



risdall

Guide to an Effective SEO Strategy



90% of searchers haven't made their mind up about a brand before starting their search.

(Status Labs, 2018)

Every year more than two trillion search queries are made on Google.

A strong SEO strategy can be a difference maker for generating more leads and getting found by customers. This represents thousands of “low-hanging-fruit” opportunities to align your company, product, or service with those who are searching and ready to buy. Brands who don't have one are leaving easy money on the table.

In this e-book, we will explore what makes a good SEO strategy and the steps needed to develop one.

● What is SEO Strategy?



Put simply, search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of making your site and content easier to find by search engines. However, in an ever-changing landscape of best practices, tools, marketing services and Google algorithm updates, it can quickly become overwhelming for marketers to choose where to begin SEO and what areas to focus on for the best ROI.

Before embarking on any SEO tactics, having a sound strategy can help define a path and expected outcomes. A comprehensive SEO strategy will include these items:

SEO Strategy & Planning

- Audience definition
- Website, rankings, and Google tools audit
- Goals and objectives

After the strategy and planning portion of a program, you naturally dive into tactical execution.

SEO Execution

- Technical SEO
- Offsite SEO
- Local SEO (if applicable)

What isn't SEO Strategy?

There are many other disciplines that are sometimes lumped in with SEO. Digital marketing is a large umbrella, and while SEO definitely falls under that, it is easy to confuse related subjects.

Here are things that fall under digital marketing that are not SEO:

- Conversion rate optimization
- Social media strategy
- PPC advertising
- Marketing automation



**A successful SEO
strategy starts with
the fundamentals.**

SEO Audience Definition

Who is coming to your website? More importantly, who do you want to come to your website? Answering these questions is **fundamental** to driving the right kind of traffic to your website. You need a clear understanding of who your prospect is and what their search intent and context are.

We like to call SEO “intent-based search optimization,” or IBSO. What IBSO is really about is defining what the prospect is searching for at each stage of their journey, and which asset on what channel will satisfy that search.



Intent

What is the prospect searching for?



Channel

Where should the asset live?



Context

Why are they searching for it?



Optimization

How will the prospect find the asset?



Asset

What asset will satisfy their search?



Ascension

What is the next step in the customer journey?

To really have a sound platform to work off, you ideally would have well-defined customer personas and a customer journey map.



Reveals why some buyers make your solution category a strategic priority while others choose the status quo.



Reveals what buyers expect to change after implementing your solution, and why.



Reveals why some buyers wouldn't perceive your company or solution as their best option.

