EMERALD
CREATIVE CONTENT

SEO
FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

WORKBOOK

Hi future student/client/friend—

You've got products and services that people would LOVE to buy…if they knew how to find them. One of the biggest mistakes small businesses owners make is staying in obscurity.

But not you!

You're here to learn about the fundamentals of search engine optimization (SEO). Why? Because you know that in order to attract more customers, you've got to be easy to discover.

85% of customers conduct online research before they buy. With the right keywords and content on your website, you can make sure your business gets on their radar.

I hope you find this workbook useful in getting started with your SEO strategy. Whenever you're ready to take your learning to the next level, my fabulous beginner SEO course, **SEO Kickstarter**, will be there waiting for you.

Cheers,
Amanda Kern, Founder & CEO

Psst! Check out the last page of this workbook for a 50% off discount code for the course.

SEO helps customers find you—the solution to their problem.

Search engine optimization (SEO) helps improve your website's visibility in search engine results pages (SERPS), making it easier for potential customers to find you. The higher you rank for a keyword, the more traffic you're likely to receive from queries including that keyword. People tend to perform searches around problems and solutions, so if you want to make it easy for them to find you, you have to create content that includes keywords around those topics.

For instance, if you're going through a plant mom era (we love that for you), you might find yourself typing a query like, "affordable houseplants near me," and then, eventually, "how to save a dying plant." If you're anything like 70% of Google's users, you're going to select one of the first five results you see (2).
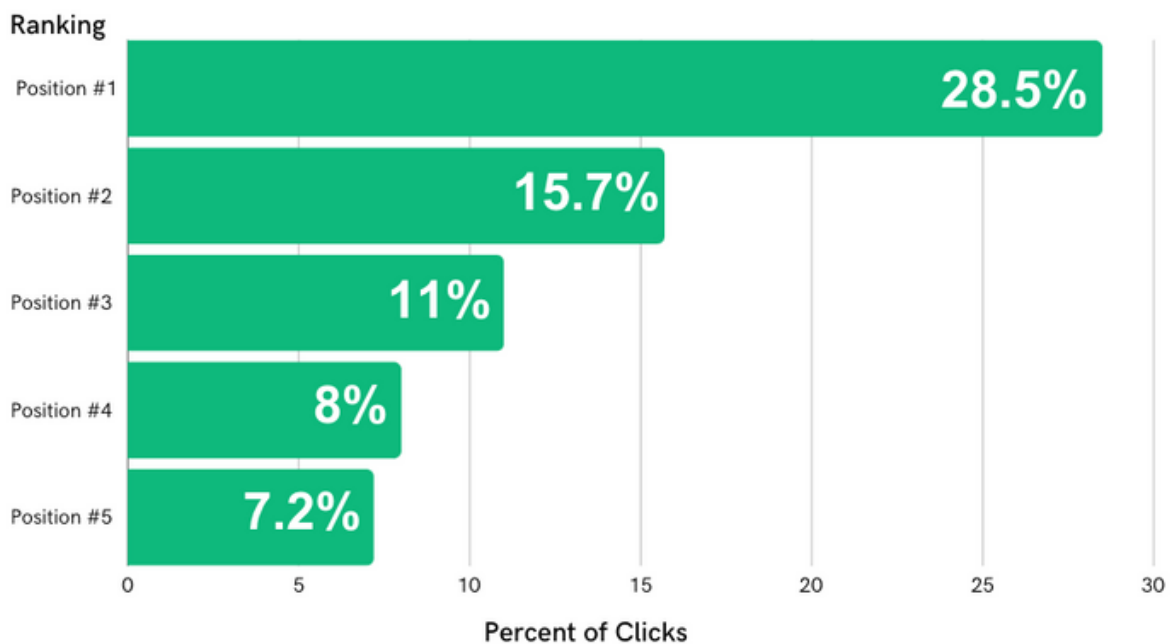
Your first query is clearly of transactional intent—you're basically ready to hop in the car and drive to your local nursery to buy a baby Monstera. This is evidenced by the "near me" part of your query. So it makes sense that when you punch the "Enter" key, you'll find a local SEO map dotted with several highly-rated plant stores in your neighborhood.

(By the way, you don't need to optimize all of your pages with the words "near me" to appear for local searches. That would just look silly!)

