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Google & holistic SEO

In this lesson we'll get you up to speed on the basics. First, we'll review how Google works. Then, we'll shed light on how we at Yoast tackle SEO. We practice what we call “holistic SEO”, and we'll stress the importance of staying away from “black-hat” SEO tricks.

What does Google do?

Search engines like Google follow links. Google follows links from one web page to another web page. Google's crawlers spider more than a billion pages every day.

A search engine like Google consists of:

1. a crawler
2. an index
3. an algorithm

We'll explore these terms in further detail below.

Crawlers, spiders or bots

A crawler follows the links on the web. A crawler is also called a robot, a bot, or a spider. It goes around the internet 24/7. Once it comes to a website, it saves the HTML version of a page in a gigantic database, called the index. This index is updated every time the crawler comes around your website and finds a new or revised version of it. Depending on how important Google deems your site and the amount of changes you make on your website, the crawler comes around more or less often.

How does Google find your site?

For Google to know of the existence of your website, there first has to be a link from another site – one Google already knows – to your site. Following that link will lead to the first crawler-session and the first save

in the index. In the old days you could submit your website to a search engine. Today, that isn't possible anymore. Search engines nowadays follow all links on the web.

Google's secret algorithm

After indexing your website, Google can show your website in the search results. Google has a specific algorithm that decides which pages it will show in which order. How this algorithm works is a secret. Nobody knows exactly which factors decide how Google determines search results. Moreover, factors and their importance change very often. Testing and experimenting gives us at Yoast a good feel for the important factors and the changes in these factors.

The value of links for search engines

It's very important to have a basic understanding of how Google and most other search engines use links: they use the number of links pointing to a page to determine how important that page is. Both internal links (from the own website) as well as external links (from other websites) can help a website to rank high in Google.

Some links are more important than others: links from websites that have a lot of links themselves are generally more important than links from small websites with few external links.

Universal search

In addition to the organic and the paid results, Google also embeds news items, pictures and videos in its search results. This embedment is called universal search.

Crawlability

Depending on how you maintain your website, it can be easy or difficult for Google to crawl your website. If you have good crawlability, Google will be able to index your site without problems. There are a few ways in which a crawler can be blocked from your website. If the website or a page on your website is blocked, you're telling Google's crawler: "do not

come here, this area is forbidden”. You won’t turn up in the search results in most of these cases.

There are several ways you can prevent Google from accessing certain pages. If you want to know more about these methods, check out our [Technical SEO course](#).

Google’s mission

Google’s mission is “to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful”. In other words: to build the perfect search engine that helps people find what they are looking for. Google always wants to show you the best result for your search query. Google has updated its algorithm numerous times over the years, but their goal remains the same: Google tries to get you the best result.

Google gives you the best results by ranking the most relevant and usable websites, and by combating spam. Sites that are only built to make money, or otherwise created purely to rank to make money, should not be on top of the search results. Sites that give the user what he or she searched for should always be on top. Google also rewards sites that provide good user experience (including for instance sites that load fast).

RankBrain

RankBrain is a Google algorithm, but a very advanced one at that. It is a machine learning system that helps Google better decipher the meaning behind the terms people search for. It serves the best-matching search results related to those queries. When RankBrain was first announced, Google called it the third most important ranking factor. Presumably, RankBrain can somehow summarize what a page is about, evaluate the relevance of search results, and teach itself to get even better at it with time. The common understanding is that RankBrain, in part, relies on the traditional SEO factors (links, content, keywords, etc.), but also looks at other factors that are specific to the search term. Then, it identifies the most relevant pages in the index and arranges the respective results in SERPs (search engine result pages).

Important Google updates

Throughout the years, Google introduced several major updates. We'll discuss the most important ones of the last seven years and the implications of these updates.

Panda (2011)

In 2011, Google released its first [Panda update](#). This Panda update tried to diminish those websites which were purely created to rank in the search engines. Panda mostly focused on on-page factors. In other words, it determined whether the site offered information about the search term visitors used. Two types of sites were hit especially hard by the Panda update:

1. Affiliate sites (sites which mainly exist to link to other pages).
2. Sites with very thin content.

Google has periodically re-run the Panda algorithm since its first release.

Penguin (2012)

A year later, Google rolled out the first [Penguin update](#). Penguin particularly looked at the links websites got from other sites. It judged whether the sites linking to your website like and admire your products or content. If the links were artificial, Google no longer assigned link value. In the past, lots of people tried to boost their ranking by buying links. Penguin tried to diminish the effect of buying, exchanging or otherwise artificially creating links. Websites with a lot of these artificial links got hit hard by this update. They lost their place in Google's ranking. This update has also run several times since its first inception and is now even said to be run continuously.

Hummingbird (2013)

In August 2013, Google released [Hummingbird](#). In this update, Google laid down the groundwork for voice search. Hummingbird pays more attention to each individual word in a query, ensuring that the whole search phrase is taken into account, rather than just particular words. This should lead to results matching the entire query better. The results

were not immediately clear, but over time, Google started showing more answer boxes in the search results (see Image 1), that gave the answer directly instead of enticing people to click on to a web page. Voice search has become more and more important as more devices (Siri, Google Home, Alexa) have started using voice search.

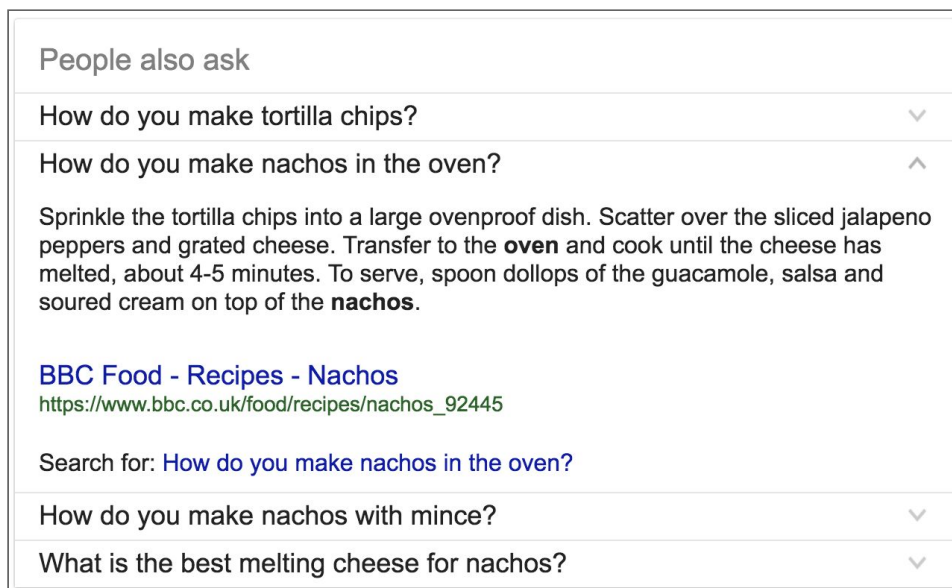


Image 1: Answer box in Google's search results

Mobilegeddon (2015)

In 2015, Google introduced the mobile update, dubbed "[Mobilegeddon](#)" by the industry. As more and more people use Google on mobile devices, Google used this update to boost sites that have mobile friendly pages in its mobile search results. Around the same time, Google showed that mobile devices accounted for over 50% of all search queries.

Possum (2016)

In September 2016, the [Possum update](#) applied several recent changes to Google's local ranking filter. After Possum, Google has shown more varied results depending on the physical location of the searcher (the closer you are to a business physically, the more likely it is that you'll see it among local results) and the phrasing of the query (even very similar variations now produce different results).

Mobile indexing first index (2018)

Last but not least, Google is currently switching to their [mobile-first index](#). This means Google will determine rankings based on the quality of the mobile version of the site instead of the desktop version. As more and more searches happen on mobile, Google wants its index and results to represent the majority of their users, who are mobile searchers. A new Googlebot will crawl your mobile site and determine if its performance, content and user experience are up to scratch. If so, you get a better ranking. If it's lacking, other sites will rank higher and you could lose out.

What is SEO?

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the profession that attempts to optimize sites to make them appear in a high position in the organic search results. The rankings of these search results are determined by Google's algorithm. Although Google's algorithm remains secret, almost a decade of experience in SEO has resulted in a pretty good idea about the important factors. In our view, the factors in Google's algorithm can be divided into two categories:

1. There are *on-page factors* which decide the ranking of your website. These factors include technical issues (e.g. the quality of your code) and more textual issues (e.g. structure of your site and text, use of words).
2. There are the *off-page factors*. These factors include links from other websites, social media attention and other marketing activities outside your own website.

What is holistic SEO?

At Yoast, we practice what we call "holistic SEO". Your primary goal should be to build and maintain the best possible website. Ranking in Google will come automatically if your website is of extremely high quality.

Google wants to serve their customers. Their mission is to index all the world's information and make it universally accessible. In addition to

this, Google, of course, wants to make money. To achieve this, they have to make sure people keep using Google. This means that they'll have to show people results they are looking for. So if your website is the best in your market, Google wants to rank it high in the results.

Permanently ranking well in Google demands an extensive SEO strategy focused on every aspect of your website and its marketing. The technical side, the user experience (UX), the content on your website: all need to be top notch. To keep ranking well in Google, you should develop – what we call – a holistic SEO approach.

Just make an awesome website!

Yoast has been giving SEO advice for many years now, but our advice has always remained the same. And the advice is simple: you have to make sure your site is really, really awesome! Don't use any "tricks". While they might get you ranked quickly, they usually don't work in the long run, and they might even backfire.

Google's mission is to build the perfect search engine that helps people find what they are looking for. Making your website and your marketing strategy fit this goal is always the way to go.

Why would you apply a holistic SEO approach?

A holistic approach to SEO means you focus on it all:

- [proper keyword research](#)
- [good technical SEO](#)
- [a great user experience](#)
- [writing quality content](#)
- [a solid social media strategy](#)
- [mobile optimization](#)

Having an awesome website with high quality content and a great user experience will not instantly improve your ranking. In the long run, though, it will definitely affect your SEO positively!

Attractive websites have a lower bounce rate and a much higher chance

of receiving social media attention. These are exactly the two things you need to make sure your website will keep ranking well in the long run. If nobody ever talks about your website on social media, how can Google keep thinking it's a good site?

Awesome websites will also result in higher conversion rates. If your audience likes and understands your website, the chance of them buying your products or returning to your website is much higher.

What's important to remember is that you should mainly focus on your users and their experience of your site. Sure, you want your site to match what Google's algorithm is looking for. Because Google's mission is to find the best result, however, focusing on making a great site for your user will lead to the algorithm ranking you higher. As Google's algorithm improves, it's becoming increasingly proficient at awarding points for achieving that goal and giving penalties for trying to rank in other ways.

Don't use any tricks

Applying a holistic SEO approach means to stay away from what is called "black-hat" SEO or "scorched-earth" tactics. Tactics like these focus on trying to exploit loopholes in Google's algorithms, and they try to get websites to rank higher than they actually deserve to. A few examples of these tricks are:

- *Keyword stuffing*
Some sites try to manipulate their ranking by filling pages with (unrelated) keywords or numbers. These keywords often appear out of context, for example in a list or group. Sometimes they even use white text to hide the fact that they are stuffing keywords.
- *Link building*
There's white-hat link building, where you build an engaged community and promote your website to relevant people, but there are black-hat strategies of link building as well. Some sites try to rank higher by buying links. This includes paying for links, but also sending someone a free product in exchange for a link.

