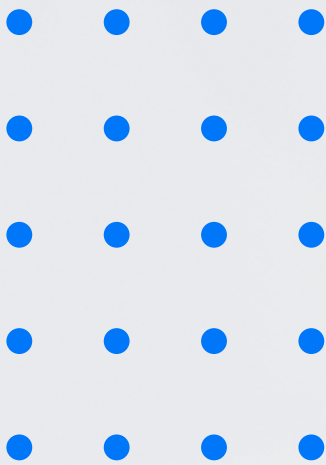


KEYWORD RESEARCH 101



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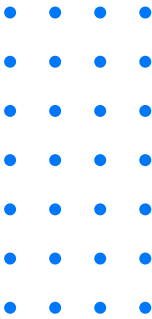
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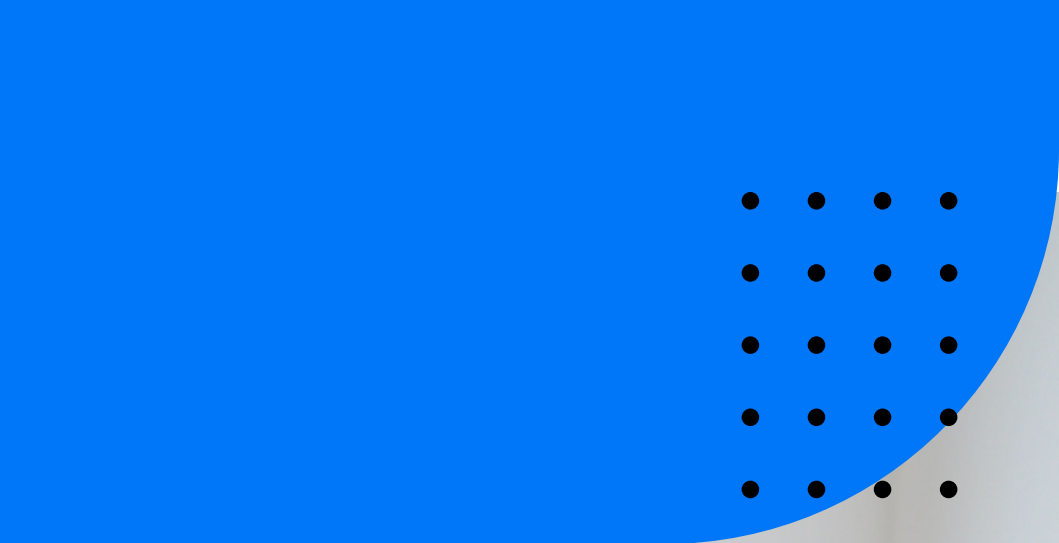
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Keyword research is an integral part of your SEO strategy. Before creating content for your site, you should know what search terms your audience uses to find your content. Their search terms are the keywords you want to use to drive more traffic to your site.

When you have the right keywords in place, you can write high-quality, value-packed, practical, and findable content.



What Is Keyword Research?

Keyword research is the cornerstone of SEO (search engine optimization). It's the process of identifying search terms that people enter into a search engine to find the information they are interested in.

By including keywords in your content, you can increase your rankings on search engines, which will make your content seem more valuable, and make it more likely the user will click on *your* content as opposed to someone else's.

Keyword research uncovers search queries to target, the popularity of the queries, etc. **All to ensure that your web pages, blog posts, and other content, deliver the results that you are looking for.**

Understanding keyword research, including how it has evolved, is the best way to improve both your content creation and promotion. It's the best way to

make your brand known to the people who would be most likely to purchase from you.

Keywords:

- Are the words and phrases that define what people are searching for
- Describe the topics you write about

In a perfect world, these two categories line up and bring your content and audience together so they can find your brand, your content, and your products.

Why It Matters

Keyword research is important because it matches up the search terms your audience uses with the words you include in your content so that it can be found by your audience.

If you use words to describe your products but your audience doesn't use those words to search for products, they aren't going to find you and you're going to face a steep uphill battle to get traffic to your site.

Understandably, it doesn't make sense to optimize your content with words that your audience doesn't use in their search. This is where thorough keyword research comes in.

