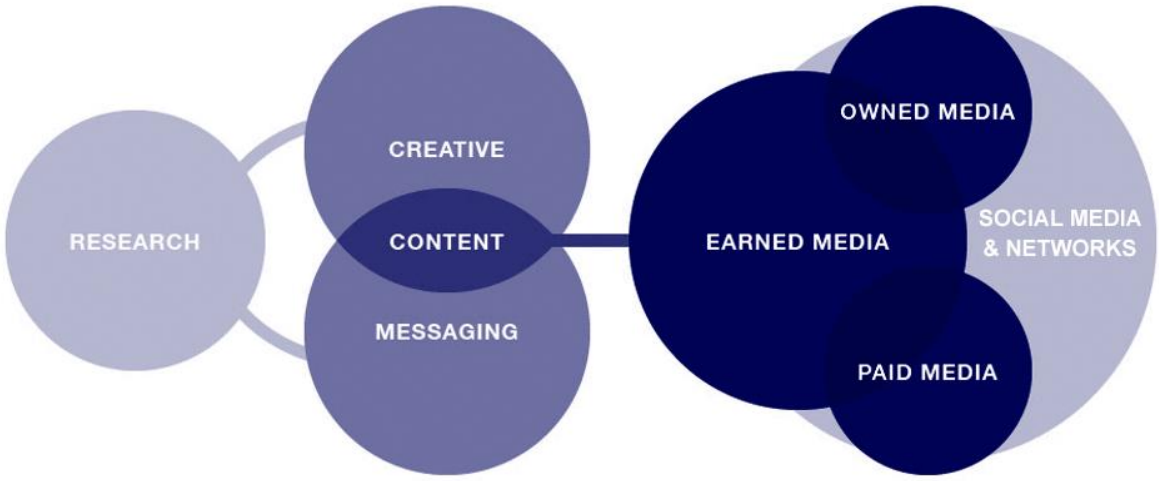
- **Landing Page Persona:** A marketing persona is a fully realised description of the target customer. Developing a landing page around the key attribute of target persona helps to ensure that content appeals to the ideal customer at each stage of the sales funnel.
- **Content Hierarchy:** On site conversion is determined by the user's ability to empathise with the site content and subsequently find what they are looking for.
- **Conversion Process:** The conversion process describes what methods are used to facilitate an action by a visitor or potential customer. Actions can be varied and will differ depending on where the individual is within the buying cycle.
- **Measurement Goals:** Tracking the performance of landing pages is essential for optimizing conversions. Packages like Google Analytics provide a number of useful metrics that can help brands to understand visitor behaviour on landing pages.
- **Mobile Landing Page Strategy:** Googles preference is for a fully responsive design and this based on the following reasons
    - It keeps desktop and mobile content on a single URL
    - Google can discover content more efficiently.

CONTENT IDEATION, CREATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR SEO

CONTENT LED APPROACH TO SEO

A content led approach to SEO involves the process of developing and sharing relevant, valuable, and engaging content to a targeted audience with the goal of acquiring new customers or increasing business from existing customers. A key part of this approach is to ensure that this content is aligned with business priorities and is based on clear objectives and relevant market research. It should be tailored to the needs of the audience and be integrated into pre-existing operational infrastructures and leverage existing assets and online materials. The success of a content led marketing strategy is not wholly attributed to any one isolated channel but is dependent on integration with business objectives and pre-existing "in-flight" or current marketing activity, or activity that is in the pipeline. Achieving a strong organic presence requires implementing a multi-faceted, cohesive and integrated SEO campaign and the heart of this a content creation, distribution and engagement framework (figure 6).

Figure 6: Customer Attributes and Behaviour



Owned Media & Platform Content	Earned Media & Shared Content	Paid Media & Promotional Activity
Brand owned content, websites, blogs and social networking platforms. This includes a range of content outlets.	Word of mouth, viral, press articles, public discussion and content dissemination.	Digital advertising, banners and sponsorship on third-party sites. This can also include integration with offline activity.
Created for long-term sustained engagement with existing and potential consumers	Earned media is typically the result of well executed paid and owned media where the brands are advocated by third parties	Demand creation activity designed to actively push content and messages directly to new customers.

The two key areas of this framework are:

- Content ideation
- Communication and distribution of content

CONTENT IDEATION

This is the process of creating content that helps to drive rankings against target keywords. The end goal is to earn authentic links, however, for sites to organically link to this, the content needs to be:

- Relevant i.e. content that is relevant to your product, brand or service.
- Authentic i.e. credible content that people trust.
- Engaging i.e. content that is both useful, interesting and adds value to the customer.