Your second query is different. This time, you're not looking to make a purchase—yet. You're conducting an informational query and hoping to learn from someone's expertise on the issue of rescuing dying houseplants.

(Side note: no judgement. I'm sad to say that I too am a serial plant killer, mostly due to overwatering. Now I use ice cubes to water my houseplants, and it seems to be helping).

So your search yields a host of articles and user forums, each with headlines and descriptions hoping to entice you to want to learn more.

10 Ways To Revive Your Dying Houseplant Before It's Too Late

15 At-Home Remedies To Save A Dying Houseplant (2024)

How To Rescue A Dying Houseplant: The Ultimate Guide

What are hacks that will bring a dying house plant back to life?

Help my plant is dying how do I revive an indoor plant?

The first article is published by a home improvement business you've known forever. The next two are from companies you've never heard of before, but the titles are intriguing nonetheless. The last two are Reddit forums last updated a few years ago. Which one will you click?

Statistically speaking, you're going with one of the first two options. You'll read through the tips and come to the realization that there's only one way to save your persnickety Fiddle Leaf Fig: start watering the thing in your shower, quit pruning the dead-looking leaves, and purchase new soil that's better suited for tropical plants.

Where will you purchase this soil? From the specialty nursery who published the article you read, of course. They made it so easy—the link was right there at the end of the article. Plus, you had a good feeling about this brand's vibe by the time you got to the end of the list of tips, and you feel good about supporting a brand you like.

Of course, this scenario is an ideal outcome for the small business owner who published the article. But it doesn't quite happen this way every time someone clicks on your content. In fact, most people will decide to purchase nothing, and feel satisfied simply with the value of the knowledge they gained from reading.

That's also an ideal outcome.

The fact that they clicked, spent time reading and engaging with your content, and then ended their search sends hugely positive signals to Google's algorithm.

Your content solved their problem, even if they didn't convert into a customer.

Now, Google is going to reward you by ranking your article a little bit higher to see if you can also solve the problem for other users. The result? More eyeballs on your website, and more users that might just convert into customers.

So how do you start? What does it take to start getting recognized for the value you provide to users? This workbook will cover at least part of the answer: SEO-friendly content. Read through three sections (SEO Basics, Keyword Research, and Content Writing) to learn the foundations you need to start getting that first bit of traction in search. So get your pencil ready—it's time to start digging into the nitty gritty of it all!

Part 1: SEO Basics

Key Concepts

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

SEO stands for **Search Engine Optimization.** It's the process of optimizing your website to rank higher in **search engine results pages** (SERPs), thus increasing the quantity and quality of traffic to your site through organic search results.
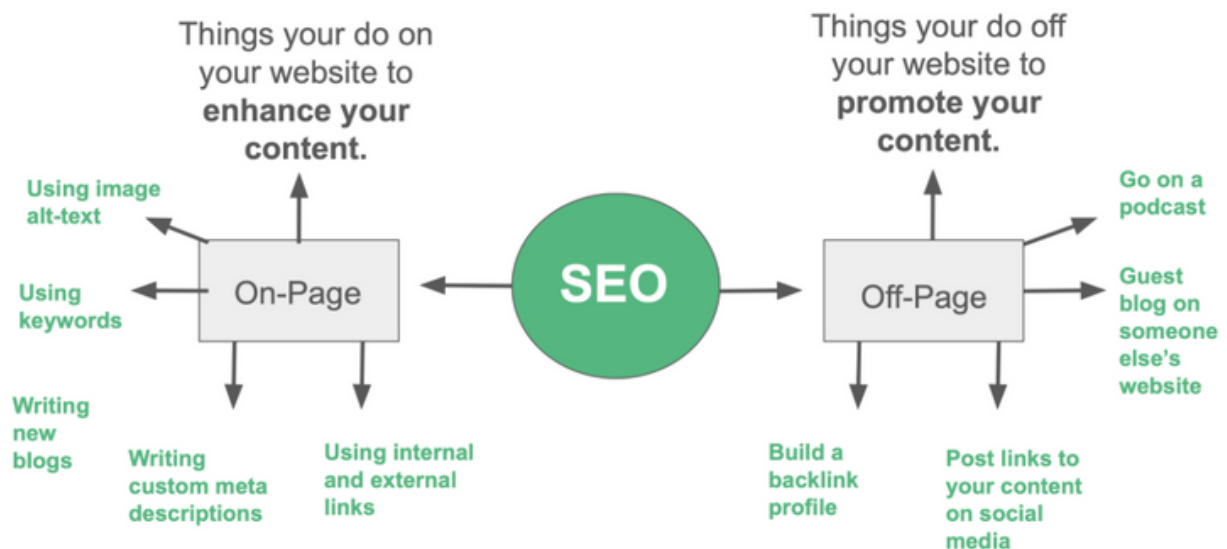
Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs)

The page that a search engine presents after a user submits a **search query**.