It ensures that you're using the same words as your target audience, which makes the effort of optimizing your content worthwhile. Additionally, you can look at search intent to find out exactly what your potential customers are looking for. This will help you to create content that your audience finds very valuable.

People use keywords to find solutions to their problems when they are conducting research online. **If you're successful with your keywords, your content has a better chance of getting in front of**

the people who are looking for the information, which will mean more traffic for you.

It's important to note that your content should not be centered around what you want to tell people. Rather, your content should center around what people are trying to discover. You're bringing your audience to you.

Among the many benefits of conducting keyword research are:

- **Marketing trend insights:** Effective keyword research will provide you with insights into what the current marketing trends are within your industry and point you to relevant topics and keywords that your audience is searching for.
- **Traffic growth:** When you've identified the best keywords for the content you're publishing, you'll rank higher in search engine results and more traffic will be attracted to your content.

- **Acquire more customers:** If you have the content that your potential customers are looking for, you can meet their needs and provide a call to action which will lead them through your sales funnel.

However, keywords alone are not enough to drive substantial traffic any more. This is in large part due to the fact that search engines have evolved beyond algorithms that are looking for an exact word match.

Is Keyword Research Still Relevant?

It's no secret that keyword research has changed immensely in the last 10-15 years. If you're willing to evolve with these changes, keyword research is still incredibly useful and relevant.

In the past, the goal was to stuff the keywords into your content and use terms people were searching for in the hopes of pushing your pages

to the top of the search results. Quality often took a backseat to keyword density, which made the content clunky and hard to read. Readers got nothing of value from this content and it didn't get the results that were intended.

This kind of approach to keyword research no longer works. In fact, it's often penalized by search engines and will drop your rankings to the basement. Search engines like Google are constantly tweaking their algorithms to deliver results that are most relevant to what the people are trying to find.

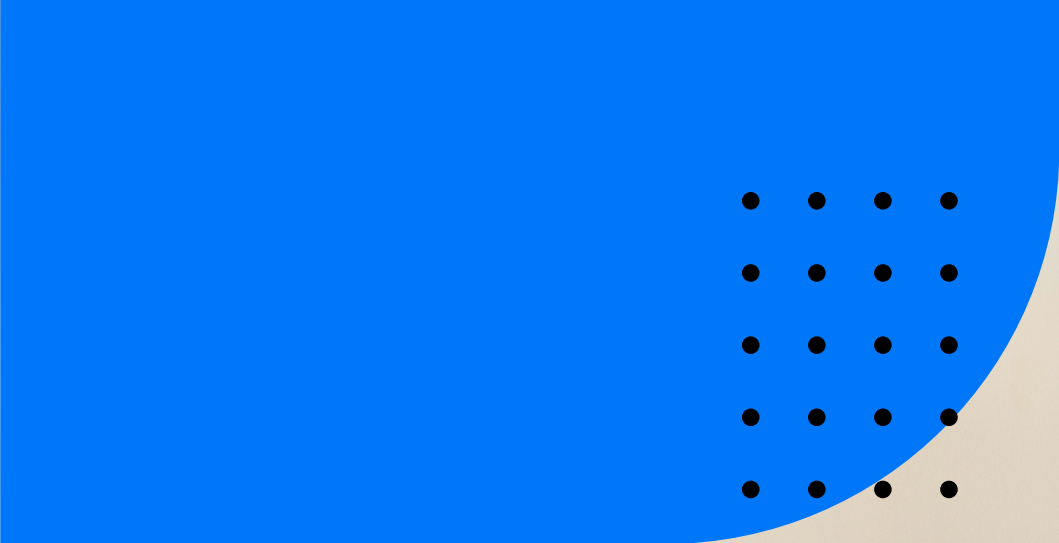
Search algorithms used today include:

- More and more people are using their voices to search rather than typing in keywords. **Natural language** changes keywords fundamentally because it changes the format of the request.
- Search engines try to bring you the most relevant content to your request and

oftentimes will answer your query in an **answer box**. This is usually based on well-optimized, relevant content.

- **Semantics.** Optimizing content for a single phrase is no longer enough. You also have to include related phrases that mean basically the same things.

As algorithms continue to evolve, your keyword research will need to be more and more honed to be useful.



Essential Concepts of Keyword Research

Before we jump right into doing keyword research, let's explore some essential concepts. This will be helpful later when we start learning how to actually do keyword research.