- *Page swapping*
Page swapping is a trick for getting ranked for one page, and then, after the page has attained a good position in the search results, replacing that page for another.

Google has updated its algorithms to account for these tricks. With the updates, these results were heavily penalized. Using similar tactics can get you banned from Google for a significant period of time. What we want you to do is create a sustainable SEO strategy, which will not only have you rank today, but in the long run as well. The better Google's algorithm becomes, the less effective these black-hat tactics will be.

Conclusion

SEO is the practice of optimizing websites to make them reach a high position in Google's - or another search engine's - search results. At Yoast, we believe that holistic SEO is the best way to become the best result, because you focus on making every aspect of your site awesome. Don't use any black-hat SEO tricks, because in the long run, this will have negative consequences for your ranking. Instead, we recommend you to practice sustainable SEO, where you keep the user in mind.

Keywords: the basics

This lesson covers the basics of keywords. We'll start this lesson by exploring what keywords are, and why they are important. Then, we'll explore what keyword research is all about and we'll take a closer look at the importance of executing proper keyword research. Finally, we'll quickly go into how to execute your own keyword research.

Keywords

What is a keyword?

A keyword, or focus keyword, is the search term that describes the content on a page best. It's the search term that you most want your page to rank for. When people search for that term, they should find you. A focus keyword can be a word, like "guitar", but also a phrase, like "electric guitar for kids".

Head, mid tail and long tail keywords

Some keywords are rather generic, others are specific. We broadly distinguish three types of keywords: head keywords (also called main keywords), mid tail keywords and long tail keywords. Although really, you shouldn't think of it as a fixed set of types. Rather, there is a spectrum running all the way from short and broad keywords to long and specific keywords. Consider the graphic on the next page.

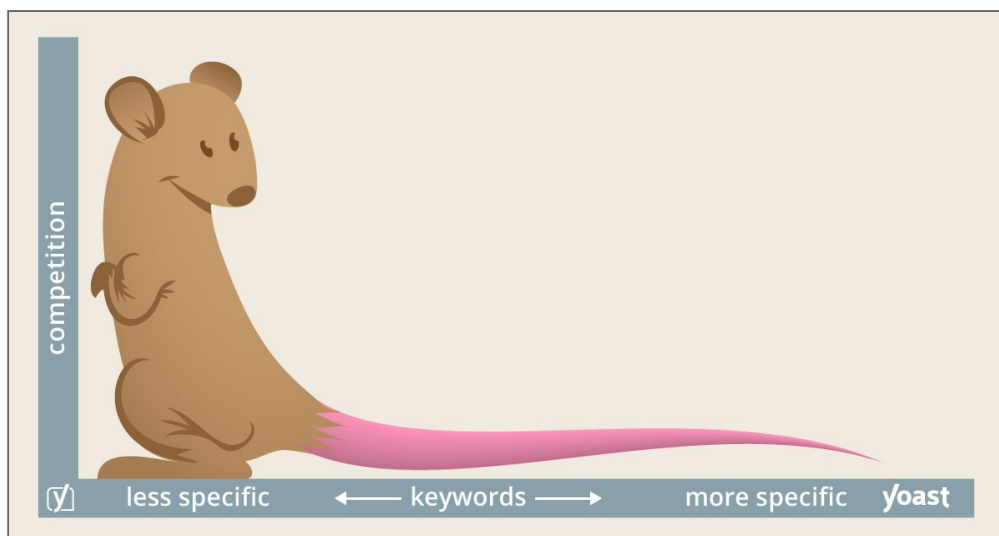


Image 1: Focus keywords

The head of the mouse represents the beginning of the spectrum. The tail of the mouse stretches all the way from the beginning (short and broad) to the end (long and specific). Your keywords can be anywhere on the spectrum. Still, it can be useful to distinguish three types of keywords, to make things a bit more concrete. We'll discuss head, mid tail and long tail keywords. This also allows us to give clear examples. Let's dive into them!

Head keywords

Most blogs have just a few main topics – these are called the **head keywords**, or **main keywords**. Mom blogs are usually about children and family life; food blogs are about eating, restaurants, and recipes. Our blog at yoast.com is all about SEO. So, all of our blog posts are about SEO, or about SEO-related topics. We most certainly want to rank for the term "SEO". Terms like "SEO plugin", "SEO courses", and "SEO blog" are also head keywords for us. As an authority in our field, we have the luxury of being able to rank for these words.

The main topic or theme of your blog is the number one keyword (or key phrase) you want people to use to find you, in our case "SEO". Imagine yourself having a food blog about homemade Italian food. You would then like to be found on a search term like "homemade Italian food". That would pretty much be the number one.



Mid tail keywords

You cannot, however, optimize all blog posts for the same term “homemade Italian food”, even if all your blog posts will be about homemade Italian food. Instead, you should write a whole number of blog posts about all kinds of longer variants of your number one search term. In the example of the food blog, you could write about several delicious things: homemade Italian pasta, homemade Italian salads, homemade Italian desserts. These could be your main categories. For these situations, you use **mid tail keywords**. Mid tail keywords are more specific keywords, derived from the head keyword they tie into.

Long tail keywords

Your keywords could be even more long tail. You could write about: homemade Italian spaghetti bolognese, homemade Italian lasagna, homemade Italian penne carbonara, and so on. These keywords are called **long tail keywords**. Long tail keywords are even more specific and less common keywords, which often focus on a niche. The longer (and more specific) search terms are, the easier it will be to rank for them. For smaller sites, long tail keywords can comprise up to six or seven separate terms.

Classifying your keywords is essential. Some keywords are very common and competitive (head keywords), while others are long tail. Decide which are your most critical high-level keywords, the ones that generate sufficient traffic for your business and fit your business best. You should only have a few of these general keywords for your business. The rest of them is bound to be more down the tail.

Why are keywords important?

When you optimize your blog post for a specific keyword, it's important that people actually search for that keyword. If they're not, you'll be doing a lot of hard work for nothing. But how do you choose the right focus keyword?

There are two things to consider when choosing your focus keyword:

1. Your *audience*: what are they searching for and which words are they using? You should get inside the heads of your audience and try to figure this out. You can use tools like Google Trends to help you with this.

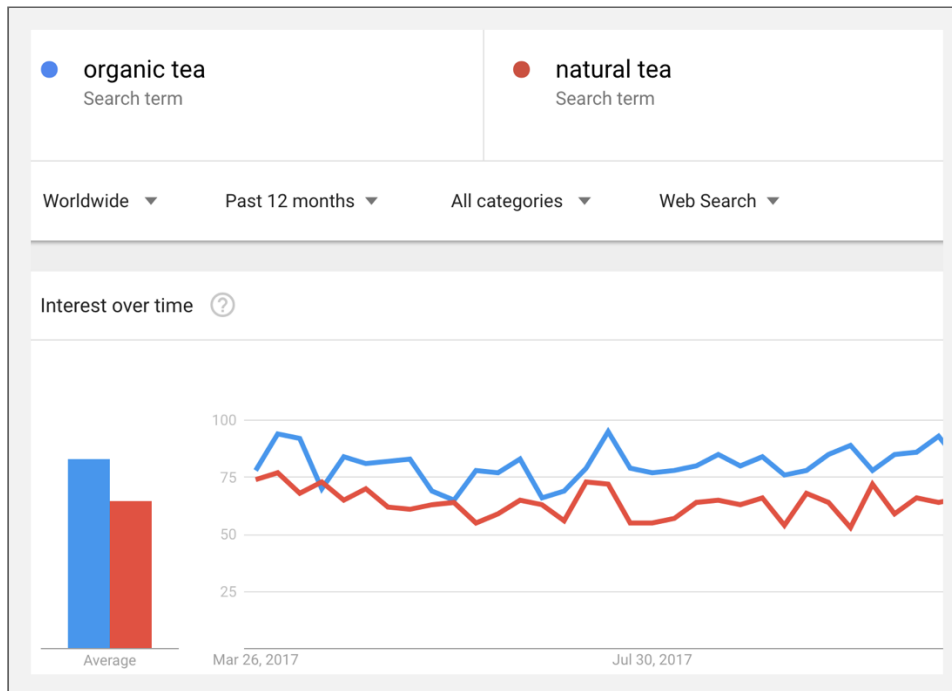


Image 2: Google Trends

2. Your *competition*: you have to focus on keywords that are not too competitive, otherwise you'll have a hard time ranking. To check this, you can search for your proposed focus keyword in Google and see whether or not the post you want to write would stand out from the other results. Does your site have enough authority?

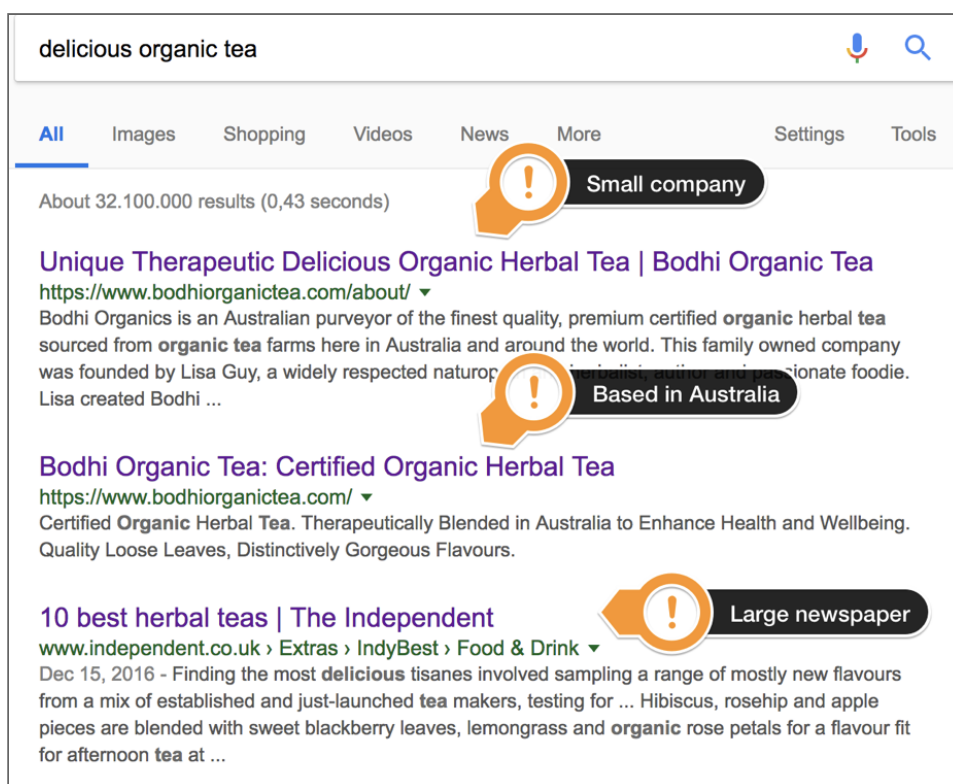


Image 3: Google your focus keyword to analyze your competition

Use your focus keyword only once

You don't want to compete with your own content for a position in Google, so you should use your focus keyword only once. If you optimize two different articles for the same focus keyword, you would like to have both posts to turn up in Google. You'll be telling Google: these two are both suitable for people searching for my keyword. You may be able to get away with this if you're a large company dominating the search results. Generally, however, you should try to write the optimal post for a focus keyword and try to rank for that article. You can have multiple posts about one topic, but try to optimize them for different keywords by addressing different aspects of that topic.

How do you use keywords in your pages and posts?