Search Query

A search query or search term is the actual word, string of words, or question that a search engine user types into the search box, typically containing **keywords.**

Keyword

Keywords are search terms you try to rank for in search engines like Google.

Things your do on your website to **enhance your content.**

Things your do off your website to **promote your content.**

Using image alt-text

Using keywords

Writing new blogs

Writing custom meta descriptions

Using internal and external links

On-Page

SEO

Off-Page

Go on a podcast

Guest blog on someone else's website

Build a backlink profile

Post links to your content on social media

Understanding SEO

- **SEO** stands for Search Engine Optimization.

- It's the process of optimizing your website to rank higher in search engine results pages (SERPs), thus increasing the **quantity** and **quality** of traffic to your site through organic search results.

- If you want to grow organic traffic, you have to grow keyword rankings.

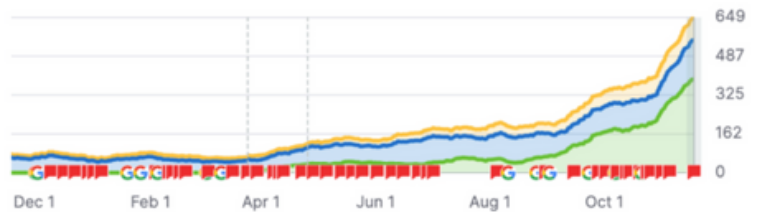- Organic SEO is NOT the same as paid search—these are the results that say "sponsored."

Organic Traffic 7,129/month

☑ Organic Traffic   ☐ Paid Traffic   🏳 Notes ⌄

Organic Keywords 2,731

☑ Top 3   ☑ 4-10   ☐ 11-20   ☐ 21-50   ☐ 51-100   ☑ SERP features
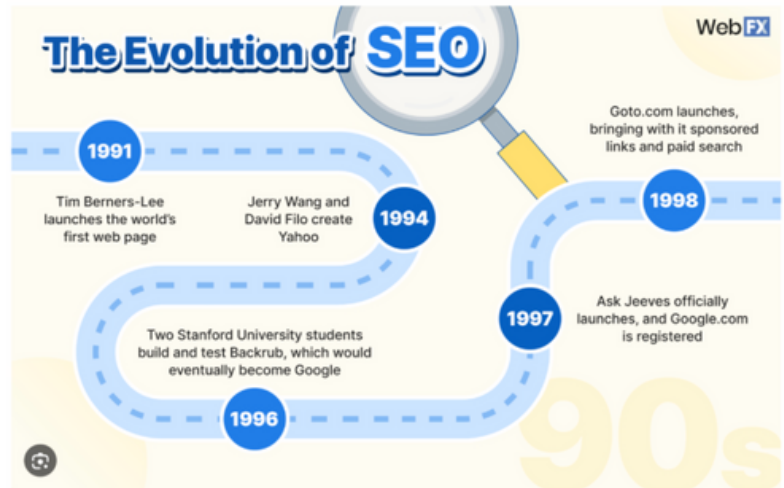
- Search engines like **Google** use complex algorithms to crawl the web, index websites, and rank them based on factors like:
    - Relevance to user intent
    - Site speed
    - Content quality
    - Mobile-friendliness
    - **(E-E-A-T) Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness**
    - *Hundreds (thousands?!) of other factors!*

SEO + Small Businesses

- Businesses have been trying to use search engines for marketing since the Dot Com era (90's).

- For small businesses, SEO has been a game-changer!