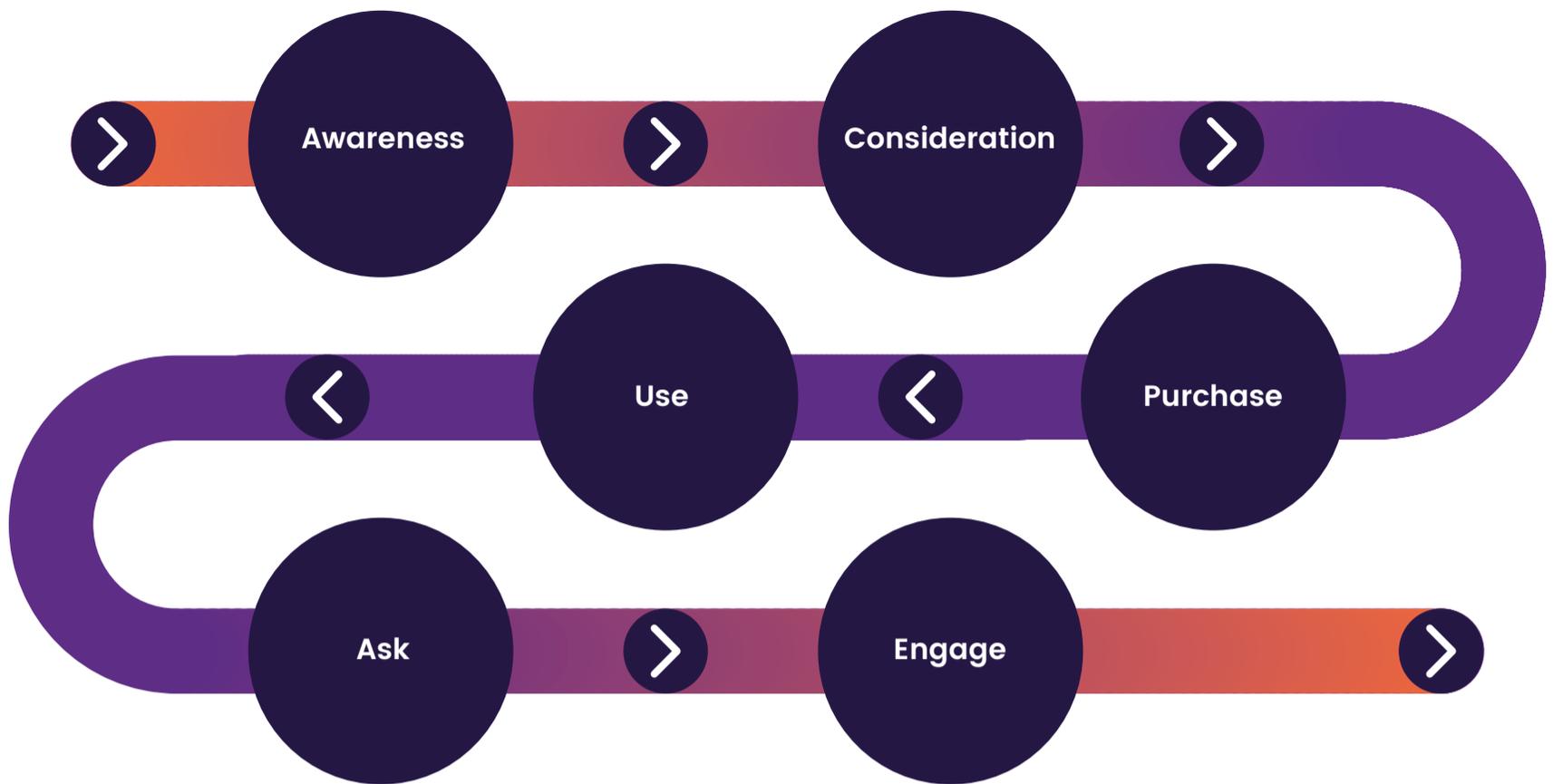


Reveals which buyers are involved in the decision and what resources they trust to guide their decisions.



Reveals what criteria buyers use to evaluate solution options and make a purchasing decision, and why.

Customer personas



Customer journey map

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Understanding Your Current State

Website, rankings, and tools audit

Part of a sensible SEO strategy will be a firm understanding of your current state of affairs. This includes working on a few technical website audits to clarify where your shortcomings are and where you currently rank.

Why is this important? Well, you might uncover some technical roadblocks on your website that may take time and money to resolve. It's better to find out if there are issues up front rather than waiting until executing your plan.

SEO Website Audit

Thankfully, the audit process has been greatly improved by the use of SEO tools and services. Basically, a tool can crawl your site and look for known technical issues and report back. Most tools will report some sort of grade and give you a prioritized list of issues to fix.

Some great tools we use for website audits are:

- BrightEdge
- SEMRush
- Ahrefs
- Moz
- Serpstat
- Screaming Frog
- Sitebulb
- BuiltWith
- GTmetrix
- Google Lighthouse
- Varvy

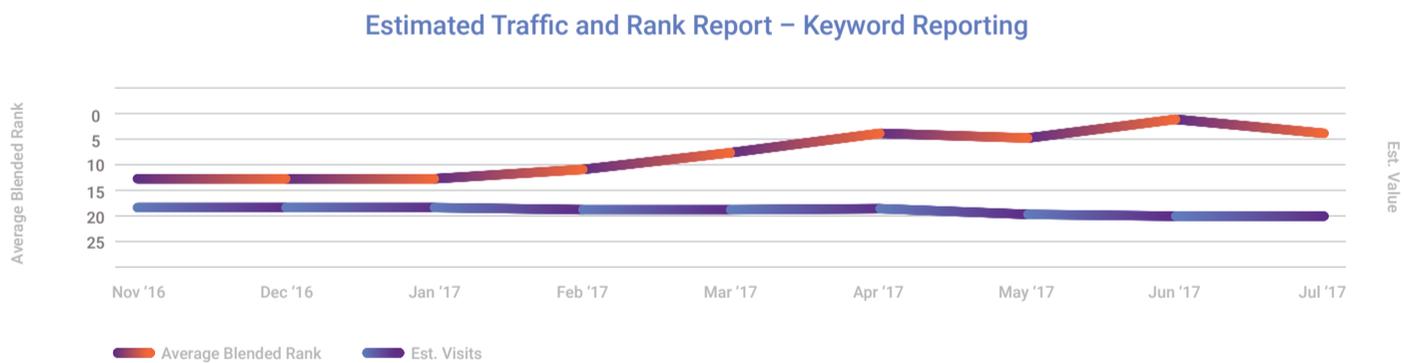
The more premium tools also offer keyword research tools and competitor insights.

Keyword rankings and search results

Ask yourself these three questions:



To determine your current keywords, some of the above-mentioned tools can analyze your current visibility.



Another key observation is the number of pages you are currently ranking for. This is easily accomplished by turning the search engine on your site. Type this into the search bar site: yoursite.com.