There was a time where you could add a lot of keywords to your pages and posts, so-called keyword stuffing, and you'd rank in the search engines. However, this is not a great SEO strategy anymore. If you do this, you'll be hit by [Google Panda](#) (or another update) in no time. Google prefers nice, readable texts. Texts with a high keyword density do not

read nicely. They are in fact, terrible to read. Instead of using your focus keyword over and over, you should use synonyms if possible. Google actually recognizes synonyms to keywords now. With this ability, optimizing for a single focus keyword becomes more and more silly.

Of course, you should use your focus keyword in your text, but you shouldn't overdo it. Usually, a keyword density of 1 to 2% is perfect. In addition, you should make sure your use of keywords is balanced throughout the text. Make sure you use your focus keyword in your page title, first paragraph, one or several subheadings, and in your meta description.

What is keyword research?

Keyword research should be the first step of every SEO strategy. Before you write your website content, you need to think about which search terms you want to be found for. You need to determine what your site should be ranking for. This means getting inside people's heads, to find out which words they use when searching. You have to come up with an extensive list of keywords that you want your site to rank for. This is called doing keyword research.

The importance of good keyword research

Proper keyword research is important because it will make clear which search terms your audience uses. At Yoast, we frequently come across clients who use one set of words when describing their products, while their target audience uses a completely different set of words. These sites aren't found by their potential customers because of a mismatch in vocabulary.

Of course, it doesn't make any sense to optimize for words that people don't use. Good keyword research makes sure that you use the words your target audience searches for to find you. This makes the whole effort of optimizing your website far more worthwhile.

How to do keyword research

We'll quickly explore how to execute proper keyword research. We're going to dive deeper into the separate steps of keyword research in the rest of this course.

Define your mission

Before you do anything, you need to know what makes your company unique. You need to have a clear concept of the mission of your company, what you have to offer, and what makes your company stand out, because that's what's going to make you rank. As we mentioned before: if you're not the best result, why should people want to find you? Why should Google rank you? Defining your mission should be the foundation for your keyword research.

Consider your audience

Once you've determined what you have to offer and what makes your company stand out, it's time to consider your audience. With your mission in mind, try to get into the heads of your potential buyers. What will these people be looking for? What kind of search terms could they be using while looking for your service or product? Ask yourself these questions and write down as many answers as possible. If your mission is clear, you'll have a pretty clear image of your niche and your unique selling points (the things that set your business apart from others). These are the terms you want to be found for.

Research your competition

You can't devise a proper keyword research strategy without taking your competition into account. Because of that, the third step of keyword research should be to research your competition. It's quite easy to get a general idea of your SEO competition. Just google some search terms you would like to rank for, and see what companies show up and where you rank. How big are the companies you are competing with for top three rankings? Would your company fit between these results? This is all quite easy to determine using just the Google search results.

Once you have a general idea of your competition, it's time to take things a step further. Start with the keywords you think you have a reasonable chance of ranking for. Visit the pages that are currently ranking. What exactly are they doing? What information are they offering? Are their texts well-written? What can you offer that they don't? By setting up a thorough comparative analysis, you can try to match the things those sites do well and outperform them in areas you're better at. And if you do that well, you'll be able to be the best result!

Conclusion

In this lesson, we've discussed focus keywords. We've seen that it's very important to choose the right focus keyword. Otherwise, you'll be doing a lot of hard work for nothing. We've also seen that executing good keyword research is important for your SEO, because it makes sure that you use the words your target audience searches for to find you. Finally, we've explained briefly how to execute keyword research.

Your mission

In the previous module, we've explained how Google works and what search engine optimization (SEO) entails. We've also stressed the importance of holistic SEO. Then, we've explored keywords and the basics of keyword research. In this lesson, we're going to take the first step in the process of devising a great keyword strategy: identifying your purpose and unique selling points (USPs). After you've determined your mission and USPs, we'll explain how to set up your keyword research sheet.

What is a mission?

Whether you have a blog, a company or anything else, it's important to have a clear mission. Every website owner has certain expectations of his visitors. If you have a blog, you probably expect them to read your posts. If you have a webshop, you want your visitors to buy your products. But what do you want to achieve with your company? Perhaps you want to inform or entertain your visitors with your blog posts. If you're selling things, you might want to improve their lives with your awesome products.

When people can't come up with meaningful keywords, this is often because they don't have a clear view of what they want to achieve. Before you can explore what your audience wants from you, you have to have a clear view of what your company is. This is why the first step of executing proper keyword research is to identify your purpose, or mission.

Example: Yoast's mission

Let's look at an example of a website with a clear mission: Yoast's website! As you can see in Image 1, our mission statement is right next to our logo on the homepage. Our mission is:

“SEO for everyone”

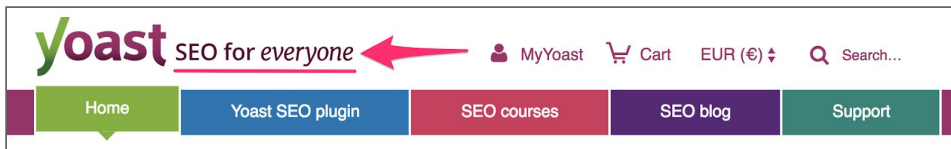


Image 1: Mission statement on yoast.com

We believe the web will benefit from all people having an equal chance in the search results. Great ideas and inventions don't always come from large agencies but are created everywhere around the world. That's why we believe that every idea should have a fair chance in the search results.

All of our products and activities are geared towards achieving that goal. When we decide what we should do, we always consider whether it fits our mission. "SEO for everyone" is why we have plugins that help you rank. "SEO for everyone" is why we have courses where we teach people how to make their site rank in the search results. "SEO for everyone" is why we write a lot of informational blog posts on SEO and related subjects.

Now we know why it's important to have a clear mission, we'll dive into how you should formulate the mission of your website. We'll first explore how to define your purpose, or mission. Then, we'll explain how you can identify your USPs.

Defining your mission

As we've seen, it's very important to formulate a mission for your website. But how do you come up with your mission?

Step 1: Write down your goal

The first step in defining your mission is to write down your most important goal. Take the time to write down the goal of your website. You have to come up with one mission, one message to send to your audience. Once that message is clear to you, you'll be able to communicate it much better to your audience.

Step 2: Consider these questions

To formulate the mission of your website, you should consider the questions listed below. You should be able to answer all of these questions with your mission.

- What can people do with the products or information you're offering on your website?
- What makes your products or ideas unique?
- How will your products/services enhance your clients' lives?
- Why should people buy the products/services on your website and not on another (e.g. cheaper or better known) website? Or why should people read your information and take your advice instead of information on another website?
- What's the reason you're offering these products/services or information, besides making money?

Once you've answered these questions, you should have a pretty clear idea of the purpose of your website. Try to represent this purpose in one clear sentence.

Example: Anna's sustainable leather webshop

Anna has a webshop where she sells products made from sustainable textile, a leather alternative made from pineapple waste. This leather is made from pineapple leaves, which are a byproduct of pineapple farming for consumption. Therefore, the products are a sustainable alternative for real leather products. Her webshop is based in the Netherlands. Anna sells shoes and bags made from pineapple leather. In addition, she also blogs about other sustainable products and sustainability in general.

Anna's mission statement could be something like "improving the world with sustainable fashion".



Image 1: Defining your mission

Identifying your USPs

After you've defined your mission, you're ready to move on to phase two: identifying your unique selling points (USPs). Your USPs are what sets you apart from your competition. It's what makes your company stand out from other companies. It's everything that could motivate a visitor to choose you over someone else. This could be a unique product, your expertise, original writing, competitive prices, great service, anything. If you're not unique, why should people want to find you?

You've already thought about your USPs when preparing your mission statement. In the questions you answered, you thought about what makes your company unique. So, you should consider the answers you came up with and try to identify your USPs.

Example: Anna's sustainable leather webshop

Let's revisit the example we discussed earlier: Anna's sustainable leather webshop. Anna's most important products are the products made from pineapple leather: shoes and bags. But what are her unique selling points? It could be that she has unique knowledge about sustainability and innovative products. Maybe she's the only one in the Netherlands selling these products made from pineapple leather. Or maybe her prices are really competitive. It could just as well be a combination of these! Either way, it's important that Anna thinks about this. She has to know what she has to offer that others don't. Because that's what she should optimize for. Partly because she will

have a better chance to be the best result, partly because there will be fewer competitors.

Try to translate this to your own situation. If you're able identify your unique selling points, you're ready to take the next step in your keyword research: setting up your keyword research sheet.

Setting up your keyword research sheet

If you've determined your mission and your USPs, you're ready to set up your keyword research sheet. We'll briefly explain how to set up a keyword research sheet here. You've already seen how to go about this in more detail in the screencast in this lesson. In this text, we'll take a quick look at the steps you have to take to set up your own keyword research sheet.

Step 1: Define your mission and USPs

We've already seen that the first step of setting up your keyword research sheet is to define your mission and USPs. We've already seen that for Anna and her sustainable leather shop, the mission statement could be something like "improving the world by selling sustainable products and offering information about sustainability". And as we've discussed before, her USPs could be:

- Unique knowledge about sustainability and innovative products
- Unique products made from pineapple leather
- Competitive prices

Of course, there could be a lot more USPs. But for now, we'll focus on these. Write your mission and USP down, and you'll have a start for your keyword research sheet!

Step 2: Think about your site

If you've defined your mission and USPs, you definitely have something you can work with. But this is just the bare minimum. If you maintain a blog or sell products, you can use your main blog categories and your main products or product categories for your keyword sheet as well.

Thinking about these things will help you come up with relevant keywords that fit your business.

For example, Anna could blog about the process of creating pineapple leather, about the ecological advantages of pineapple leather products, about other innovative sustainable products, or about sustainable living in general. She could use these categories to set up her keyword research sheet. In addition, she could optimize her product pages for the various kinds of products made from pineapple leather: shoes, bags, and so on. Thinking about the structure and content of her site will help Anna to come up with relevant keywords.

Conclusion

In this lesson, we took the first step in the process of devising a great keyword strategy. We've discussed the importance of identifying your mission and unique selling points, and we've explained how to determine these things. Then, we took a quick look at the steps you have to take to set up your own keyword research sheet.

Your audience

This lesson is all about your audience. We'll start by explaining how to find your company's niche. Then, we'll explain a few methods of getting to know your audience. Moreover, we'll discuss why it's important to let go of your own perspective and take the perspective of the searcher. We'll also go into the most common mistakes people make when coming up with keywords. As letting go of your own convictions is hard, we'll end this lesson by giving you a couple of tips on how to accomplish that.

Finding your niche

After you've determined your company's mission, you should focus on finding the right niche for your business. We'll first explore what a niche exactly is. Then, we'll discuss how to find your niche.

What is a niche?

A niche is simply a smaller part of a market with specific needs. If you find your niche, you'll have your own little corner of your market that you can dominate. The online dictionary Merriam Webster defines a niche as:

“the situation in which a business's products or services can succeed by being sold to a particular kind or group of people”

If you have found your niche, your products, sales, communication, and marketing can be optimized to target that specific groups' needs and wishes.