- It levels the playing field, allowing you to compete for visibility to your target audience because **you can't buy the top organic positions—you have to earn them.**

The Evolution of SEO

WebFX

1991 — Tim Berners-Lee launches the world's first web page

1994 — Jerry Wang and David Filo create Yahoo

1996 — Two Stanford University students build and test Backrub, which would eventually become Google

1997 — Ask Jeeves officially launches, and Google.com is registered

1998 — Goto.com launches, bringing with it sponsored links and paid search

90s

Summarize

Technical SEO

- Technical SEO involves the aspects of SEO that are related to the technical infrastructure of a website. Common technical **errors + warnings** includes:
  - Speed
  - Missing headers
  - Not mobile friendly
  - Duplicate meta descriptions

Example audit dashboard from SEMrush

On-Page SEO

- On-Page SEO is all the strategies you use to optimize your own website, like:
  - Keyword research
  - Creating content clusters with blogs and landing pages for specific services or products
  - Optimizing your content with strategic keywords
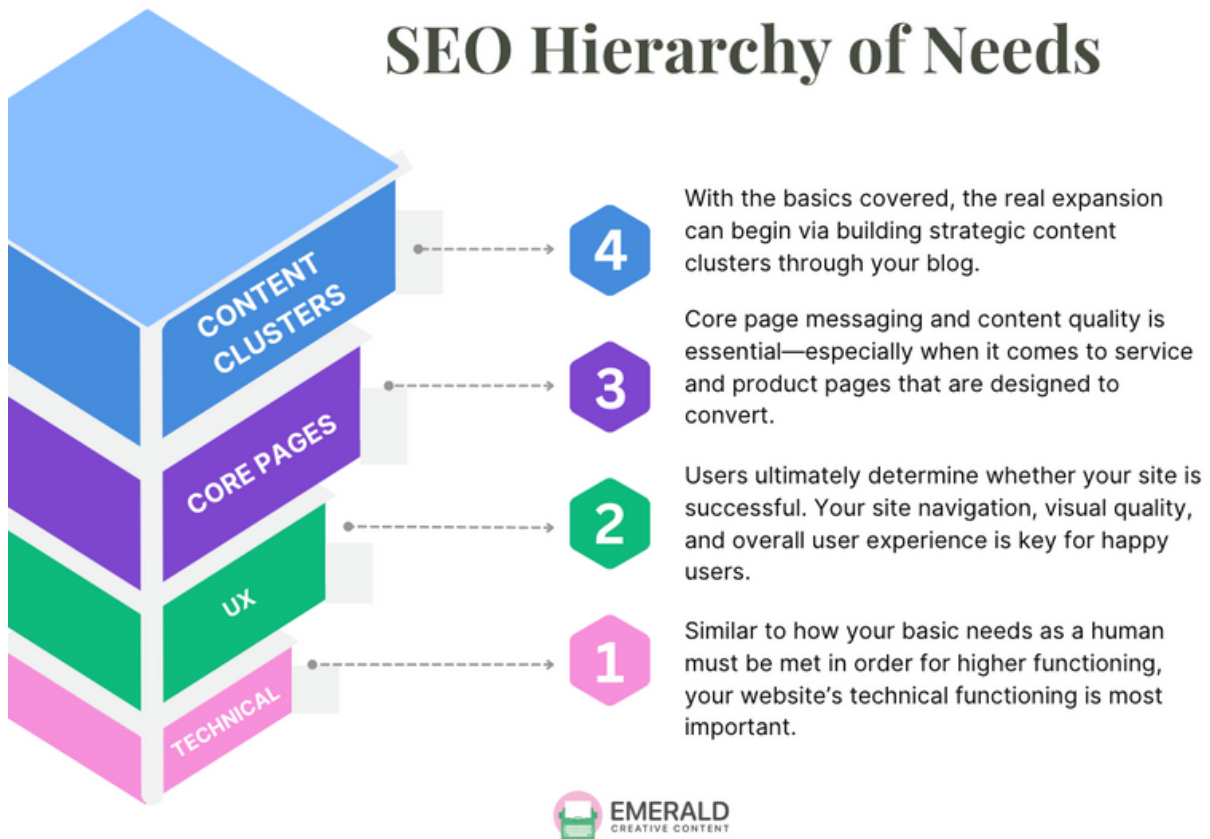 - Adding keyword rich alt-text to images

Off-Page SEO

- Off-Page SEO is all the strategies you use to promote your content outside of your own website:
    - Social media promotion
    - Public relations (PR)
    - Guest blogging on someone else's website
    - Newsletter blasts
    - Creating a Google Business Profile

Summarize

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SEO Hierarchy of Needs

4 — With the basics covered, the real expansion can begin via building strategic content clusters through your blog.