For SEO to be successful, content creation also needs to utilise business information to identify the correct commercial areas to focus on. The process of content ideation can be broken into the following key areas:

- Business Objectives and Marketing Activities.
- Customer Attributes and Behaviour.
- Content Production and Publishing Schedule.

BUSINESS OBJECTIVES AND MARKETING ALIGNMENT

Example objectives to determine content creation include:

- **Business Objective Alignment:** Definition of commercial and product orientated objectives such as:
  - Increase market share
  - Launch new product
  - Generate interest
  - Improve perception
  - Develop community
  - Develop recognition
  - Generate leads or prospecting
  - Help close sales
- **Brand Alignment**: Authenticity is a key consideration within Google's algorithm, therefore content needs to integrate with brand values to help drive credibility and trusted commercial value. To achieve this content needs to be aligned with:
  - Values
  - Equity
  - Messaging
  - Proposition
  - Positioning



- Tone of Voice
- Image
- Colours

- **Marketing Channels and Asset Alignment:** It is important to align SEO content to marketing assets, wider campaign activities as well as primary routes to market and channels. This ensures that it remains credible, on brand and maximises its reach and trust with the consumer base. This alignment drives authenticity but most importantly it drives efficiencies. Marketing alignment can be summarised as follows:
  - Channel alignment
  - TV/radio ads
  - News articles/PR
  - Trade press
  - Magazine adverts
  - Events/seminars
  - Exhibitions
  - Assets alignment
  - Marketing and sales collateral
  - Websites/blogs
  - Social assets
  - Brand partners
  - Sponsors and ambassadors

CUSTOMER ATTRIBUTES AND BEHAVIOUR

The content ideation and creation process needs to address four key content areas of customer persona and behavioural traits when consuming content:

CUSTOMER DEMOGRAPHIC

Different customers consume information and content in different ways. Therefore the choice of content should be informed by the following:

- Target groups/personas
- The demographic composition of target groups/personas
- Key life style variables and interests
- Key life style traits and interests

Demographic data can be used not only to pinpoint variables such as age, hobbies and gender, but it can also be used for indexing. Indexing is the process of comparing a target group

against a baseline average, the primary objective is to determine whether a target group has a demographic variable that is greater than the average.

CUSTOMER LOCATION

Different customers exhibit different platform preferences for consuming content. For example, while younger groups may be more receptive to promotional offers or content on a social platform, older groups may typically engage on a branded site or forum or blog. Content creation should consider:

- Where does this consumer group go to engage and find information about brands?
- What specific platforms, activities and mediums are used as part of this process?

CUSTOMER MOTIVATION

What motivates customers to engage with a brand will vary from one group to another and can range from simply loyalty, through to product offering or discounts and offers. Customer motivation should be considered in the following:

- What motivates consumers to engage with brands?
- How do consumers like to be spoken to by a brand?

CUSTOMER PARTICIPATION

How customers like to engage with brands and the type of content they consume will vary depending on their product preferences and level of product experience. Customer participation seeks to answer the following key questions:

- What type of activities do customers typically engage in?
- What type of content is consumed?
- What type of brand driven activity would positively influence the purchase process?

This type of data profile allows SEO strategists to have a greater understanding of platforms, potential brand advocates and publishers and inspires relatable content approaches and ideas with the intention of generating natural links, brand engagement and off site coverage to both enhance SEO and social influence.

CONTENT PRODUCTION AND PUBLISHING SCHEDULE

Ultimately content production should be:

- Appropriate: Contribute to business goals as well as customer needs.
- On brand: A consistent tone of voice that reflects brand values.
- Useful and usable: Appropriate to user goals and context.

- Clear and legible: Content that is well written, clear and readable to user.
- Channel aligned: Different content works better on different channels.
- Discoverable: Ensure marketing efforts are working harmoniously to maximise the discovery opportunity.

In order to create SEO content that caters to these key principles, it is important that each piece follows a structured process of production. Moreover, it is essential to wrap this into a publishing schedule to define the purpose of content and ensure that it is aligned with wider marketing activities or channel initiatives.

The key elements of an SEO content production and publishing schedule include:

- Content Goals
- SEO One-Page Guidelines
- Content Theme
- Content Engagement Triggers
- Content Format
- Content Distribution Point
- Content Publishing Workflow

CONTENT GOALS

It is important to refer to broader business and marketing objectives and align your content with a range of clear goals. For example, consider whether content is designed to develop brand and awareness or is it designed to drive sales or to build a community (figure 7).