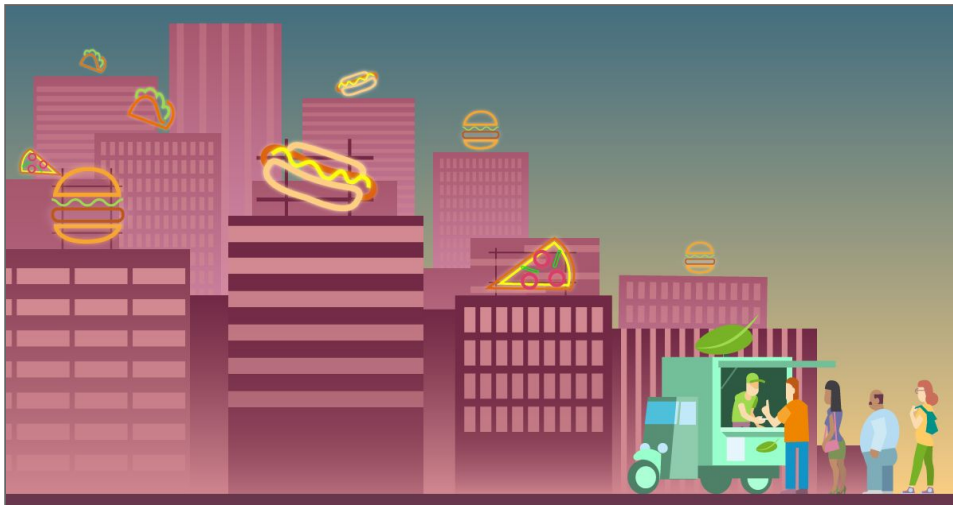


Image 1: Finding your niche

Your niche largely depends on your audience. For some companies, like Facebook and Amazon, almost the entire world is the niche. However, most companies don't have that luxury. Most companies need to carefully consider who and what they are going to target, to maximize their potential. The more you know about the people who might be interested in your product, the easier it will be to optimize your website for them. If you have a rough profile of your audience, it's easier to provide the service they are looking for.

Example: Yoast

At Yoast, we sell our software online. This means we can sell our products all over the world. However, we still carefully consider who would be interested in our products and how we can reach those people. Then, we adapt our SEO to that.

Example: Anna's sustainable leather

Let's revisit the example we discussed in the previous lesson: Anna's webshop where she sells products made from sustainable textile, a leather alternative made from pineapple waste. Just like Yoast, she could sell her products all over the world. However, she has to ship her products, and that can be costly if it's to the other side of the world. That's why it might be most cost-efficient if she chooses to focus on a more local market, for example The Netherlands or Europe. Her niche could be something like "people who are interested in sustainable fashion items and who are living in Europe". However, the niche

for her blog about sustainability could be different, as she could reach people from all over the world with her blog. So, Anna could be active in multiple niches.

The importance of analyzing your audience

Determining your niche is vital for companies. When you know your niche, you can emphasize what makes your brand or products unique, therefore improving your chances to rank well for them. If you know your audience, you can anticipate upon their needs. Knowing the preferences of your public allows you to adapt your marketing and sales strategies. And this in turn can increase your sales.

How do you get to know your audience?

To get to know your audience, it's important to establish what you need to know about them. Do you want to know about the interests of your audience? Or about their age? Their location? Are there any other important factors you'd like to know about? And how will you be able to reach those people?

Once you've determined what you want to know about your audience, it's time to analyze. There are several methods available to help you find out more about your visitors. We've listed the most important ones below.

1. Google Analytics

The best way to start analyzing your audience is by using [Google Analytics](#). Google Analytics will tell you at what time a day your audience is on your site, where they're from (as shown in Image 2), which pages they like most and whether they use a desktop or a mobile device. That's all valuable and usable information.

You should closely monitor which pages and blog posts generate a lot of traffic and investigate possible patterns. Perhaps posts about a certain topic generate a lot of traffic, while posts about other topics don't get many visitors. You could use this information when choosing the topic of your next blog post.

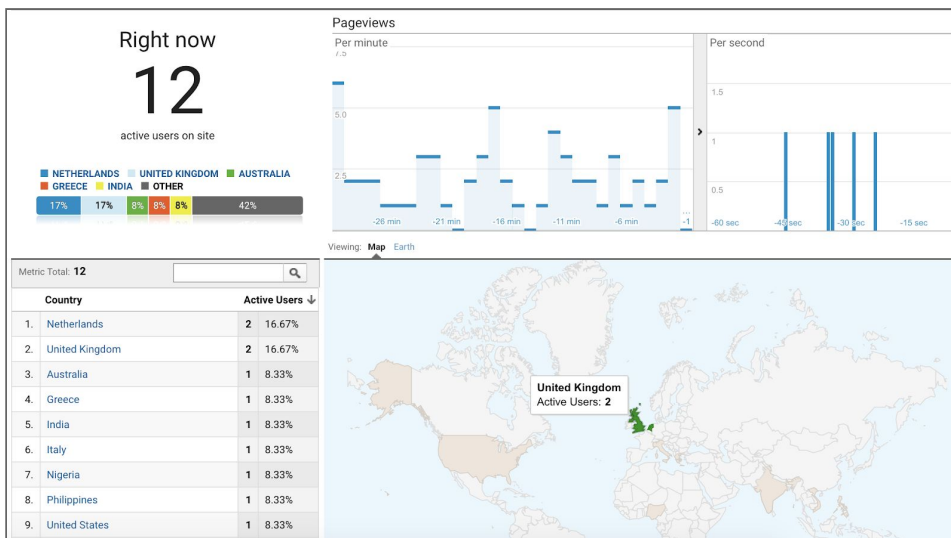


Image 2: Analyzing the location of your audience in Google Analytics

2. Facebook Insights

Where Google Analytics provides you with information about the visitors on your website, [Facebook Insights](#) can tell you a lot about the people you reach on Facebook. With Facebook Insights, you can check which posts get many views and which posts don't get attention from your audience. You can experiment buying ads on Facebook as well.

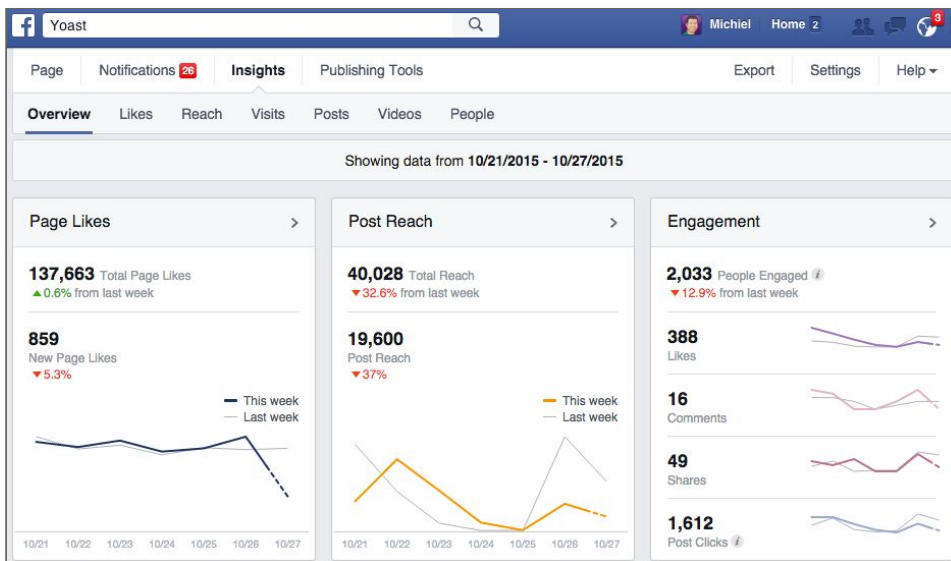


Image 3: Facebook Insights

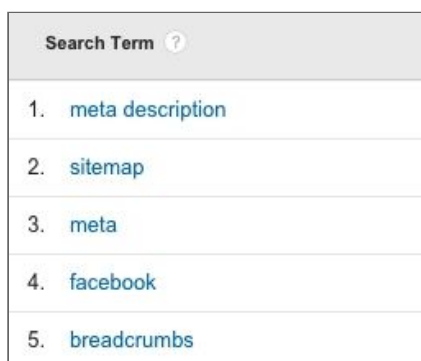
Other social media platforms have analytics too. There's [Instagram Analytics](#), [YouTube Analytics](#), [Twitter Analytics](#), and [Pinterest Analytics](#).

We recommend you to monitor the analytics of the channels you use on a regular basis.

3. Your site's internal search function

Another great tactic to find out more about your audience is to look at what people search for in your site's [internal search function](#). What search terms do they use? This represents what people are looking for on your site. There could be things people want to know or buy that aren't on your radar yet, so this is valuable data.

You can find all the keywords people have used in the internal search option on your website in [Google Analytics](#) (Behavior > Site Search > Search Terms). Image 4 shows you an example of what people search for in the internal search function of yoast.com in Google Analytics.



Search Term ?
1. meta description
2. sitemap
3. meta
4. facebook
5. breadcrumbs

Image 4: Internal search results in Google Analytics

4. Comments

You can draw similar conclusions from looking at the comments people post below your blog posts. By analyzing the comments, you can find out what kind of people form your audience, and what they are saying about you or about your post. Which aspects of your blog are they talking about in their comments? Which topics are so important to them, that they are willing to engage?

Example: Yoast

At Yoast, we regularly get ideas for content and services by addressing issues users raise in the comments. For example, Image 5 shows a question asked in a comment on our article on multilingual SEO. After reading this article on how to deal with different language variations on your site, Sam wondered what you should do when you have sites for different variations within the same language. Answering this question could be a great idea for a new article on yoast.com.

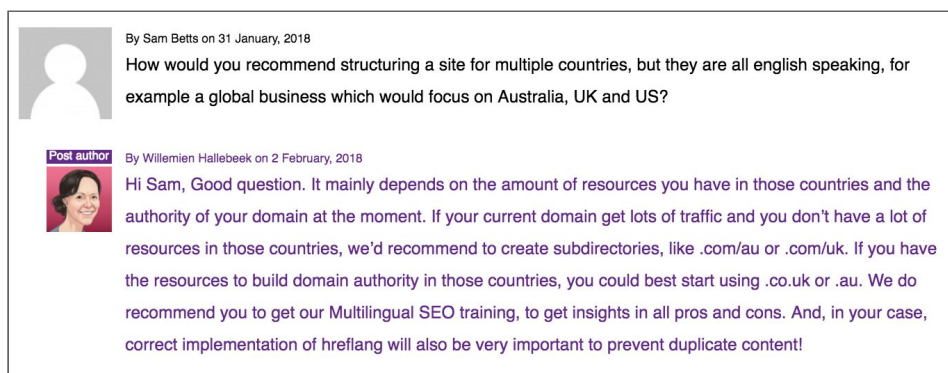


Image 5: Question in a comment on an article on yoast.com

5. Talking to your audience

Reaching out to your audience directly is also a great way to find out more about them. You could make a survey, or talk to your visitors directly. There may well be interesting conferences or shows in your field, where you can meet a lot of potential visitors and customers. If you talk to them, you could get a feel for what they need and value. Ask them what they like best about your website, your products, or your blog posts. Ask them why they come back to your website. Invite them to talk about their experience on your site (and don't be scared of some criticism).

Be wary though: none of these methods are reliable enough on their own. Some people are more likely to fill out a survey, other people will visit events. And these groups often have different preferences. You really need a combination of all of these tactics to be able to get a realistic view of your audience.

Your niche can evolve

One last thing about niches: they can evolve. If your company starts growing, your niche will grow along with it. Maybe you'll even be able to branch out into other niches within your market. During that process, always stay aware of your place within the market and your audience. This will help you serve your audience as best as you can.