This will give you an idea of how many of your pages are in Google's index. Does the number seem high, low or just about right?

Google Tools Audit

Ensuring that your suite of Google tools are properly configured is the most crucial step in an SEO strategy. You must ensure that Google Analytics is properly configured, the website has been submitted to Google and that you are taking advantage of tag management.



Remember

Google's tools are very powerful, but out of the box they are a one-size-fits-all configuration. Like any tool, they need to be set up by experts and tailored to your website, audience and traffic.

Google Analytics configuration questions:

- Are you filtering out your own traffic?
- Are you filtering out your vendors' traffic?
- Are you filtering spam/bot traffic?
- Are you excluding self-referrals?
- Are you excluding spam referrals?
- Are your audiences segmented?
- Are goal conversions set up?
- Is site search enabled?
- Is your Google Ads account linked?
- Is Google Search Console linked?
- Are content groups enabled and correct?
- Is tracking code implemented properly?

Google Search Console:

- Are https and www/ non-www versions set up?
- Is the sitemap submitted?
- Is Robots.txt file submitted?
- Is the website verified?
- Are there any crawl errors?
- Are resources blocked?
- Are there security or malware issues?
- Are there 404 errors?

Google Tag Manager (GTM):

- Is GTM installed?
- What tags are implemented, and are they firing correctly?
- What events are being tracked?
- Is data being pushed to the data layer correctly?
- Is Google Analytics implemented through GTM?

Setting Goals and Key Performance Indicators

As with any marketing or business strategy, having some defined goals and objectives can help keep you focused and on the right path along your optimization journey.

You will often be presented with choices. When presented with a choice, always choose the one that helps inch you toward a goal.

Website Goals

What is the purpose of the website?

This is a question we usually ask when assessing websites for the first time. This should be obvious. There should be clear calls to action and well-defined content paths (landing page > blog > resource > conversion, etc., etc.).

Conversion Goals

The overall goal of any website should be to drive business. Typically that process is several steps (see customer journey map) or micro-conversions.

For e-commerce retailers, the transaction is the ultimate goal. For other websites (B2B, informational, content publishers, SAAS, etc.), the goals would likely be driving the prospect down the funnel.

Here are some general conversions you likely would track:

Top-funnel conversions

- Content consumption
- Asset downloads (infographics)
- Subscribe to content (newsletter, podcast, video series)

Mid-funnel conversions

- Resource downloads (whitepaper, ebooks, case study, checklist, etc.)
- Quizzes and surveys
- Webinars
- Events
- Catalog
- Tripwire offer

Bottom-funnel conversions

- Product demo or free trial
- Pricing or spec sheets
- Product detail pages
- Contact (speak to a rep, find a distributor, quote request)

SEO KPIs

Your SEO program goals will always start off being more general. Do not arbitrarily set performance goals like “increase organic traffic by 1,000 views per month.”

For one thing, you need time to establish a solid baseline. That means that your Google Analytics have to be configured correctly and collecting data for a reasonable amount of time.

Good SEO goals to start with are:

- Increase overall non-branded keyword rankings
- Increase ranking around a topic (multiple keywords)
- Remove roadblocks for search engines
- Decrease website errors (ex: 404)
- Maximize website performance

Once your site has been optimized, everything is configured correctly, and your content is in alignment with your keywords, you can start being more specific with your SEO goals. Once established, here are some other metrics that you can start to work on:

- Click-through rate (CTR)
- Session duration
- Bounce and exit rate
- Organic impressions
- Organic conversions
- Referral traffic

There are more goals and SEO KPIs that can be layered in, as well as some that may be event-based or seasonal.