Understanding Keyword Types

There are three main types of keywords used:

- **Head or short-tail keywords:** Usually just 1-2 words with a high search volume.
- **Body, modifier, or medium-tail keywords:** These are 2-3 word phrases with moderate search volume.
- **Long-tail keywords:** Four or more words strung together with low search volume. They are the bulk of web traffic.

It's important to note that the shorter keywords are going to be more general, and therefore more competitive. The longer your keyword is, the more specific it is and the fewer results there will be when people are searching for it. Longer keywords are less competitive and higher converting.

Your focus keyword or key phrase is a word or phrase you want search engines to find on a certain page of your website. Determining your focus keyphrases is done through keyword research.

While long-tail keywords are more specific and less commonly searched for they are still really important because they focus the searcher on your niche. This not only helps you to find highly qualified leads but also allows you to rank better because there is less competition.

Even though fewer people are searching for your long-tail keywords, they will likely be more motivated to subscribe, buy, or do whatever your call to action asks them to do.

Keywords vs. Topics

SEO has evolved a tremendous amount over the past 10-15 years and some believe that keywords have become relatively unimportant in your ability to rank well for the searches people are making.

This is somewhat true and while the actual keyword itself isn't necessarily the criteria that make your content rank, the intent behind the keyword and whether the content is most relevant for the search does.

This doesn't mean that keyword research is outdated. Keyword research still tells you what topics people care about and how popular those topics are within your audience.

By researching keywords that are getting a large volume of searches, you can identify the topics that you want to create your content around.

Then, you can utilize these topics to choose the keywords you're going to target.

Latent Semantic Indexing

Latent semantic indexing (LSI) is basically search engines using word association to decide what content searchers will find most relevant.

Since LSI helps search engines give people the most relevant results, part of a good keyword strategy is finding LSI keywords you can utilize in your content.

A great example of this is when you start to fill in the search box on Google and it starts coming up with suggestions to autocomplete your request.

As you add more words, the list changes to provide context. You can also check out the related search terms that appear at the bottom of your results page.

Understanding Keyword Intent

To make the most of your keyword research for content creation, SEO, or marketing in general, you have to understand what the intent of the searcher is. When you understand search intent, you can pinpoint and deliver exactly what your target audience is searching for.

There are four different ways to describe keyword intent:

- **Navigational:** Users searching for a particular website
- **Informational:** Users searching for the answer to a question
- **Investigational:** Users searching for information that may lead to a conversion
- **Transactional:** Users ready to buy

Let's walk through a typical search process to help illustrate what each of these terms really means. For example, let's say you are experiencing some

intestinal distress and you're looking for solutions. You might type in your symptoms and see what comes up. This is an informational search.

While you're looking at symptoms and possible treatments, you might find a couple of brands that you find interesting. So, you type their name into a search box to find their site. This is a navigational search.

As you start investigating comparisons, reviews, and researching the brand, this is investigational, but with an informational element.

Transactional keywords usually include words like buy, purchase, etc. with a description of what you're looking for.

Knowing what the intent of the search is will help you to determine the keywords that will help you to rank the best.

Key Elements of Keyword Research

When you're conducting keyword research, there are three main elements you should pay attention to.

Relevance: The concept of search intent comes in because search engines rank your content based on relevance. This means that your content will only rank for a particular keyword if it meets the needs of the searcher.

Additionally, your content needs to be the best resource available that matches the query. Google won't rank your content highly if it provides less value than other content that exists.

Authority: If Google deems your content as authoritative, it will rank it higher. In other words, do what you can to become an authoritative site with high-quality, helpful, and informative content and then promote that content with backlinks and other social signals.