Taking the perspective of the searcher

Once you've found your niche, you can start coming up with keywords you think your audience will enter into the search bar to find you. However, don't just start making a list without giving it any thought. Before you start thinking of words, try to stop thinking from your own perspective. You have to take the perspective of the searchers, because they are the ones typing the search terms into Google, not you. What words do *they* use to find you? The way *you* think about your content and products is irrelevant when it comes to creating a keyword list.

Example: Yoast

As we've told you in the first module of this course, we think of our courses platform as "Yoast Academy". However, after analyzing our audience we found out that our searchers are much more likely to search for "Yoast courses". That's why we optimize for that. We let go of our own terms in favor of the terms our audience uses.

Common mistakes when coming up with keywords

There are a couple of mistakes people tend to make when creating their keyword list. We'll explore some of them below.

Focusing on your product, not the solution

The first mistake people tend to make is being too focused on the features of the product they sell, rather than considering what solutions customers are looking for. For example, if someone is looking for a new smartphone, they'll be much more likely to google the terms listed in the first column than the second column of Table 1.

Focus on solution	Focus on product's features
smartphone with large and bright screen	smartphone with 5.8-inch AMOLED screen with a 2960 x 1440 resolution
fast smartphone	smartphone with Snapdragon 845 processor
smartphone with great selfie camera	smartphone with 8 megapixels AF sensor 1/3.6 inch

Table 1: Focus on solution vs. focus on product features

Using technical terms or jargon

A similar problem is using technical terms or jargon. These are often not the best keywords. Let's go back to the example of Anna and her sustainable leather shop.

Example: Anna's sustainable leather

As an expert on these products, Anna may think the keyword "pineapple fabric shoes" fits her topic best. But most people don't think like that. Most people will search for "natural leather shoes" or "vegan leather shoes", as Image 6 shows. Searchers often aren't even aware of very specific terms. Of course, this depends on the audience you're trying to target and the niche you're in.

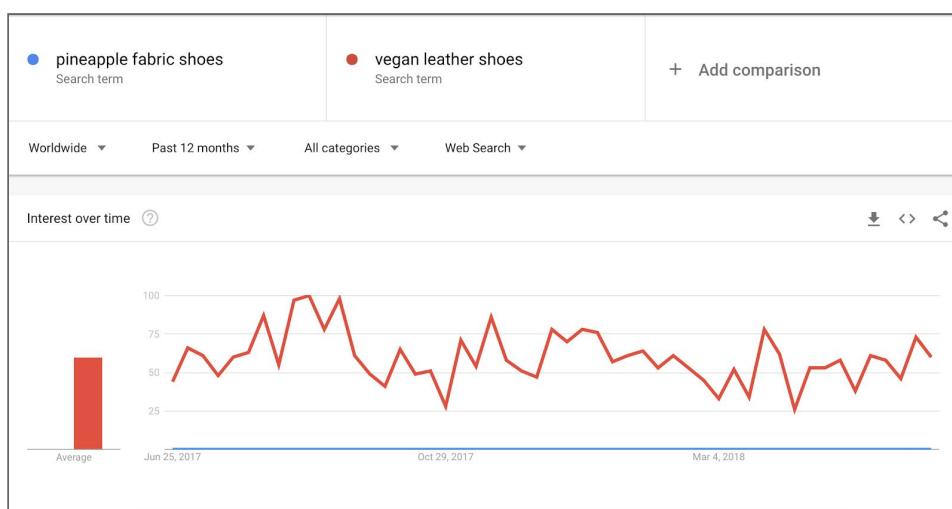


Image 6: Comparing interest for “pineapple fabric shoes” and “vegan leather shoes” in Google Trends

Using generic keywords

Another problem is using generic keywords that don’t match the needs of your audience.

Example: Yoast

At Yoast, we once saw a keyword list with several variations of “content to learn languages in Dutch”. However, a keyphrase like that is much too vague, and people won’t search for that. Searchers don’t want to learn “languages”, they want to learn a specific language, like English or Spanish. Moreover, they are usually not looking for “content”, they are looking for videos, a book or a course. A more viable alternative would be “videos for learning Spanish in Dutch”.

Another example of this, is someone who used the keywords “grow” and “growth” in his keyword list. On his website, he presented methods to grow a business, but he was obviously not optimizing for the right keywords. The words “grow” and “growth” can be used in a lot of different contexts. Therefore, the chance that people will find what they’re looking for after landing on that page when searching for these keywords is very small. They could just as well be looking for information on how to grow plants.

Using search terms users will never use

The last common problem we’ll discuss is using certain search terms which users will simply never use to find the content you have to offer. We once saw someone with the keyphrase “nothing happens without imagination” in their keyword list. Although they may well rank for that keyword, as there’s not going to be much competition for it, no one is going to search for that term. And if someone searches for that term, the chance that the searcher has the same thing in mind as the creator of that page is very small.

Tips for coming up with good keywords

Letting go of your own perspective and convictions is really hard. Therefore, up next, we'll discuss a few tips for coming up with good keywords. Let's assume that you aren't ranking for any keywords and you don't have a big audience which you can analyze yet. What can you do to take the perspective of your audience?

Ask outsiders

The first thing you could do is ask outsiders what words they would use to describe your product. In addition, you could ask them what words they would use to find you. It's best to ask people who would actually be interested in your content or product. You could reach out to people on forums, social media, or in real life. You could also use your internal search function for this, if that provides enough data.

Try to get into the heads of your audience

If you can't reach enough data, you can also try to come up with these words yourself. Try to get into the heads of your audience and make a list of questions your audience could have about your website or product. These questions can be keywords as well.

Use tools

There are a few tools available for coming up with keywords as well. We'll discuss a few of them.

- **Answerthepublic.com**

A handy tool that can help you is [Answerthepublic.com](https://www.answerthepublic.com). When you enter a term, this tool uses the auto suggest results provided by Google and Bing to make a list of questions people search for concerning that term. For example, if Anna searches for “vegan leather” on Answerthepublic.com, the results will show over fifty questions that people have asked the search engines about vegan leather. A selection of these questions is shown in Image 7. These questions could be excellent long tail keywords to optimize a page for!

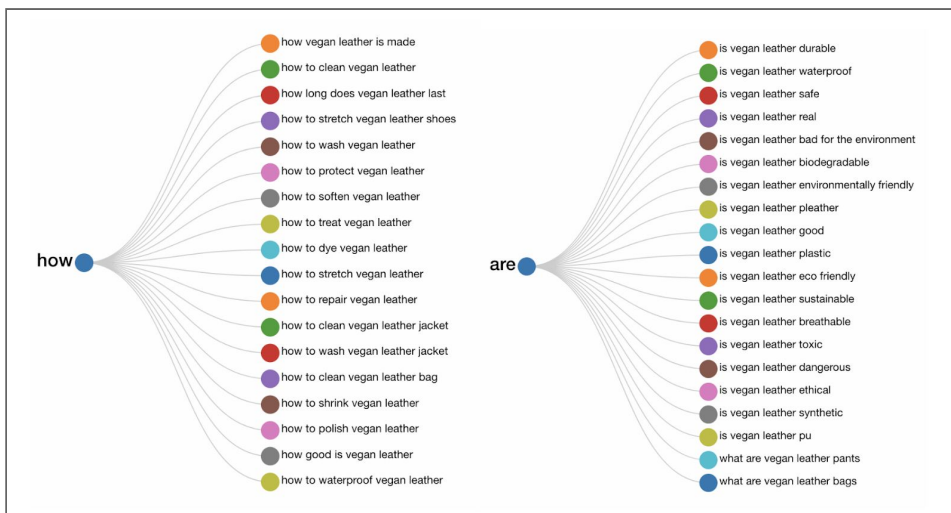


Image 7: Part of the list of questions when searching for “vegan leather” on Answerthepublic.com

- **Yoast Suggest**

Another tool you could use is [Yoast Suggest](#). You can use our Yoast Suggest tool to find out more about the search terms people type into Google. This tool also uses the Google suggest data, the words that Google automatically suggests when you’re typing in a query. When you enter a keyword, it will expand the keywords the way Google would show keyword suggestions. If Anna types in “vegan leather” in Yoast Suggest, she’ll see lots of suggestions for queries people have used when looking for vegan leather products (Image 8). This is a great way of coming up with new keywords!

<i>vegan leather b</i>	
	vegan leather bags
	vegan leather backpack
	vegan leather boots
	vegan leather belt
	vegan leather backpack purse
	vegan leather by the yard
	vegan leather briefcase
	vegan leather boots mens
	vegan leather booties
	vegan leather biker jacket

Image 8: Part of the Yoast Suggest results when searching for “vegan leather”

- **Google Ads Keyword Planner**

The last helpful tool we’ll discuss is the [Google Ads Keyword Planner](#) (yes, Google AdWords has a new name!). It’s also possible to use this tool to find new and related keywords. However, you should ignore the search volume data! The search volume data in the planner is really only useful for keywords that you’re actually spending money to advertise on. Otherwise, these volumes are not reliable. While not really helpful to decide which keyword is most used by your potential audience, Google Ads Keyword Planner makes a useful tool in coming up with ideas for potential keywords.

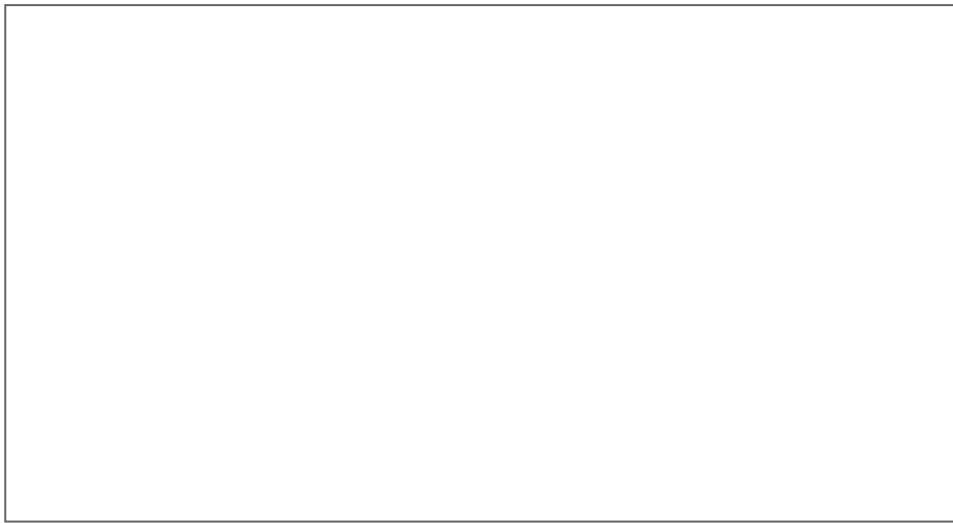


Image 9: Keywords in Google Ads

Research the words your competitors use

Finally, you should consider researching what words your competitors use, as well. Which keywords seem to work? And which don't? Of course, you have to make sure to separate yourself from your competition by being unique, but there's no harm in analyzing what they do well.

Conclusion

In this lesson, we've discussed the importance of finding out who your audience is. We've explained how to find your niche, a smaller part of a market with specific needs, and how to get to know your audience. Moreover, we've seen that before you start trying to come up with keywords, you have to try to throw your own perspective out of the window. Think about the searcher. If the searcher wants to find something, what words is he or she going to use to achieve that? Those are the words you should add to your keyword list.

Drafting your keyword list

In the previous lessons, we've discussed how to set up your keyword research sheet and how to find your niche. Now, it's time to go draft your keyword list. In this lesson, we'll discuss a few handy tools you can use to come up with keywords. In addition, we'll dive a bit deeper into the different kinds of keywords.