Figure 7: Content Goals

Traffic	Leads	Branding
Sales	Search	Members/Community
Shares	Engagement/Conversation	Likes/Followers

SEO ON-PAGE GUIDELINES

A key element of the creation and production process is that it follows best practice on-page guidelines. Consider whether content is aligned to the correct keyword or keyword clusters and has employed the appropriate mark-up language (figure 8).

Figure 8: SEO On-Page Guidelines

Keywords / Cluster	Word Count / Content Depth	Proper linking
Spelling/Grammar	HTML Mark-up	Best Practice use of images/media

CONTENT THEME

Content theme defines topic of discussion and is the important element of the content creation process. In order to sustain engagement it is important to employ a range of content themes. Some examples are noted below (figure 9).

Figure 9: Content theme matrix

How-to-based	Reviews	Question-based	Competitions	Templates	Data
Timesaving	Best practice	Case study	Quizzes	Product / Service Base	Galleries
Stats	Debates	Interviews	Experiments	Frameworks	Mind maps
Ask the experts	Resources	Link baits	Productivity	Definitions	Testimonials
Event-based	Research	Trends	Fun	Glossaries	Demos
Guides	Surveys	Analysis	Opinion	Checklist	News

CONTENT ENGAGEMENT TRIGGERS

Profiling customer attributes and behavioural traits can provide brands with an understanding as to how the market likes to engage their products. Content engagement triggers are critical in terms of facilitating customer interaction with content. Consider whether customers like to be entertained or if they respond to provocation or fun content (figure 10).

Figure 10: Content engagement triggers

Fun	Shocking	Moving	Controversial	Interesting	Provocation
Random	Uplifting	Inspirational	Informative	Illuminating	Debating

CONTENT FORMAT

Format is the physical output of content such as video, article or infographic. It is important to remember that multiple formats may be used to help communicate and distribute a single content theme (figure 11).

Figure 11: Content format matrix

Article	Slideshow	Video
Visualisation	Image	Press Release
Event	Webinar	App
Tool	Poll	EBook
Print	Email	Inorganic
Written	Article	Post

CONTENT DISTRIBUTION POINTS

This is the location where the content will be consumed. Examples are noted below (figure 12).

Figure 12: Location of content consumption

Website	Blogs	Microsite	Twitter
Partner Sites	Advertising	YouTube	Google+

CONTENT PUBLISHING WORKFLOW

At its most basic level, the content publishing workflow or editorial schedule segments content into a calendar format on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. A publishing workflow is essential

to developing a sustained output of content as well as sustaining audience interest and ensuring that content goals are aligned to wider marketing objectives and activities.

A typical content publishing workflow may contain the following key elements:

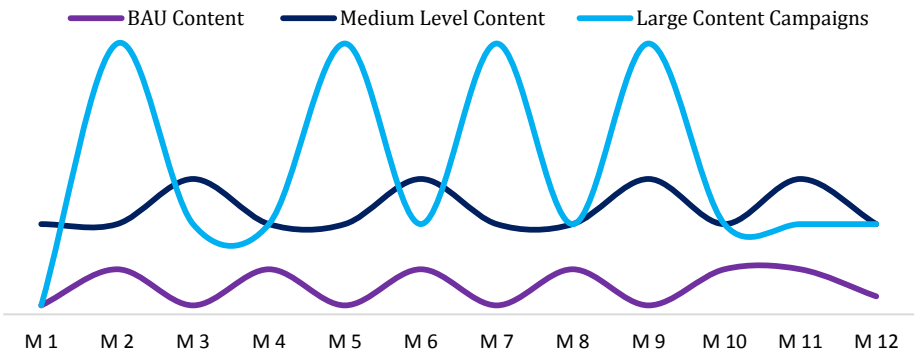
- Publishing date
- Topic/title
- Content
- Platform i.e. Twitter, blog
- Call to action/social media actions i.e. following, liking, sharing etc.
- Publishing resource
- Target persona
- Supporting resource/stakeholders.

One of the most important aspects of the content publishing workflow is how velocity and volume of content is throttled. It looks to deploy a range of outputs at different levels of importance (figure 13).

For example:

- **Basic:** This is content that your blogs, social platforms and landing pages must have to function.
- **Content Churn/BAU Activity:** This is regular content that is focused around a range of topics such as news, company and service updates.
- **Medium Level Content:** This involves interesting and sharable content that is designed to generate conversation and elicit engagement on social platforms.
- **Reactionary:** This is content that is usually in response to a topical story of interest.
- **Large Splash Campaigns:** This is high value content that is designed to precipitate a high level of brand awareness and engagement. It is typically a large scale campaign.