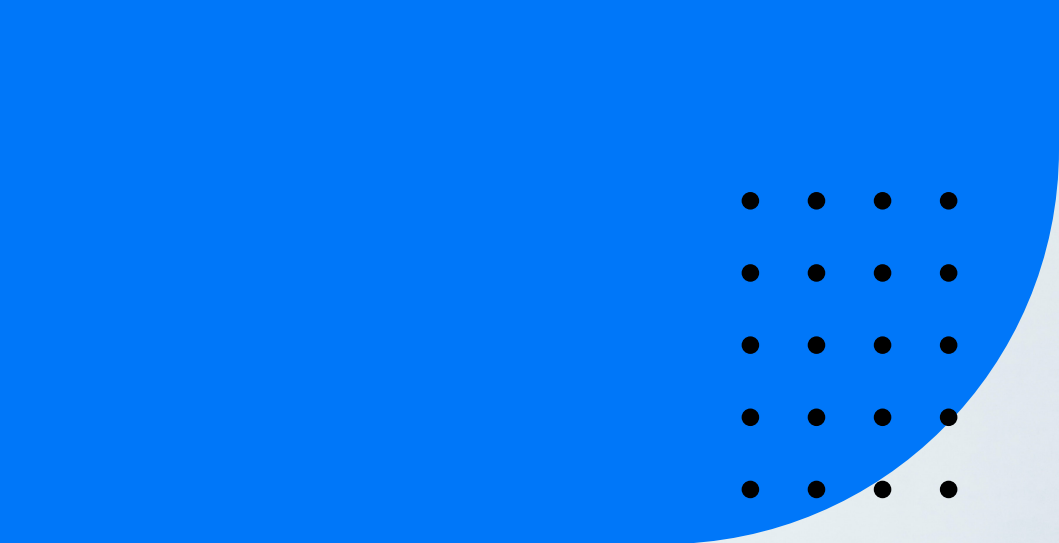
If you're not seen as an authority within your industry or if you're competing for keywords whose

SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) have heavy hitter sources, you'll have a lower chance of ranking unless your content is top-notch.

Volume: You may rank on the first page for a specific keyword but that doesn't guarantee it will result in increased traffic. No matter how good the content is, if no one searches for it, you won't get any results.

You can check the volume of a particular keyword by looking at its MSV (monthly search volume), which is the number of times the keyword is searched per month across all audiences.

Your keyword strategy is all about the decisions you make based on your keyword research. You'll decide which content you're going to create, which keywords you'll focus on, and where you will publish it. Search intent is key. Discover what your audience is really wanting or needing. You're not just looking for keywords but rather the underlying goals of what the searcher is trying to find out, do, or buy.



Getting Started With Keyword Research

So, how do you get started with keyword research?

The very first thing, before anything else, is to know your target audience. Until you know exactly who the people are that are looking for your content, you won't know how to target them with your marketing.

Once you've got a really good handle on your target market, you can begin to start your keyword research and develop your SEO strategy.

Determine Your SEO Goals

Before you get started, it's a good idea to outline your goals for your SEO strategy. **You can get started by reflecting on the answers to questions like:**

- What is the main goal of my business?
- What separates my business from the competition?
- Who is my target audience?
- What values are important to my business?
- What promises do I make to my customers?

Once you've developed a mission statement and know what goals you are hoping to accomplish with your marketing strategy, you have taken a huge first step in developing your keyword strategy.

Take note of the market you're in as that will determine, for a large part, whether you'll be able to rank high for the keywords you choose. Some markets are very competitive and contain very large companies that dominate the top results. Some companies have huge budgets at their disposal for keyword research and SEO. **Ranking well against them is tough but not impossible.**

What are you hoping to accomplish with your keyword research and SEO? There are many answers to this question.

- Brand recognition
- Conversions
- Industry authority
- Thought leadership
- Increased traffic
- Grow an audience

Knowing what you hope to accomplish with your SEO strategy and keyword research will make finding the right ones a lot easier.

Making a List of Keywords

For this part of the keyword research process, you're going to try to get into the minds of your target market and brainstorm. While keeping your mission and goals in mind, **try asking yourself these questions:**

- What are they looking for?
- What search terms will they use to look for your product or service?
- What problems does your product solve?

Keep writing down answers until you're completely tapped out. If you have a good handle on your niche, you should be able to come up with quite a few keywords that your customers might use at each stage of your sales funnel.

You can also come up with seed keywords, which often serve as a kind of jumping-off point for your keyword research. You can use them to build a list of keyword ideas, long-tail keywords, and keyword phrases that will attract traffic to your content.

You can also start adding in related terms for semantics and build your list from there. Another great place to find keywords are in blog comments, social media hashtags, etc. Anywhere people are asking about products like yours is a good place to gather keywords for your list.