3 — Core page messaging and content quality is essential—especially when it comes to service and product pages that are designed to convert.

2 — Users ultimately determine whether your site is successful. Your site navigation, visual quality, and overall user experience is key for happy users.

1 — Similar to how your basic needs as a human must be met in order for higher functioning, your website's technical functioning is most important.

CONTENT CLUSTERS

CORE PAGES

UX

TECHNICAL

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Pop Quiz

Which of the following statements are true?

1. A website's technical SEO must be healthy for your content strategy to be effective.

2. Small businesses can't rank on search engines—there's too much competition and it's just too expensive.

3. Your expertise and experience are an important part of your website's SEO, so you should be sure to share that on your website.

4. If you have a visually pretty website, the structure of your website doesn't matter so much.

5. Content clusters are a powerful way to increase your website's authority and visibility in your niche.

POP QUIZ *Answers*

Which of the following statements are true?

1. A website's technical SEO must be healthy for your content strategy to be effective.

2. ~~Small businesses can't rank on search engines—there's too much competition and it's just too expensive.~~

3. Your expertise and experience are an important part of your website's SEO, so you should be sure to share that on your website.

4. ~~If you have a visually pretty website, the structure of your website doesn't matter so much.~~

5. Content clusters are a powerful way to increase your website's authority and visibility in your niche.

End of Part 1—you've got the basics!

Part 2: Keyword Research

Quick Jot

Name a service or product you would like to appear for in search. Name a problem/question someone might encounter right before they realize they need that product or service.

_____

_____

_____

Key Concepts

Keyword Research Metrics

The quantifiable elements of a keyword that help you determine its helpfulness to optimizing your website. Typically, you want to pay attention to **4 key metrics:**

- **Relevance -** does it relate to your business?
- **Intent** - is it informational, commercial, or transactional?
- **Search volume** - how many searches per month does the keyword get?
- **Difficulty** - is it easy, medium, or difficult to rank for?
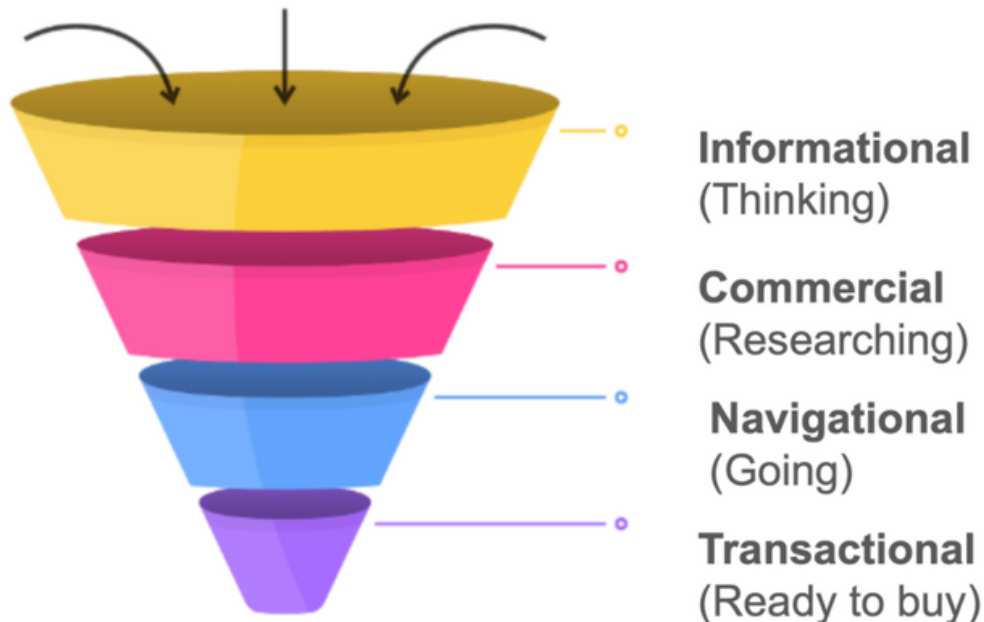
Keyword Intent

The purpose behind a user's query; you can use intent to determine what type of content should be created in order to give you the best chance to rank (i.e. a landing page vs. a blog post)

- **Informational** - the intent suggests users are researching a problem or question
- **Commercial** - the intent suggests the user is researching their purchase
- **Navigational** - the keyword suggests an intent to find a specific brand or website
- **Transactional** - the keyword suggests an intent to purchase

Understanding Search & Your Sales Funnel

Informational
(Thinking)

Commercial
(Researching)

Navigational
(Going)

Transactional
(Ready to buy)

Selecting The Right Keywords: Intent

Each intent corresponds to a different **goal or need that a user has** when conducting a search, and different types of content work best for each.