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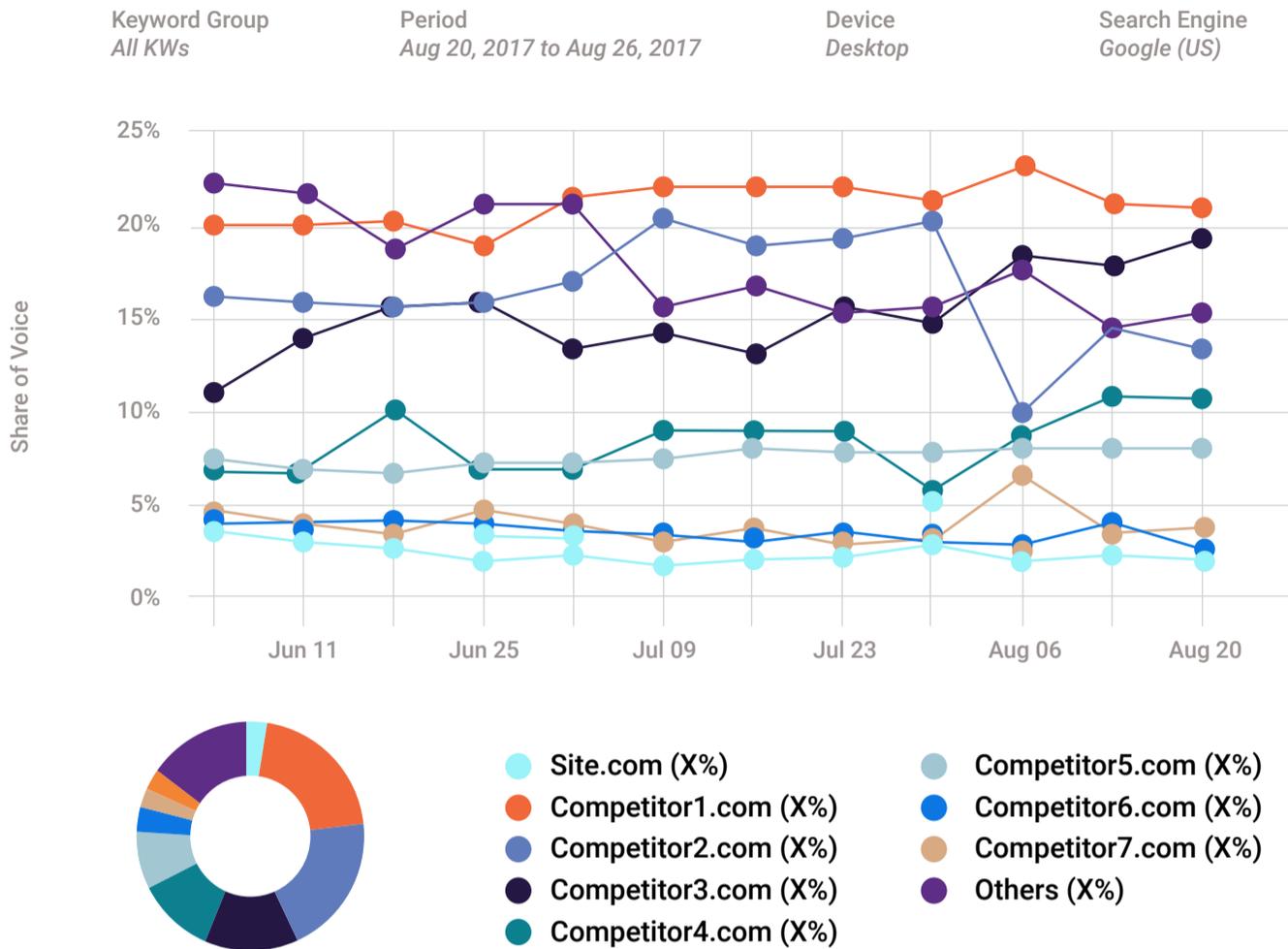
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Understanding the Competitive Landscape

One of the great benefits of SEO is potentially acquiring your competitors’ audience. Any time you can weaken your competitors’ position or gain a foothold before them is advantageous. It is easier to hold and defend a position than it is to leapfrog another search listing.

Having an eye on competitors also allows you to benchmark your SEO performance, plan content effectively and discover new challengers in the marketplace.

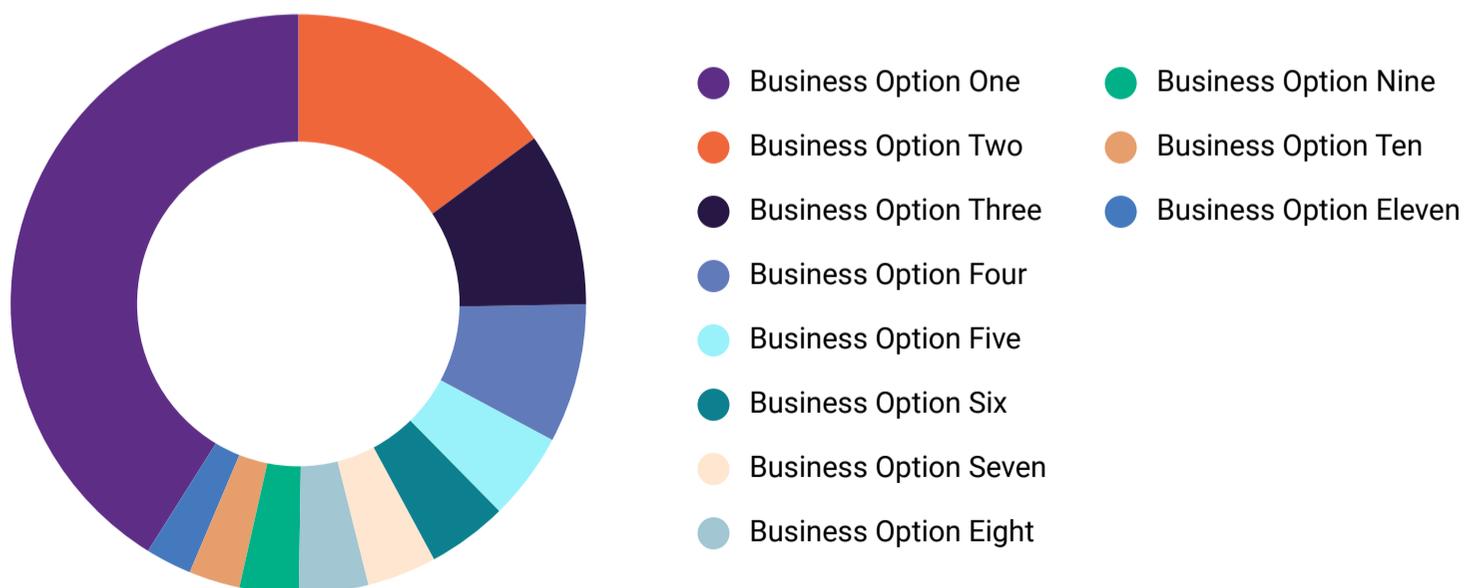
Share of Voice Report for “All KWs”