One simple strategy is to make a list of relevant topics based on what you already know about your business and your audience. These are general topics that you'd like to rank for and put each of them in a virtual bucket. Try for about 5-10 topic buckets.

Once you have a few topic buckets to focus on, you can start filling them up with keywords related to the buckets. These are the keywords and phrases you think are important to rank for in SERPs and that your target customer is probably searching for.

The point of this exercise is not to come up with your final list of keywords but rather just brain dump the phrases your target customers might use to search for content related to the topic of the bucket.

Another way to come up with keyword ideas is to figure out what keywords you're already getting found for.

Research the Keywords You've Come Up With

Once you've created your list, you can start diving a bit deeper into your keywords. There are some really great tools available to make keyword research go a bit easier for you.

The first tool is Google. **Yep, that's right, just Google the keywords you've come up with and check the searches that Google suggests while you are typing.** Those suggestions are actual questions people asked Google. You can also check the “related searches” on the results page.

This is a simple way to find all kinds of variations on your keywords as well as variations of your keywords.

Next, you're going to find some long-tail variants of your keywords. If you're just getting started with keywords, your tendency might be to focus on the more popular *head* terms. Unfortunately, these short-tail keywords are competitive and usually owned by the larger businesses in your industry.

Long-tail keywords, on the other hand, often have less competition. They'll also have a higher conversion rate because they're more specific.

Using Google, again, will help you to find more long-tail keywords. You might be able to find some less searched variants, which could also be useful.

How Intent Affects Keyword Research

You learned a little about how intent affects keyword research previously but it's worth repeating because it is probably one of the most pivotal factors in your ability to rank well on search engines. **The way Google sees it, it's more important that your content addresses the problem a searcher intended to solve rather than just inserting the words the searcher used.**

What does this mean to the keyword research you do?

Unfortunately, keywords can have different meanings beneath the surface. The intent is so important to your rankings that you'll have to be cognizant of how the keywords you target could be interpreted.

Here's a great example: You're researching the keyword "how to start a blog" for an article you plan on creating. "Blog" can mean a couple of

different things. It can mean a blog post or an actual blog website.

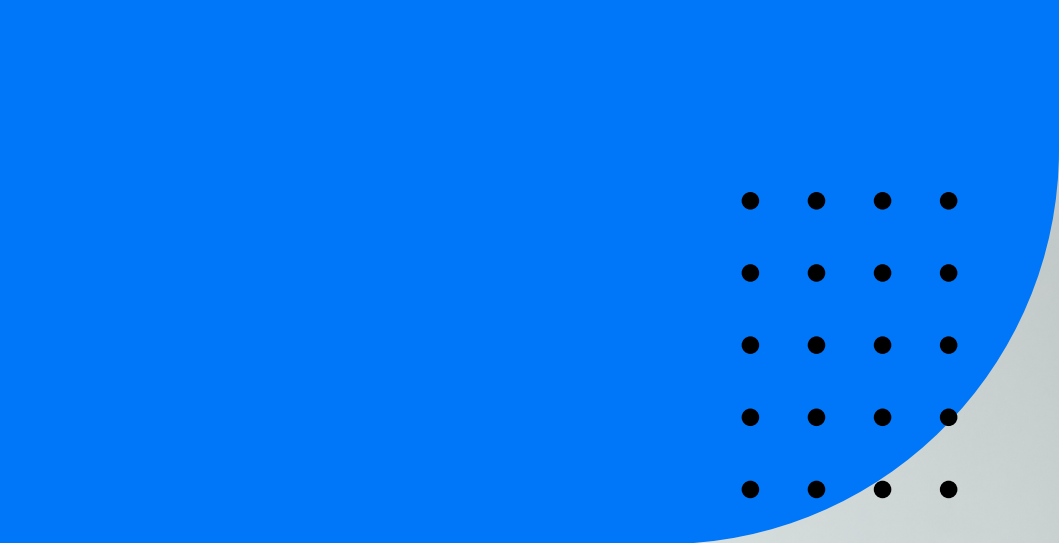
The searcher's intent about that keyword will determine the direction your article takes. Knowing whether the searcher wants to learn how to write a blog post or they want to actually launch a blog website is the type of intent you'll need to be sure of before you commit to it.