Informational Intent: Users are seeking information or answers to questions.

Blog posts, articles, how-to guides, FAQs, and educational videos work best. Content should be informative, well-researched, and focused on providing answers and insights.

Navigational Intent: Users are trying to reach a specific website or page.

For this intent, it's crucial to optimize brand pages, product pages, or specific landing pages with clear, easy-to-navigate layouts. Including the brand or website name in keywords can help improve visibility.

Transactional Intent: Users intend to complete a transaction, like making a purchase.

Product pages, e-commerce stores, and booking pages with clear calls-to-action (CTAs), prices, and purchase options work best. Reviews and testimonials can also be effective.

Commercial Intent: Users are considering a purchase and are looking for options or more information before making a decision.

Product comparisons, reviews, case studies, and buyer guides are ideal. The content should be persuasive and informative, helping users make informed buying decisions.

Keyword Research Tools

- **Overview of popular keyword research tools (free and paid options):**
  - Google Keyword Planner
  - SEMrush
  - Keywords Everywhere
  - Ahrefs
  - Moz Keyword Explorer
  - Ubersuggest

Keyword Research Metrics

- When selecting keywords, consider:
  - **Relevance** (does it relate to your business?)
  - **Intent** (is it informational, commercial, or transactional?)
  - **Search volume** (the number of searches per month)
  - **Difficulty** (is it easy, medium, or difficult to rank for?)
- You want keywords that your **target audience** is searching for and **aren't too competitive** for your business to rank.

Summarize

Keyword Research Steps

Step #1 - Research the competition.

- Search the product or service you want to appear for. Who are the top 3-5 competitors that appear in the organic search results? What keywords do they rank for?

  - _____

  - _____

  - _____

Step #2 - Compile possible keywords for blogs, landing pages, and core pages using a keyword research tool. Circle the easiest, most relevant keywords to rank for first.

Keyword	Search Volume	Difficulty	Intent

Step #4 - Make a content calendar you can stick with.

	Keyword	Content Type	Draft Date	Publish Date
April 2024				
May 2024				
June 2024				

That's it—you completed Part 2!

Part 3: Content Writing

Discussion Prompt

What bothers you the most about SEO content? What makes a good landing page or article?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Key Concepts

Best practices for keyword integration:

- Choose ONE primary keyword to rank for per page

- Each service and product should have its own page with its own keywords

- Use your selected keyword in **title tags** and **meta descriptions**

- Use your selected keyword in **headers** and **body text**

- Use keyword in **URLs** and **alt text** for images

- Include a **frequently asked questions** section

What NOT To Do…

- **Don't keyword stuff**—use the keywords as naturally as possible, only in about 1% of the text

- **Don't try cloaking**—that's where you hide the keywords on the page by trying to blend them with background.

- **Don't plagiarize**—Google recognizes duplicate content, and purely AI content** simply duplicates what's already out there.

- **Don't feel like you have to do it all yourself**—use your team, hire a freelancer, use ChatGPT** to help.

What TO do…

- **DO understand what your audience needs**—are they looking for an explanation/guide, a product comparison, a list, a service, a product, a coach, etc?

- **DO create a calendar for tackling each high-leverage keyword you found**—will you write two blogs and a new service page each month? Will you optimize one piece of old content each month?

- **DO maintain a consistent style and brand voice**—will your headers use capital case? Contractions? Slang? Pop culture references? Will you use humor? Will you use first person examples and experience?

Types Of Website Content To Optimize For SEO

- **Blog Posts and Articles:** Long-form, informative articles and blog posts that provide valuable insights, solutions, or entertainment to your audience.

  - **Lists and Roundups:** Listicles (articles in the form of a list) and roundups (collections of resources or products) are easy to read and share. They can target specific keywords and attract backlinks. specific keywords, include internal and external links, and provide comprehensive coverage of the topic.