You also must consider “share of voice” competitors. Share of voice competitors are properties that are competing for the same terms, but may not be direct competitors.

For example, if you are an automotive tire company and are optimizing for the term “performance tires,” you are not just competing against other tire manufacturers in Google search results. You also face search competition from tire retailers, automotive content sites and Wikipedia.

What is my Share of Voice vs. Organic Competitors?



The Keyword Universe

The universe from which we draw our target terms can be very large. Choosing the appropriate terms comes down to four key considerations:

- How the key term aligns with your business' offerings
- How the key term aligns with the searcher's intent and context
- The potential volume of search traffic
- The level of ranking difficulty

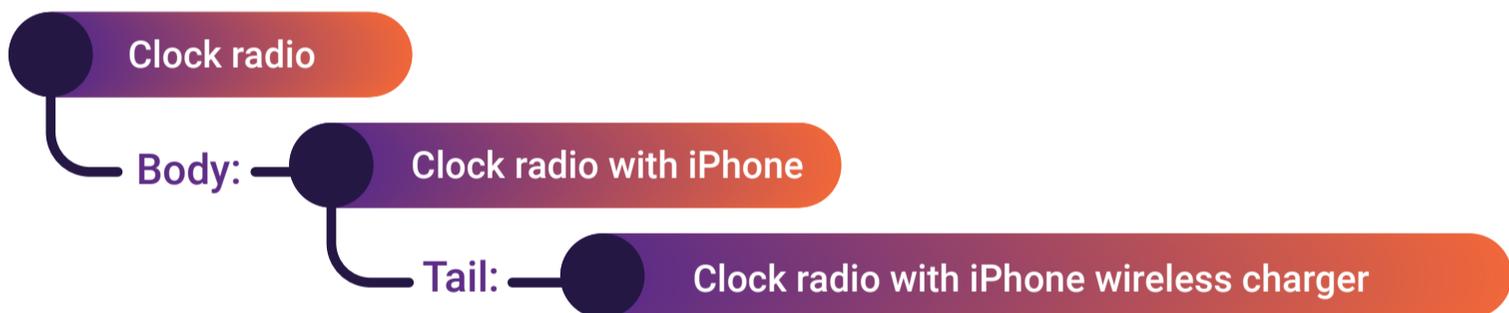
It is very important that you choose the wording most aligned with your customers' language and not your own.

The way you should work your keyword strategy is to start by choosing a "head term." Head terms are high-volume, one- or two-word keywords. They are the most difficult to rank for and the traffic that results from these tends to be fairly general in audience.

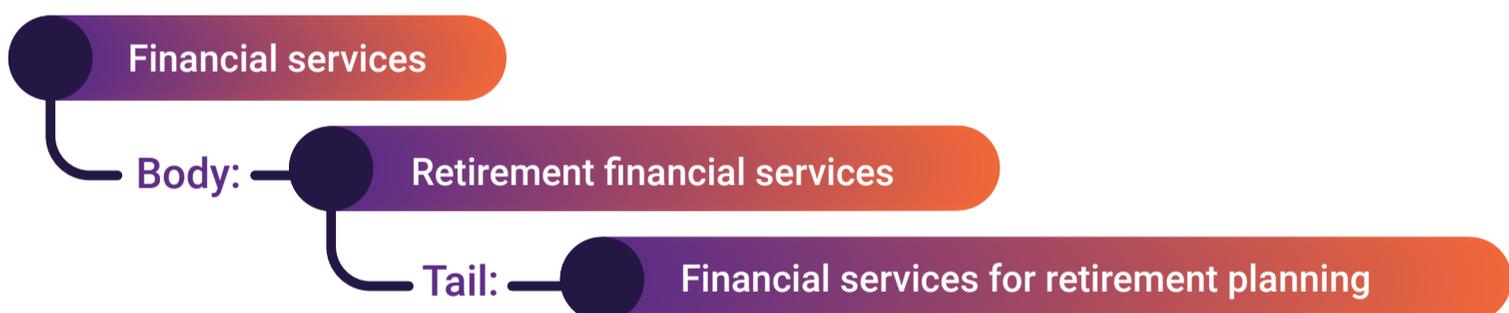
After establishing your head term, start researching longer, more nuanced phrases around that term. Those with two to three words are called "body" keywords, and three-plus words are called "tail" keywords.