You can easily verify the intent of a keyword by simply entering it into a search engine yourself to see what types of content come up. This way, you'll be sure you're getting the traffic you intended to.

Keyword Research Tools

There are a lot of great tools out there to help you come up with more keyword ideas and to help you easily find information like search volume, ranking difficulty, keyword value, competition, etc. Here are some favorites to get you started:

- [Ahrefs](#) offers keyword research, content, and SEO tools.
- [Google Adwords Keyword Planner](#) is a great tool that allows you to evaluate monthly global and local search volumes for keywords, competition levels, and estimate cost per click.
- [SEMrush](#) provides keyword data and helps you find keywords related to your search terms. This is a paid tool but also has a free option.



Using Your Keywords

Once you have a great list of keywords, you'll need to decide which ones you want to rank for and where you're going to use them. Let's dive into how to find and choose keywords for your website.

Use Google Keyword Planner to Whittle Down Your List

[Google's Keyword Planner](#) allows you to search the volume and traffic estimates for the keywords you're thinking about using. Once you have this information, you can use [Google Trends](#) to refine your choices.

Using the keyword planner, you can flag any keywords from your list that have too little or too much search volume. Before you delete them from your list, look at their trend history and projections on Google Trends. **Some low-volume terms might**

be worth investing in now for the benefits you reap later on.

Sometimes, your list is just so huge that you have to narrow it down. Google Trends can help you determine which keywords are trending up so you can choose them over others.

Prioritize Your Best Chances

Based on your website's authority, you can prioritize the keywords that you have a chance of ranking for on Google.

Big companies with well-established brands typically go after the high search volume keywords and Google rewards them with top-ranking authority on many topics. **You can consider prioritizing keywords that have little competition.**

Some keywords don't already have multiple websites battling for the highest rank and so you

can win the spot because no one else is trying to claim it.

Research the Monthly Search Volume for the Keywords You Choose

You want to create content centered around what people are searching for and checking the MSV can help you to do that.

MSV is the number of times a query or keyword is entered into a search engine during the month. Tools like [Google Trends](#) can help you discover the most searched keywords and related keyword clusters.

Consider SERP Features

When you're choosing your keywords, you also want to pay attention to SERP features. You can do this by looking up the keyword you're considering to see what the first results look like.

Here's a quick overview of what types of SERP features there are:

- **Image packs:** These are search results displayed in a horizontal row of images. If there's an image pack for your chosen keyword, you should write an image-heavy post to rank over it.
- **Paragraph snippets:** Featured or paragraph snippets are short snippets of text that appear at the top of the search results to give the searcher a quick answer to a common search query. Having a good understanding of the searcher's intent and giving a concise answer can help you to rank better.
- **List snippets:** These snippets are designed for posts that outline the steps to do something from start to finish. You'll often find them when making a "how-to" search. Creating content with direct, clear instructions can assist in winning a ranking here.

- **Video snippets:** These are short videos that search engines display at the top spot in a query instead of text-based snippets. Posting a video on YouTube and your website helps you get this ranking if you tag the target keywords people are looking for.

Make Sure Each Bucket Has a Mix of Short and Long-Tail Keywords

Short-tail or head terms are the keyword phrases that are shorter and more generic. Usually, they are 1-3 words in length. Long-tail keywords are longer and more specific; three or more words.

You'll want to aim for having a mixture of both types of keywords because that will balance your keyword strategy to meet your long-term goals while still giving you some short-term wins.

Head terms are searched for more frequently which generally makes them much more competitive and

harder to rank for but they will give you the most search volume.

But, your long-tail keywords may be more desirable. As discussed earlier, someone who is searching for something more specific is likely a more qualified lead rather than someone looking for something more generic.

These searchers will be much more likely to subscribe to your emails, purchase your products, and become loyal fans of your brand.

The bottom line is that you need to check your keyword lists to make sure you have a good mix of short and long-tail keywords so you get some quick wins but also qualified leads.

Observe How Your Competition Is Ranking

Just because a keyword is important to your competition's rankings doesn't mean you have to

also use it. But, knowing what keywords your competition is trying to rank for is a great way to reevaluate your list of keywords.

If there are keywords on your list that your competition is also trying to rank for, it makes sense to try and improve your ranking for those words. Just don't forget the keywords that your competition seems to be ignoring. This is a great way for you to own some market share on important terms also.