Coming up with keywords

In one of the previous lessons, you've set up the basis of your keyword research sheet. If your mission and USPs are clear, you'll have a clear idea of the most important terms you want to be found for. But now, it's time to come up with actual keywords! Luckily, there are some tools that can help you with this step.

Google search results

The first thing you can do is use Google search itself. Just type in a word you think would be a good keyword and suggestions for related queries will automatically show up. For example, if you type in “sustainable products”, terms like “sustainable products for restaurants” and “sustainable products blog” will automatically show up, as shown in Image 1.

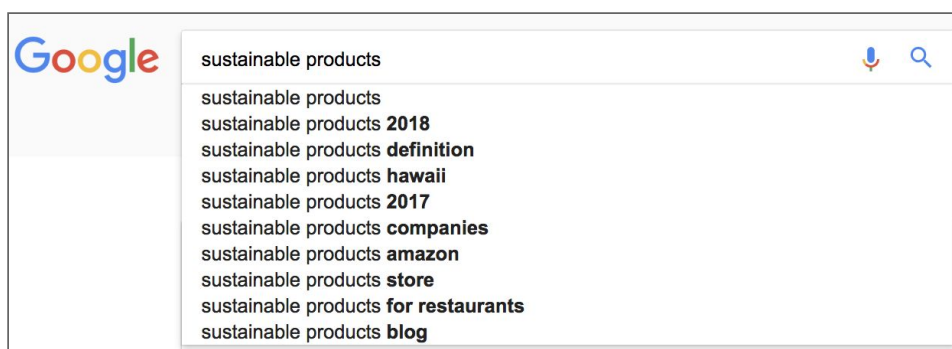


Image 1: Suggestions by Google when searching for “sustainable products”

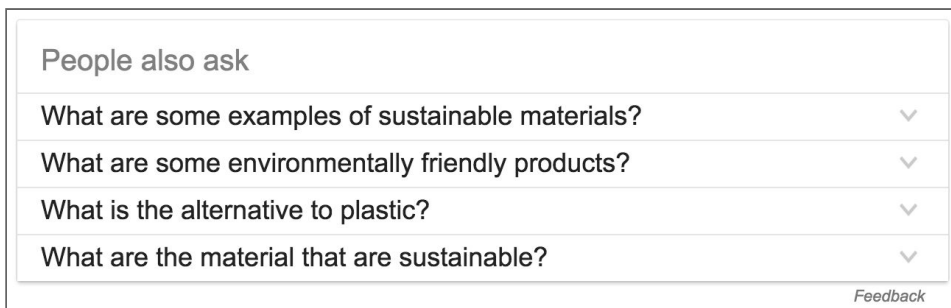


Image 2: Answer box in the search results when searching for “sustainable products”

You can also try to google a term and see if answer boxes show up. Answer boxes are search results that display questions related to the search query. In this case, the answer box shown in Image 2 is displayed in the search results.

You can click the question to see what Google considers the best answer. If you think you can provide a better answer to the question than the current result, consider optimizing for that entire question as a keyword.

Lastly, related search results are often displayed at the bottom of a search results page. An example of this is shown in Image 3. These can be used to come up with keywords as well. Of course, these are probably terms that your competitors optimize for as well, so see it as the start of your keyword research.

Searches related to sustainable products	
sustainable products 2017	eco friendly products project
sustainable products list	eco friendly products for the home
sustainable products examples	list of eco friendly products
sustainable products 2018	eco friendly products in india

Image 3: Related search results for the query “sustainable products”

Yoast Suggest

We’ve developed our own keyword research tool to come up with keywords as well. [Yoast Suggest](#) uses the Google Suggest functionality you know from searching in Google. It finds the keyword expansions Google gives and then requests more of them. This is a great way to quickly find more long tail keywords you can focus on. Yoast Suggest gives you suggestions for every letter of the alphabet. Image 4 shows an example of the results of Yoast Suggest when searching for “sustainable products”.

<i>sustainable products a</i>	
	sustainable products amazon
	sustainable products australia
	sustainable products and services
	sustainable products app
	sustainable products and consumer demand
	sustainable products and processes
	sustainable products and practices
	sustainable products awards
	sustainable products and consumption
	sustainable products adidas

Image 4: Part of the Yoast Suggest results when searching for “sustainable products”

Google Trends

[Google Trends](#) allows you to compare the traffic for sets of keywords. It compares the search volume between search terms over a certain time. This will give some insight into the volume of the search terms people use, relative to other terms. Google Trends also shows related queries.

Example: Anna's sustainable leather

For example, if Anna wants to know if she should try to rank for “sustainable products” or “eco-friendly products”, she could compare these two keywords in Google Trends. The results in Image 5 show that there's a greater interest in “sustainable products”, meaning more people search for that keyword in comparison with “eco-friendly products”. However, if we add “eco friendly products” (without hyphen) to the comparison, the results change. Apparently, people search for “eco friendly products” (without hyphen) more often than for “eco-friendly products” (with hyphen). And now, it's clear that there's a greater interest in the keyword “eco friendly products” than in “sustainable products”. So, if we assume that both keywords have a similar amount of competition, Anna should optimize for the keyword “eco friendly products”.

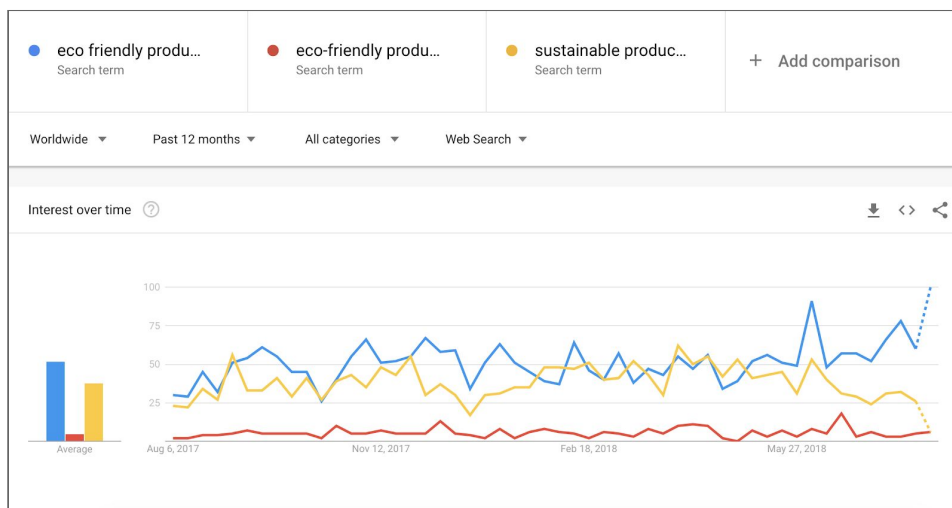


Image 5: Example of a Google Trends comparison between the keywords “eco friendly products”, “eco-friendly products”, and “sustainable products”

Google Ads Keyword Planner

You can also use the [Google Ads Keyword Planner](#) to find new and related keywords. However, you should ignore the search volume data because this is really only useful for keywords that you're actually spending money to advertise on.

Your internal search results

What are people searching for on your site? These terms are keywords in the vocabulary of your actual audience and should definitely be added to your keyword list. You can look into your site's internal search results in Google Analytics, at Behaviour → Site Search → Search Terms.

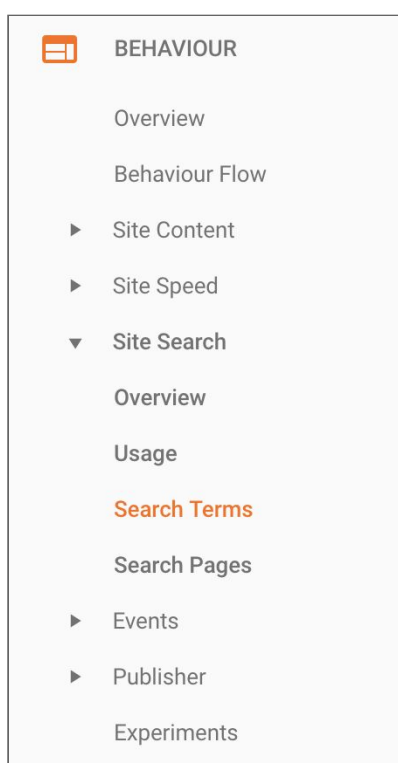


Image 6: How to find your site's internal search results in Google Analytics

Going down the tail

In the introductory module of this course, we touched on the different kinds of keywords. We introduced head keywords, mid tail keywords, and long tail keywords, and we explained head keywords are generally short and generic and long tail keywords are long and specific. We mentioned

that you should generally aim to rank for long tail keywords when you're starting out. To be fair, it's a bit more nuanced than that. That's why we're going to dive into these different kinds of keywords a bit deeper and explore that nuance.



Image 7: Long tail keywords

History of long tail keywords

To really understand the notion of long tail keywords, it's good to know more about the history of the term. The term "long tail", when it comes to marketing, was first used by Chris Anderson in a Wired Magazine article, published in October 2004. According to Anderson's theory of the long tail, our culture and economy are shifting away from a focus on mainstream products and markets toward a huge number of niches (in the tail). Simply put, this means people want less and less one-size-fits-all products, and more and more narrowly-targeted goods and services.

This can also be applied to keyword strategy. With his theory, he showed that there is a market for every product. Sure, we mostly notice the big hits, but there are a lot of opportunities in more niche areas as well. There's great value in finding a smaller market which you can dominate. It's easy to apply this idea to a keyword strategy, as keyword research is all about looking for realistic opportunities.

Look for realistic opportunities

Image 8 shows what we described in the previous paragraph. The head of the mouse represents short keywords, which are generally searched for most often. An example of these short keywords could be a keyword like “book”. These keywords are more likely to have more competition. The further you go down the tail, the more specific keywords become. At the end of the tail, there could be a keyword like “children’s book about cultural identity”, which is very specific. There could be a lot of words in between this head keyword and the long tail keyword.

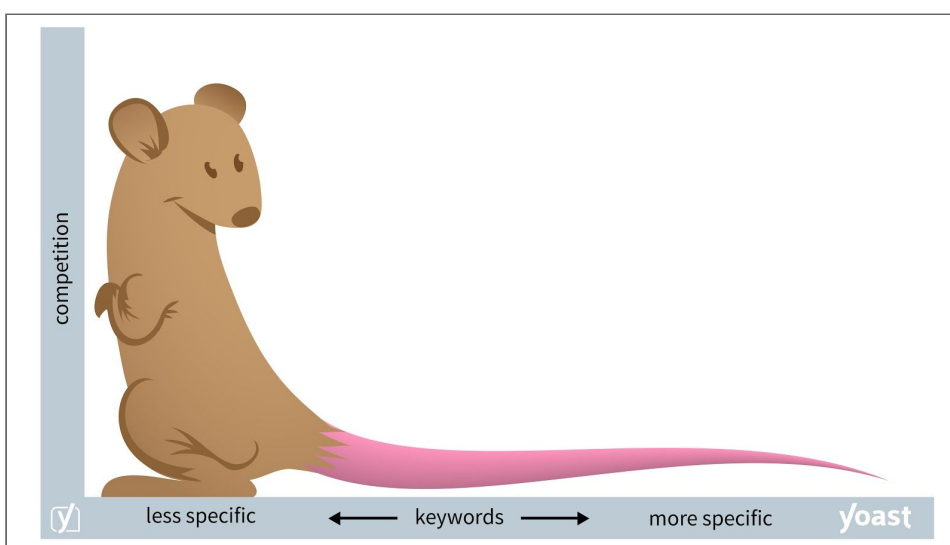


Image 8: Less specific (head) keywords vs. more specific (long tail) keywords

As you can see, talking about head, mid and long tail keywords is a bit of an oversimplification. Keywords can fall anywhere on the tail, there are no fixed points. But it’s quite difficult to reflect this accurately in your keyword research strategy. That’s why it can be useful to divide your keywords into categories. Because it’s useful to think about your keyword length, we’ve chosen to use three categories:

- **head keywords**
- **mid tail keywords**
- **long tail keywords**

Please note that keywords can consist of several words as well, even head keywords. For example, “nuclear power plant” could be a head term,

where – for a different company – a mid tail term could be something like “ballet shoes”. Everything we’re teaching you is relative to your market and product.