Here are some examples:

Head:



Head:



As you can see, the more words a search query has, the more specific the searcher's intent. The search volume for tail terms is much, much lower, but the searcher is likely a more qualified prospect.

After assembling your keyword universe, it is time to align these terms with your content marketing plan.

Robust Content Plan

In order to rank a webpage for a keyword, you have to have content published around that term. SEO only exists in what search engines can read from your website.

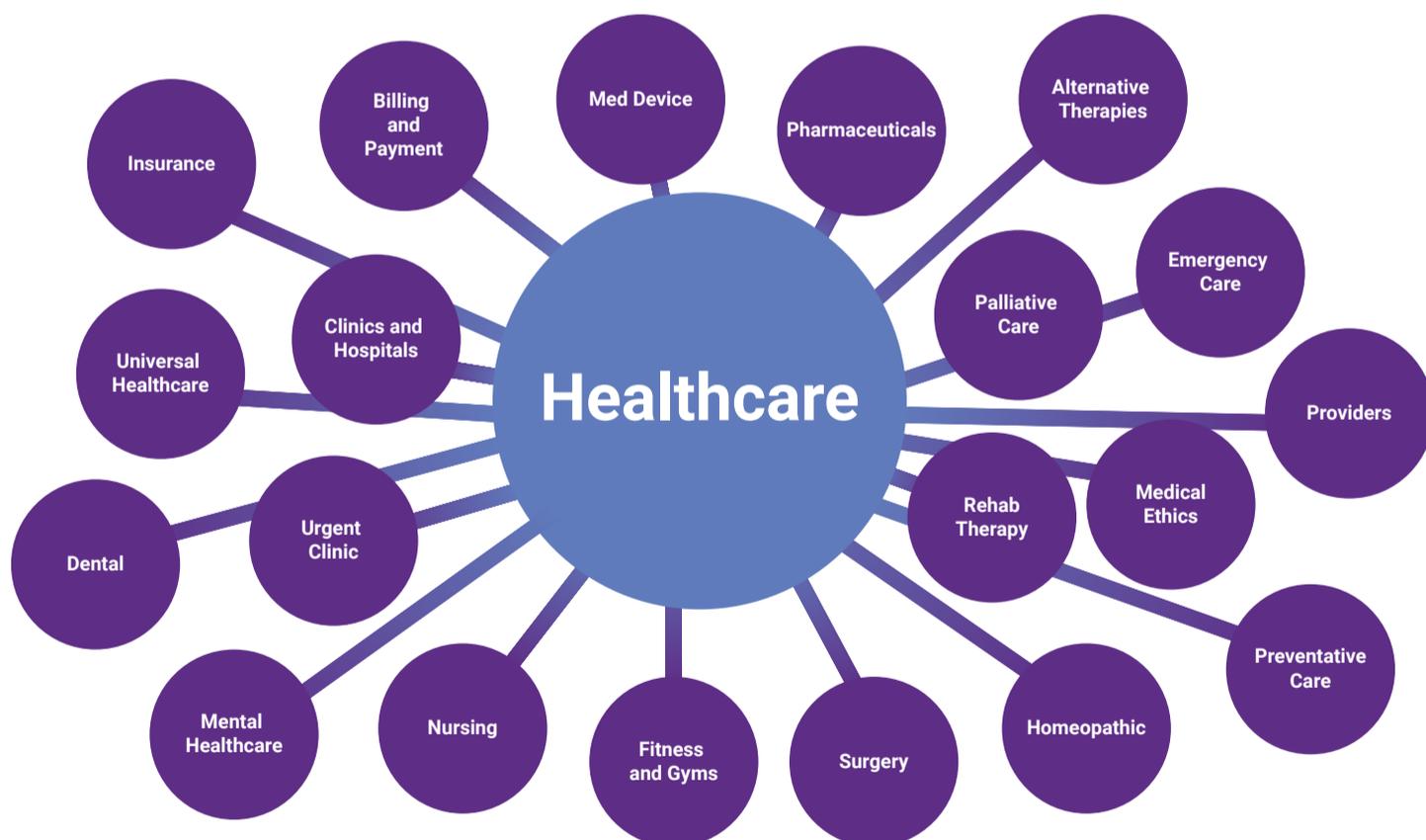
When defining an SEO content marketing plan, you will need your defined keywords as a starting point for topic generation. The most-effective approach to create a large impact is the hub-and-spoke model.