  - **How-to Guides and Tutorials:** Step-by-step guides and tutorials that help solve specific problems or teach something new are excellent for SEO. They target long-tail keywords and cater to specific search intents.

  - **Product Reviews and Comparisons:** Content that provides detailed reviews, comparisons, and recommendations can attract users who are in the decision-making phase of the buyer's journey. Use targeted keywords and provide genuine, valuable insights.

- **Service pages** and **product pages** are crucial components of a website, especially for businesses that aim to sell products or services online. Optimizing these pages for SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is essential to improve visibility, attract potential customers, and ultimately increase conversions.

Summarize

Landing Page/Services Page Content Writing Steps

Step #1 - Select a commercial keyword related to your highest revenue-generating product or service.

- _____

Step #2 - Create an audience persona based on your dream client.

What are their pain points (i.e. external needs? Internal desires?) Age? Interests? Job title? Annual income? Special qualifiers? (i.e. "business owner" or "already owns a guitar")

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Step #3 - Create an outline for your landing page that includes:

- ☐ A title that includes your keyword, headers that all include your keyword/keyword variation
- ☐ A call to action at the top, middle, and bottom
- ☐ Copy written in conversational language that focuses on the audience persona (not the business) and pokes at the customer's pain points
- ☐ Content that explains not just the features of your product/service, but the benefits
- ☐ Testimonials and data demonstrating the efficacy of your product or service

- ❏ A "how it works" section explaining what customers can expect from beginning to end once they decide to convert

- ❏ Images that have been compressed and tagged with keyword-rich alt-text

- ❏ An FAQ section with plenty of common questions as well as People Also Ask questions

Using AI: Prompt Suggestions

Define the Value Proposition: "Can you help me write a concise statement that clearly explains the unique value my product/service offers? I'm targeting [your target audience] and my main benefits are [list main benefits]."

Craft Engaging Headlines and Subheadlines: "I need a compelling headline and subheadline for my landing page that captures attention and encourages [your target audience] to stay and learn more. My product/service is [brief description]. What do you suggest?"

Create Persuasive Copy: "Can you assist me in writing persuasive body copy for my landing page that highlights the key features and benefits of my [product/service]? I want to address the problems it solves for [your target audience] and how it stands out from competitors."

Design a Strong Call-to-Action (CTA): "I need a powerful call-to-action that motivates [your target audience] to [desired action, e.g., sign up, purchase, contact us]. The tone should be [choose: urgent, inviting, friendly, professional]. Can you provide some suggestions?"

Optimize for Search Engines and Conversions: "Could you guide me through optimizing my landing page's content for SEO to attract [your target audience] through organic search?"

Step 4 - Post to your website! Be sure to write a custom meta description and create a custom URL.

- ☐ Meta descriptions should be 155 characters or less (about 20-30 words), should include your keyword, and should entice the reader to click.

- ☐ URLs should be short and sweet—and MUST include your keyword.

Blog Content Writing Steps

Step 1 - Select an informational keyword related to your highest revenue-generating product or service.

- _____

Step 2 - Create an outline for your blog that includes everything on the blog checklist.

- ❑ A title that includes your keyword, headers that all include your keyword/keyword variation
- ❑ Copy written in conversational language that focuses on the audience persona (not the business)
- ❑ Logical organization/structure (listicle, how-to, checklist, FAQ-style, roundup, etc)
- ❑ An introductory paragraph that empathizes with the reader and hooks them (try stats or stories)
- ❑ A section that immediately answers the query right after the intro
- ❑ Short paragraphs (3 lines max) with plenty of header 2s, header 3s, and bullets when appropriate
- ❑ A CTA at the end that guides readers back to your landing page
- ❑ Images that have been compressed and tagged with keyword-rich alt-text
- ❑ An FAQ section with plenty of common questions as well as People Also Ask questions

Step 3 - Post to your website! Be sure to write a custom meta description that includes your keyword and create a custom URL that includes the keyword.

That's it—you completed Part 3 and finished this workbook. High five!

CONNECT

Amanda Kern

is the founder and CEO of Emerald Creative Content. Each quarter, she facilitates a beginner SEO course called SEO Kickstarter, a 5 week course that meets weekly to help small business owners grow their digital presence and attract more targeted website traffic.

Register for SEO Kickstarter—the SEO beginner course for small business owners.

Use code HAVEN to get a 50% discount on course registration.

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