Example: Record shop

Let’s illustrate this with an example: Lisa just opened a record shop in London. As there are quite a few record shops in London, Lisa decided to add something unique to her shop. In her record shop, visitors can buy records, but they can also sit down and have a drink, as it’s a cafe as well. She wants music lovers from London to be able to find her shop.

While her head keyword may be “record shop London”, there will probably be too much competition for this term to rank high. A quick Google search shows that there are over 400 million results and the first page is almost completely filled with big sites that list the best record shops in London. Therefore, she should forget about ranking for her head keyword for the foreseeable future.

What other options are there? Lisa could try to add her unique selling point to her keyword. If she tries “record shop cafe London”, the results show “only” 23 million results and there are shops similar to hers showing up on the first page. The competition is already a little less stiff, but she’s still going to have a hard time ranking. This may be a better keyword to keep in mind for when she’s built her brand a bit.

To be found right now, she has to offer something really unique. Let’s say Lisa’s shop sells a very special collection of punk rock vinyl records. She could optimize for that with a keyword like “record shop cafe london punk rock vinyl collection”. Now that’s a long tail keyword! With some good SEO efforts, ranking top 3 for this term should not be hard at all. Although Lisa will reach a smaller amount of music lovers, she will be able to be the best result for the specific group that is looking for exactly what she has to offer.

Different markets require different strategies

Keep in mind that different markets require different strategies. In some markets, head keywords might be within reach for you. For example, when you own a record shop in a small town, like Rye, in England. With

some smart SEO, it wouldn't be a stretch to think you could rank for "record shop Rye".

It's very important to do proper research to determine what keywords are realistic targets. We've already discussed some of the factors you have to take into account here: your mission, your audience, and your competition.

In addition, it's worth considering that, even though long tail keywords have smaller audiences, there are often many more long tail keywords than head keywords. That means that, if you can compete and rank for *lots* of long tail keywords – which are typically less competitive – you might do better overall than if you'd chased after the competitive head terms.

Drafting your keyword list

Now, it's time to go draft your keyword list! In the screencast in this lesson called "Drafting your keyword list", we show exactly how you go about creating a keyword research sheet. So, if you haven't watched the screencast yet, we highly recommend you to do that now.

Conclusion

This lesson was all about drafting your own keyword list. We've explained which tools you could use to come up with keywords. We've discussed Google search, Yoast Suggest, Google Trends, Google Ads Keyword Planner, and your internal search results. Moreover, we've explored the difference between head, mid tail, and long tail keywords in more detail. Up next is your site's potential traffic and conversion.

Traffic potential

This lesson is all about the traffic potential of your keywords. We'll discuss what traffic potential entails, and we'll look at several ways to determine the traffic potential of your keywords: using Google Ads, Google Trends, and Google Analytics.

Researching traffic potential

In the previous modules, we took the first steps of keyword research. We thought about our mission, and we researched our audience. Then, we came up with various keywords and drafted our keyword list. However, there's still a lot of work to do. We'll start by researching traffic potential.

What is traffic potential?

To research traffic potential is to look at what words are searched for most in your market. It's important to keep in mind that it has nothing to do with whether people will actually reach your page. If you have a website where you sell shoes, the keyword "shoes" has a sky-high traffic potential because a lot of people search for that term. However, the chance that people will reach your site through that search term may be a lot lower, because there are a lot of competitors. A keyword like "silver ballet shoes for toddlers" will have a lower traffic potential but there will be less competition as well. So, traffic potential gauges the potential market *if* you could rank for that keyword.

Scoring traffic potential

We measure the traffic potential on a scale from 1 to 10, where:

- a score of "1" means almost no one will search for that term;
- a score of "10" means that it's one of the most popular terms within your market.

After you've done your research, you have to estimate these scores yourself, based on the results of your research efforts. The traffic potential scores are always relative to your market. So, the keyword "shoes" may have scored a 9 for the website selling shoes we discussed earlier, while it scores a 3 for a blog discussing the latest fashion trends. However, low traffic potential values don't necessarily mean that you shouldn't optimize for a keyword. We've already seen that chasing long tail keywords can be a great strategy, even though their traffic potentials are quite low. But traffic potential is still very important because it's important to know what words people search for. That's why traffic potential should be one of the variables you take into account when choosing what keywords you want to try to rank for. We'll explain the other variables in the following modules.

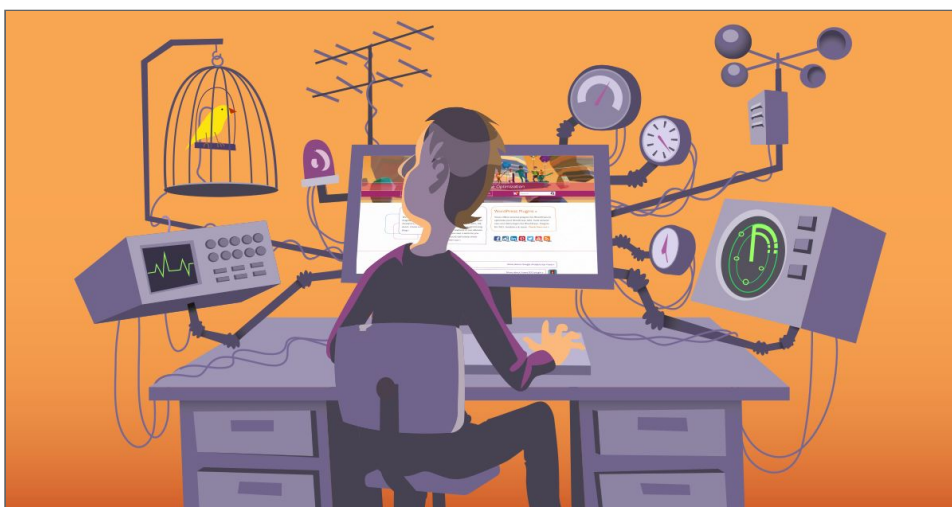


Image 1: Researching traffic potential

Determining traffic potential

Now we know why it's important to analyze the traffic potential of your keywords, let's dive into *how* you can do this. It isn't easy, because search volume data aren't openly available. Moreover, Google has made it increasingly difficult. But there are a couple of ways that allow you to estimate how frequently terms are used. We'll discuss a few of these methods below.

Method 1: Google Ads

The first method is to use Google Ads and bid on the search term of your choice. If you bid on a term, you are provided with more accurate data.

However, this is quite expensive, especially when you have to do this for a lot of keywords. At Yoast, we don't do this very often ourselves.

Method 2: Google Trends

Secondly, you can discover how often search terms are used relative to each other, using Google Trends. With Google Trends you can compare the search frequency of two to five terms at once. Keep in mind that these aren't absolute search volumes but relative search volumes. This means that you can see how often a search term is used compared to another search term.

With Google Trends, you can even see the difference between numerous geographical regions and between different times of the year. It's very important to check Google Trends if you expect that some of your keywords are seasonal, for instance, due to regulations or holiday seasons.

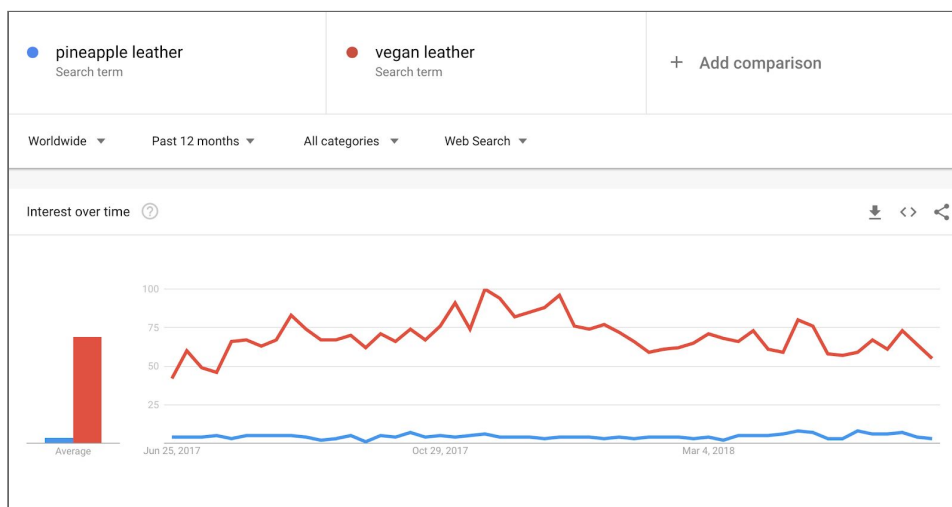


Image 2: Comparing terms in Google Trends

For example, if Anna was researching which word she should optimize her webshop for, she could compare the terms “pineapple leather” with “vegan leather”. As you can see in Image 2, “vegan leather” is searched for much more frequently. However, this doesn't necessarily mean Anna should optimize for “vegan leather” because competition is probably much stiffer for that search term. Determining which keyword you should optimize for means weighing several variables.

The only problem with Google Trends is that some keywords have too little search data. In this case, Google Trends will simply not be able to help you. This happens quite a lot for long tail keywords. Luckily, there is another method to help you out.

Method 3: Google Analytics

The last method we'll discuss here is using Google Analytics to analyze the data your own site provides you with. You can [use Google Analytics to check the number of times each page has been visited](#). To see this data, go to:

Behavior > Site Content > All Pages

Here, you'll see your site's top 10 pages, ranked on the number of page views. If you have a specific page you want to look at, you can simply fill in the URL (without the domain name) in the search bar. Then, you'll be able to see that page's data. However, these are still page views from all sources, not just traffic coming from search engines. To find traffic originating exclusively from search engines, there are two ways to go:

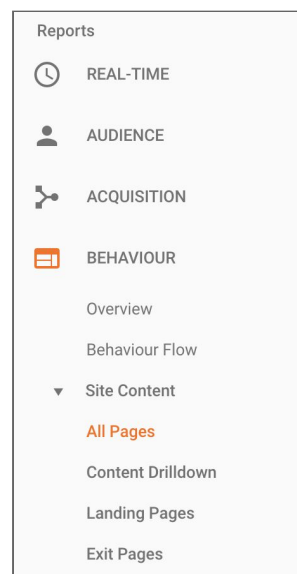


Image 3: Google Analytics menu

1. Filter data

The first way is via filtering the data in the table. To filter the data, click the *Secondary dimension* drop-down menu and click *Acquisition > Medium*. Additionally, you can click *Source/Medium* if you want to specify per search engine.