Best Keywords for SEO

Keep in mind that there are no “best” keywords.

There are just keywords that are more highly searched by your target audience. It's up to you to create a strategy that will beneficially rank your pages and drive more traffic to your site.

The best keywords for your strategy will be based on relevance, volume, and authority. Your goal is to

find highly searched keywords that you can realistically compete for based on:

- The level of competition for the keywords.
- Your ability to create content that is better than what's currently ranking.

Once you have your list of keywords for your business, be sure to reevaluate it every once in a while. As you gain authority on SERPs, you'll be able to add more keywords to maintain your current rankings as well as move up.

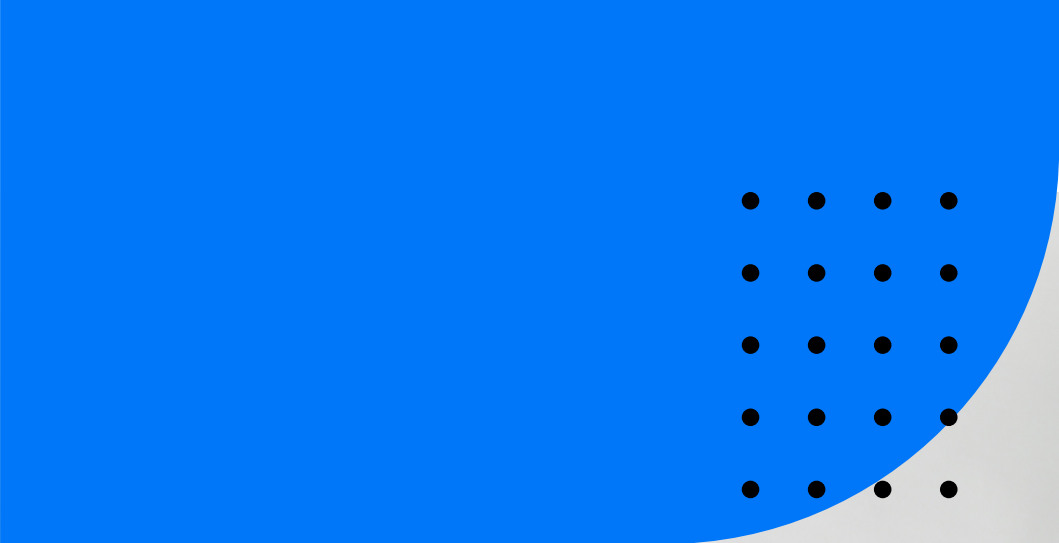
Where to Use Keywords in Your Content

Once you've finalized your list of keywords, you can start placing them into your content. Actually optimizing your content for SEO is a little more complicated but to get started, **you can start using keywords in these key areas:**

- **Page title:** This refers to both the actual title and the SEO title and they might be slightly different. The title is where Google begins its quest to determine relevance. It's the clickable link that you'll find in the search results.
- **Meta description:** If you aren't using an SEO tool, your meta description will automatically default to the first 160 characters of your content. That makes it a great place to use keywords. The meta description is the description that sits below the clickable link and is what helps searchers decide if the content is what they're looking for.

You'll also use keywords and related terms throughout each piece of content. Just be careful to avoid stuffing keywords - Google will know and penalize you for it in rankings. Make your content readable and understandable for humans.

It's better to have quality, useful content than to include every keyword. When you're done, review your content to see if you can include any additional keywords or semantic keywords without compromising the intent of the content.



Top 5 Tips for Better Keyword Research

Now that you're on your way to conducting quality keyword research, here are some tips for doing the best keyword research you can possibly do.

Tip #1: Decide Your Scope Before You Start

It can be easy to get started doing keyword research and start going off-topic when you don't know what you're really looking for. Spending hours mindlessly making notes of every term that seems remotely relevant to your website is not an efficient strategy.

What's the purpose of your research? Are you looking for content gaps in your market that you can capitalize on or are you looking for some keywords to use on a new page?

When you determine your scope ahead of time, you will better understand what keywords will work best for you and when you have enough to move forward.