What is the hub-and-spoke model?

The hub-and-spoke model of SEO is the practice of clustering content topics around a central theme. The central theme (head or body keyword) is the hub, supported by a number of related content pieces as the spokes.

The goal of the model is to become an authority for the hub term. And to do that, you must thoroughly explain the subject and answer the questions of searchers.

Even if a subtopic doesn't exactly match your product or service offerings, you are trying to build your overall authority.



When generating topics for your model, keyword research can help be your guide. You can use Google's own real-time search suggestions to get an idea of what people are searching for around your search term.



Google provides hints as to some of the most popular queries

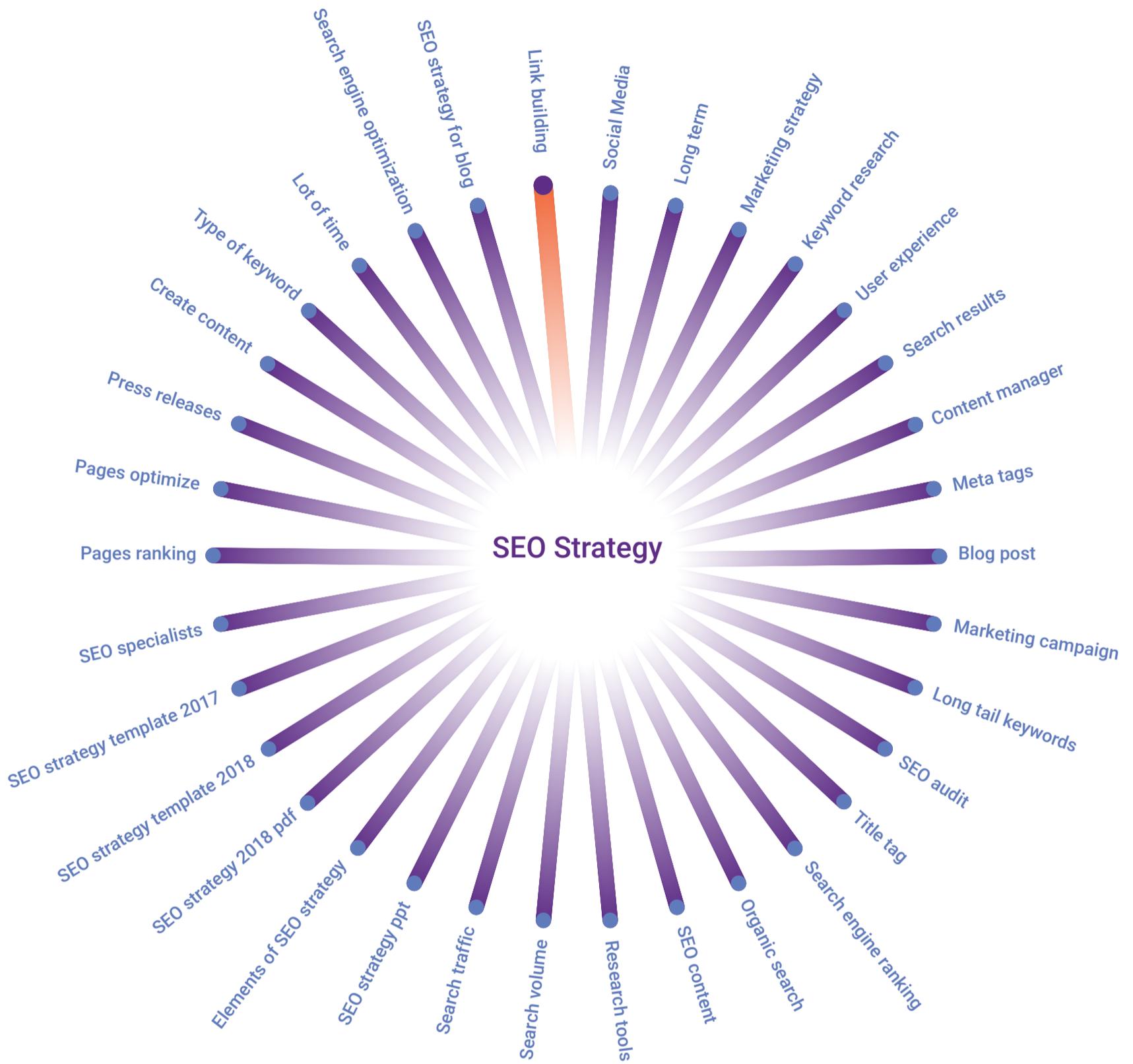
Other tools, like SEMRush, BrightEdge, Moz and Answer the Public, can also find questions and topics around a term.