Figure 13: Pattern of content activity



COMMUNICATION AND PUBLISHING OF CONTENT

"What good is great content if no one can find it? How useful is findable content when it doesn't engage and persuade?" (The Truth About Content Marketing and SEO, Top Rank Blog, 2013).

Great content without effective marketing communications is producing content for contents sake and will never deliver success.

Great content must be shared to generate coverage which in turn helps drive brand advocacy, engagement and crucially for SEO purposes, natural links that will deliver SEO rankings. Central to achieving this success is an approach that puts SEO at the heart of content strategy and allows for integration with other channels to drive SEO value as well as direct traffic and brand awareness/engagement.

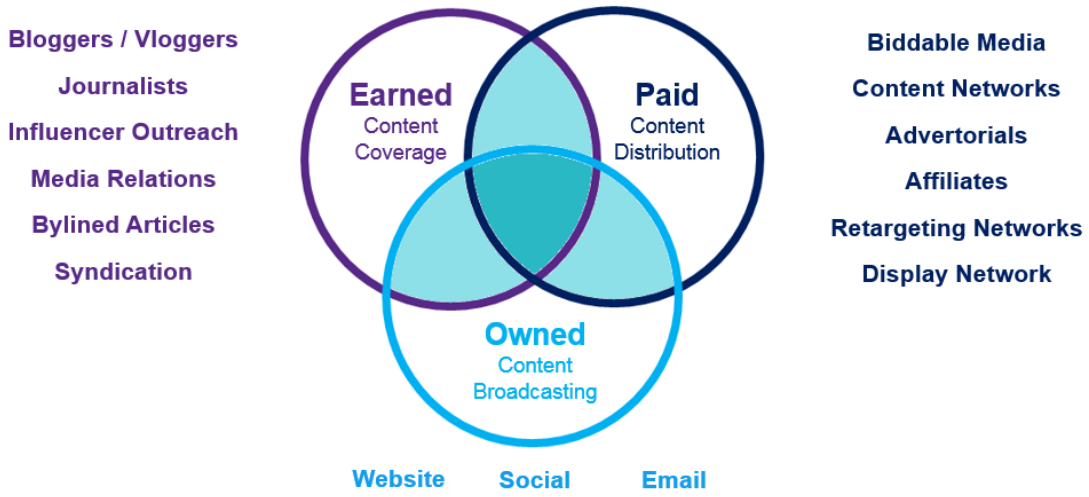
DEPLOYMENT VIA EARNED, OWNED AND PAID MEDIA OUTLETS

Content can be segmented into three types of communication methods: earned, owned and paid.

- **Owned Communications:** The channels that are fully owned by you. These can drive early ground swell and engagement with any content led campaigns.
- **Paid Communications:** The channels that typically involve some form of media or partner spend in return for exposure for your campaigns
- **Earned Communications:** The channels that you can't buy exposure on, but you can earn it be providing value to the user.

The framework below (figure 14) demonstrates how these methods can be integrated to deliver a mutually inter-dependent structure spanning various online channels and content types.

Figure 14: Pattern of content activity



It is important to understand how brands use content within each of the media areas:

- **Volume** is important for gaining traction in all three types of media. The amount of content that is presented to prospective clients helps Google understand more about a brand.
- **Velocity** covers the speed at which content is disseminated. The faster content is provided to Google, the faster it can be indexed and available for consumption.
- **Variety** ensures that an audience receives new and interesting content.
- **Veracity** is how content is perceived. Creating new and interesting content helps a brand to champion its point of view and, in turn, lends authentic value to the content - value that Google will pick up on.

OWNED MEDIA

These are channels that are fully controlled and owned by a single brand. These can drive early ground swell and engagement with any content led campaigns. One of the most common examples is a website, although blog sites and social media channels are other examples of owned media properties too. Channels like social media and blogs are extensions of a website, and all three are extensions of a brand as a whole. Typical owned media channels are as follows:

- Brand website
- Mobile site
- Retail stores (online and offline)
- Blogs
- Social media channels

- Apps
- Magazines
- Brochures

PAID MEDIA

Paid media is a good way to promote content in order to drive earned media, as well as direct traffic to owned media properties. Paying to promote content can help get the ball rolling and create more exposure. Social Media sites like Facebook and Twitter offer advertising that could potentially help boost content as well as website traffic. Using retargeting, Pay Per Click and display ads is also an effective and direct way to drive searchers to owned media and helps to increase traffic and/or conversions. Typical paid media channels are as follows:

- Biddable Media
- Content Media
- Advertorials
- Affiliates
- Retargeting/display
- PPC

EARNED MEDIA

Earned communications is focused on driving quality coverage of authentic and natural links. If owned media sites are the destination then earned media is the vehicle that helps people get there. Earned media is essentially online word of mouth, usually seen in the form of 'viral' tendencies, mentions, shares, reposts, reviews, recommendations, or content picked up by 3rd party sites. Typical earned media is as follows:

- Retweets
- Facebook likes
- YouTube comments
- Shares
- Bloggers writing about your product
- Online reviews
- Word of mouth

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Key recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- **Content Led Approach to SEO:** A key part of this approach is to ensure that this content is aligned with business priorities and is based on clear objectives and relevant market research.
- **Content Ideation:** This is the process of creating content that helps to drive rankings against target keywords, with the end goal of earning authentic links. For SEO to be successful, content creation also needs to utilise business information to identify the correct commercial areas to focus on. Key considerations underpinning content ideation are:
    - Customer Attributes and Behaviour
    - Customer Demographic
    - Customer Location
    - Customer Motivation
    - Customer Participation
- **Content Production and Publishing:** In order to create SEO content that caters to these key principles, it is important that each piece follows a structured process of production. Moreover, it is essential to wrap this into a publishing schedule to define the purpose of content and ensure that it is aligned with wider marketing activities or channel initiatives. Key considerations underpinning content production and publishing are:
    - Content Goals
    - SEO On Page Guidelines
    - Content Theme
    - Content Engagement Triggers
    - Content Format
    - Content Distribution Points
    - Content Publishing Workflow
- **Communication and Publishing of Content:** Great content must be shared to generate coverage which in turn helps drive brand advocacy, engagement and crucially for SEO purposes, natural links that will deliver SEO rankings. Central to achieving this success is an approach that puts SEO at the heart of content strategy and allows for integration with other channels to drive SEO value as well as direct traffic and brand awareness/engagement. Key considerations underpinning content communication and publishing:
    - Owned Media
    - Paid Media
    - Earned Media

CONCLUSIONS

Search engine optimisation incorporates a diverse range of digital channels and success is representative of an advanced and integrated digital approach. This approach leverages traditionally isolated marketing functions, such as PR and content, and considers the accessibility and usability of digital assets in the context of multi-device consumption.

Sharing relevant, valuable, and engaging content to a targeted audience is the lynchpin of SEO strategy and understanding the behavioural characteristics and motivations of individual customer segments is fundamental to delivering this effectively.

As a result of Google algorithm changes, SEO is becoming increasingly synonymous with user experience (UX) design and leverages conversion rate optimisation principles. In addition to established website quality indicators, such as Domain Authority, key ranking signals across all industries are rapidly converging around UX and include time on site and bounce rate.

High search rankings and a brilliant content marketing campaign can help to drive traffic to a website, but acquiring visitors and developing brand awareness represents only one step in the path to market growth. Logical site architecture, goal-orientated internal linking methods and optimised landing pages are key to converting site traffic into real customers.

Technical optimisation represents a key part of modern day search strategy, but alone is not enough to provide brands with the level of engagement that Google demands in order to up weight presence in search results. Technical optimisation strategies need to be complemented by functional and engaging content strategies.

A website which puts the customer at the heart of all content and functionality decisions will ultimately return dividends by improving cross device accessibility and increasing brand share of market.

STRATEGY CHECKLIST

An SEO strategy should consider the following recommendations:

✔	
	Adhere to Google's quality guidelines which include: • Quality of links • Quality of content • Quality of engagement
	Produce a structured approach to keyword selection including: • Core, short tail generic phrases • Long tail generic phrases • Brand and product related phrases • Mobile relevant keyword phrases
	Implementation of technical SEO best practice including: • Relevancy i.e., matching on-site content to what users are searching for • Hierarchy i.e. channelling authority to the most relevant places • Indexation i.e. allowing easy indexation
	Development of a landing page strategies including: • Desktop landing pages • Mobile landing pages
	Development of SEO led content creation and communication framework comprising of the following key elements: • Content alignment with business and marketing goals • Content ideation, creation and scheduling • Content Communication and distribution of content

DISCLAIMER

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FIND OUT MORE

To learn more about Stickyeyes' approach to content marketing, our unique tools and the impact that content marketing has on SEO, please get in touch at www.stickyeyes.com/contact

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