Tip #2: Monthly Search Volume Is Important but Intent Is Key

When you're making decisions about which keywords you want to target on your website, the first metric you'll naturally gravitate to is how many people are searching for it, or the volume.

However, the MSV means very little if you have no real chance of getting onto pages 1-2 of the rankings or if your content doesn't give the user what they're searching for.

Enter intent: Understanding what users are really looking for when they type in a keyword. A good rule is to check Google to find out what is actually ranking for a particular keyword before you decide on your target.

That's how you'll discover what Google is currently considering to be the best content to serve users who are searching for that keyword. It will also show you what you're competing with.

If you're planning content that doesn't answer the search parameters in a similar or better way than the other sites that are ranking, you should probably pick a different keyword.

Tip #3: Use Google Search

If you know the right places to look, there are a ton of golden information sources regarding keywords that users are searching for that you can find quickly and easily on a Google SERP.

Type in your keyword but before you hit enter, take a look at what Google is suggesting as relevant variants. It's a great place to start looking for quality long-tail keywords.

Once you do hit enter and see the results, take a look at the box that says “people also ask”. Google is literally telling you what keywords people are actually searching for on this topic.

Tip #4: Target Variations, Queries and Questions

Once you find the keywords or queries that you want to use in your content, there are still opportunities to get your content to rank higher. Variations of that keyword can be used on the same page. **When you target synonyms and semantically related keywords, you can help to expand your keywords and improve your rankings.**

Even when you find a top keyword with a really high search volume, you can usually find a relevant long-tail version that will be the perfect fit for your content.

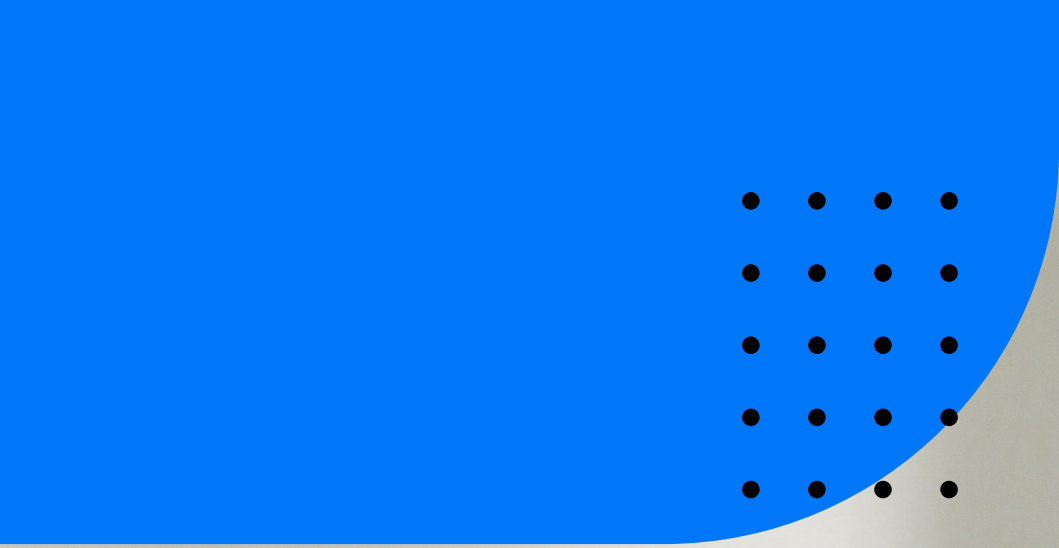
Query and question keywords are another way to expand your keywords and boost your rankings.

Since many people are using the voice assistant on their mobile devices they might ask full questions to find what they're looking for. Including the answers to specific questions in your content can help boost your content's performance.

Tip #5: Use the Tools Available to You

Don't be afraid to learn how to use the tools available for keyword research. Especially the ones from Google because they are free which makes them a great place to get started.

Keyword research can be overwhelming when you're first getting started, don't be afraid to utilize tools and tutorials for tips and tricks to make it easier.



Final Thoughts on Keyword Research

Hopefully, this guide has given you some great jumping-off points for starting your own keyword research. In time, you'll develop your own tricks and methods and find your favorite tools and strategies for tackling keyword research. It's an ongoing process and will be constantly evolving.

Keyword research is a continual process of gathering insights to help you have the best strategy you can for SEO and marketing purposes.