Display keyword suggestions that Group Keywords Volume

All Keyword Suggestions
Across 2 Groups

<input type="checkbox"/>	Keyword	Relevancy	Monthly Volume	Search
<input type="checkbox"/>	how to build seo strategy	●●●●●●●●	11-50	🔍
<input type="checkbox"/>	what is seo strategy	●●●●●●●●	11-50	🔍
<input type="checkbox"/>	how to do seo marketing	●●●●●○○○	11-50	🔍

Moz's Keyword Explorer helps filter suggestions by questions.



SEMRush topic mindmap

Questions:



- What are the top 5 best SEO link building strategies in 2019
- What should be the strategy to get fast link building in SEO?
- What is the best link building approach?
- What are the best SEO link building techniques in 2019?
- How to build quality links for SEO?
- What is link building in SEO?
- Is SEO link building dead, and why or why not?
- Can anyone guide me on the best SEO link building strategies?
- How to develop and implement a link building strategy?
- Does link building in SEO still work?
- What is tiered link building in SEO?
- What is the best link building strategy for new websites?

SEMRush Topic Research tool

Sometimes it may be helpful to write a very big, comprehensive piece on your hub topic. You can then take that long-form content and break it into smaller chunks and publish those.

The smaller chunks of the larger piece can be published to different channels and in multiple formats, such as:

- Videos
- Infographics
- SlideShares
- Guest blog posts

Anytime you can write long-form content and repackage and republish parts, you can get maximum value out of your investment.

SEO, Content Marketing and your Website Structure

With your content marketing plan defined, determining how it fits into your website structure can be a bit confusing. Websites don't exactly follow a hub-and-spoke model. Websites follow a hierarchical model.

Hub pages should connect content from across the website, no matter where it resides. Related content like blog posts, product pages and press releases should all be referenced from the hub page.

It is crucial that you cross link your supporting content to your hub pages, and vice versa. This will give search engines a clear signal that you are an authority.

Local SEO

If your business has one or more physical locations where customers would visit you, then local SEO is another layer of needed optimization.

Local search is a big driver of physical foot traffic. With more and more people using voice search, that number is rising.

Here are some typical queries for local searches:



According to Google, 50% of people who performed a local search on their phone went to a physical location within a day.

Optimizing for local businesses, branches and franchises requires extra work. That work starts with ensuring your business is correctly listed with Google and Bing.

The key elements for your listing are that your Name, Address and Phone (NAP for short) are correct and consistent across all your listings (Google, Bing, Yelp, Facebook, etc.). Inconsistencies can look suspicious or unprofessional.

All these websites that list your NAP are called citations. Your main local SEO goal should be to increase the number of citation websites and make sure you are listed properly.

For businesses with many locations, branches or franchises, this can be a lot of work. Fortunately, there are some tools and services that can take some of the burden out of managing these listings.

There are many places to earn citations and links for local businesses:

- Social media
- Review websites
- Local directories
- Local newspapers
- Local schools, universities and associations

Another crucial component of local SEO is generating positive reviews. The more 5-star reviews you have, the more likely you will be featured prominently and drive clicks.

Automating and monitoring your review process is critical. Again, there are tools and services that can take the hard work out of the process.

Ready for your Digital Marketing Maturity Assessment?

One of the ways we connect with new clients is through Risdall's unique Digital Marketing Maturity Assessment. This complimentary assessment covers a number of topics that directly impact your marketing, digital strategy, and sales. These include:

- How your current efforts fit into the larger marketing ecosystem
- Where you should focus for the greatest impact with your audiences
- Education on marketing areas that have been neglected
- Creating a roadmap to expand marketing efforts and ensure success

To set up your Digital Marketing Maturity Assessment with our team of experts, please email info@risdall.com or call **1-888-RISDALL**.



info@risdall.com



1-888-RISDALL

About Risdall

Risdall is a digital marketing agency that specializes in harnessing machine learning and data to drive targeted visibility and engagement that builds brand reputation and delivers sales. We've been in business for over 45 years and are proud to include such clients as Arcserve, Ecolab, Hoya Vision Care, Smith System, Turck, and YRC Worldwide in our portfolio.

Headquartered in Roseville, Minnesota, Risdall is heralded as one of the oldest and most successful agencies in the Twin Cities market and is recognized nationally for its leading-edge interactive marketing capabilities. The full-service agency embraces an integrated approach offering marketing, advertising, public relations, design, traditional and interactive media, and research capabilities.