Page	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Entrances	Bounce Rate	% Exit	Page Value
	13,025 % of Total: 1.81% (720,229)	11,681 % of Total: 1.86% (628,293)	00:01:40 Site Avg: 00:02:14 (-25.65%)	5,558 % of Total: 1.30% (427,876)	74.06% Site Avg: 72.48% (2.17%)	52.78% Site Avg: 59.41% (-11.15%)	\$1.99 % of Total: 235.76% (89.84)
1. /hir	13,025(100.00%)	11,681(100.00%)	00:01:40	5,558(100.00%)	74.06%	52.78%	\$1.99(100.00%)

Image 4: Find data from search engines via filtering

2. Create a segment

The second way is through [creating a segment](#) that only includes “Organic traffic”. There’s a ready-made segment called “Organic traffic” already available in Google Analytics. To add a segment, click *Add Segment* at the top of the page in any view from Audience down to Conversions. Choose that segment from the list, and voila, you’ll only see traffic coming from search engines.

Overview SAVE

All Users
100.00% Page Views

+ Add Segment

Overview

+ NEW SEGMENT Import from gallery Share segments View Search segments

VIEW SEGMENTS	Segment Name	Created	Modified	Actions
All	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ New Users			Actions
System	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ Non-bounce Sessions			Actions
Custom	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ Non-Converters			Actions
Shared	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ Organic Traffic			Actions
Starred	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ Paid Traffic			Actions
Selected	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ Performed Site Search			Actions
	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ Referral Traffic			Actions
	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ Returning Users			Actions
	<input type="checkbox"/> ☆ Search Traffic			Actions

Apply Cancel

Image 5: Find data from search engines via segments

Conclusion

We've seen that researching traffic potential means looking at what words are searched for most. Traffic potential gauges the potential market *if* you could rank for that keyword. Moreover, we've discussed several ways that allow you to estimate how frequently terms are used. We've explained how to determine the traffic potential of your keywords using Google Ads, Google Trends, and Google Analytics.



Conversion

In the previous lesson, we discussed the first variable that you should take into account when executing your keyword research: traffic potential. In this lesson, we'll discuss the second important variable: the chance to convert. How likely is it that someone who visits a page actually performs the action you want them to take on that page? We'll explain what conversion entails and what makes a page likely to convert well. Then, we'll discuss how conversion ties into your keyword strategy.

What is conversion?

Conversion is often associated with a sale, but in online marketing, defining conversion as just that is too narrow. Conversion, the way we define it, happens every time a visitor completes a desired action on your website. That could be a click-through to the next page, if that is your main goal on a certain page. But it could also be a user subscribing to a newsletter. And it could be a visitor buying your product. It can be anything that fits your business. In short: conversion happens when someone completes the action you want them to complete.

Let's say you have an online shop. In that case, your most important conversion is turning visitors into customers. You want to make sure they buy a product. However, if you're a real estate agent, your most important conversion will probably be a visitor contacting you after seeing one of your listings. And if you're a psychologist with a website where people can make an online appointment, that would be a conversion, too. There are lots of different types of websites, so you need to determine what you define as conversions for your pages yourself.

What makes a page likely to convert well?

There are a lot of factors that make a page likely to convert well. Addressing every single one of them is beyond the scope of this course, so we'll focus on the most important aspect: creating user-centric pages.

Sell the way people want to buy

The most important factor for converting well is to create user-centric pages. If you want to convert your visitor based on your own perspective on your product, you may turn visitors off. You have to do the exact opposite thing. You have to look at things from the perspective of your user. You shouldn't sell the way you want to sell, but sell the way people want to buy.

Example: Headphones

Let's consider an example. You're doing some research on new headphones. You discover two companies selling headphones:

Company A: *"Our headphones have noise-canceling, high impedance, and dynamic drivers."*

Company B: *"With our headphones, you'll never be bothered by noises around you. Your music will sound exciting, like you're listening to it live! You'll hear the deepest and clearest bass sounds you've ever heard!"*

Which would you choose? Which description sounds more tempting? Most people would probably go for company B, because they offer exactly what people are looking for. Here's the catch: both companies are saying the exact same things! Company B was just much better at identifying what its customers can relate to.

This is true for a lot of things. Users decide if they want our products, they decide to subscribe to a newsletter or not, they decide to fill out your form or not. So in that sense, conversion is very much user-centric. Conversion is about making your visitors happy.



Image 1: Conversion

Conversion and keyword strategy

We've discussed the definition of conversion, but how does conversion tie into your keyword strategy? It ties into your keyword strategy in two ways. First of all, certain types of keywords are more likely to convert than others. Secondly, conversion is one of the variables which you should take into account when deciding whether you should try to rank for a keyword. Let's take a closer look at these two ways.

Types of keywords and conversion

There are certain types of keywords that are more likely to convert than others. The best way to explain this is to take a look at a practical example. Consider the following three keywords:

1. ballet shoes
2. pink ballet shoes
3. buy pink ballet shoes for toddlers

To determine which one of these keywords is most likely to convert, try to take the perspective of the searcher. What is the searcher most likely to be looking for or to do when entering those queries? Let's consider this for the keywords mentioned earlier.

1. **ballet shoes**

Not everyone using the query “ballet shoes” will be looking to buy ballet shoes right away. People might just be looking for more information about ballet shoes. There are all kinds of reasons people could be googling “ballet shoes”. This is almost always the case for very broad terms like this one. A quick look at the search results for this query shows, next to sites selling ballet shoes, information about preparing ballet shoes, picking the right ballet shoes, and information on a movie called “Ballet Shoes”.

2. **pink ballet shoes**

People searching for “pink ballet shoes” are already more likely to convert. These people are searching for ballet shoes in a specific color, so it’s much more likely they actually want to buy a pair.

3. **buy pink ballet shoes for toddlers**

The keyword “buy pink ballet shoes for toddlers” is even more extreme. When someone searches for this keyword, they explicitly state their intention to buy pink ballet shoes (specifically for toddlers). Once someone who has entered that search term lands on a well-optimized page, the chance of conversion is sky-high!

Although the conversion rate for the third keyword is highest, you shouldn’t overestimate it either. People can change their mind, or maybe they want to visit several different websites to find the best deal. There could be all kinds of different reasons. Even for the most successful pages, conversion rates are very low. The average landing page across industries has a conversion rate of less than 2,5%.

Conversion and choosing keywords

The most important thing to consider here is the search intent of a searcher: what is the searcher looking for when entering a search query? Obviously, someone looking to buy is much more likely to buy than someone who’s just looking for information. You can’t really influence

that. We'll dive into the different types of search intent when we look at creating landing pages.

What other conclusions can we draw? There's a useful rule of thumb we can identify regarding keywords:

The more specific the search term, the better your chances to convert.

We've already seen that the longer the keyword you're optimizing for, the fewer competitors you'll have. So, it's much easier to rank for long tail keywords than for more generic head keywords. This means focusing on a lot of long tail keywords could generate lots of traffic to your website. But long tail keywords are also generally more likely to lead to sales or other types of conversion. This is because they usually focus more on a specific product or topic. So, conversion is definitely one of the variables which you should take into account when deciding whether you should try to rank for a keyword.

This rule doesn't always apply, though. If someone searches for "ways to tie ballet shoes", that person is much less likely to convert for ballet shoes than someone simply searching for "ballet shoes". Moreover, this rule of thumb is only applicable when every other factor is the same between the pages you're comparing. A product page optimized for a head keyword may have a much better chance to convert than a blog post optimized for a long tail keyword, for example.



Image 2: Long tail keywords

Applying conversion principles to your keyword strategy

How do you apply everything we've seen in this module to your keyword strategy? We've already determined that the chance to convert is one of the factors that you should take into account when deciding what pages you want to optimize for and pay the most attention to.

If you're selling products, your product landing pages have by far the highest chances to convert and are very important pages on your website. If people are searching for a certain product, you almost always want your visitors to land on a product page. However, this isn't the only way to drive sales. Depending on the search intent of your user, there are other ways of convincing your visitors to buy your products than just pulling your visitors into your product pages from the search results like a spider catches flies.

When people are searching with an informational intent, it's fine for them to land on blog posts or informational pages. If you do a good job there, you can funnel your visitors to your product pages later. Not to mention the fact that other types of conversion may also be able to secure sales in the long run. For example, a newsletter subscription may be very important for your long-term traffic and customer retention. This tactic will lead to lower conversion rates, but a smart application of both approaches may increase your total sales. Moreover, not every visit to

your website has to result in a sale. Sometimes providing great information and a good experience is exactly what you want to do.

Don't forget, your SEO strategy should be holistic. Just make sure you have a good idea of how each page stacks up conversion-wise. The best keyword strategy is made by researching every factor and making smart choices based on that research.

Example: Anna's sustainable leather

Let's go back to the example we introduced in a previous module: Anna and her sustainable leather webshop. She could create a page with information on vegan alternatives for leather. Or she could create a page where she tells all about the process of creating pineapple leather. If she adds links from these information pages to her product pages, people who are just looking for information on these subjects could eventually end up on her product pages. If she adds a clear newsletter subscription button to her information pages, people who are interested in these sustainable products might sign up for her newsletter and become returning visitors.

Conclusion

We've seen that conversion happens when someone completes the action you want them to complete. This could be a sale, but also a newsletter subscription or an appointment. We've also discussed how conversion ties into your keyword strategy. First of all, we've seen that long tail keywords are generally more likely to convert than shorter keywords. Secondly, we've seen that you should take conversion into account when deciding whether you should try to rank for a keyword.

Researching your competition

In the previous modules, you learned how to come up with keywords and how you can discover whether people are actually searching for the terms you want to rank for. In this module, we'll first explore the basics of researching your competition to determine whether you can rank for a keyword: Why should you invest time and money into researching your competition? Why is it so important to rank top 3? And, what factors influence your rankings? After the basics, we'll go a bit more in-depth and discuss how you can properly identify your competition to help define your own position within the market.

Ranking

Find your niche

In this module, you're going to learn how to determine whether you stack up against others trying to rank for the same keywords you've come up with. And in some cases, there's nothing you're going to be able to do about it, whether you like it or not. Some companies may simply be able to spend more time and money than you. As a local company, you're not going to rank for "refrigerator". Even Amazon doesn't rank top 3 – and trust me, they'd like to. Then again, for other keywords, you may just be the one company that is most eager and able to rank!

That's the exciting thing about keyword research: finding that exact sweet spot in which you can succeed; that little market you're able to corner and use to achieve the results you're looking for. You may recall one of the previous modules where we discussed [finding your niche](#).

Pick your battles

At Yoast, we currently rank #1 for the search query "what is a meta description", for example. That hasn't happened overnight. It took a lot

of work and a good strategy to get there. By the way, it's not easy to stay on top for some of the terms we rank for, either, but our hard work has paid off! That's what you're going to have to do as well. Consider carefully: can I rank for this keyword? Am I able to compete?

Researching your competition can seem like a big and scary task. Competition, as well as your own SEO authority, may change over time, so you have to reconsider and update your strategy all the time. Don't worry, though, we're going to tell you how to best tackle the question of whether you have a realistic chance of [ranking for a keyword](#). Or if you're better off not optimizing for a keyword because it's just not going to be a realistic target. That too is valuable information as it saves you time and money. Remember: keyword research and strategy are all about identifying the right opportunities. And you can't identify opportunities without comparing and contrasting your own abilities to those of your competition.

The importance of ranking top 3

Being at the top of the search results is hugely important. Research shows that as much as a third of the total traffic comes from the number one result, and 17% from the second result. That means that about half of the searchers click one of the first two results (see Image 1). Moreover, 90% of the searchers doesn't get beyond the first page of the search results.

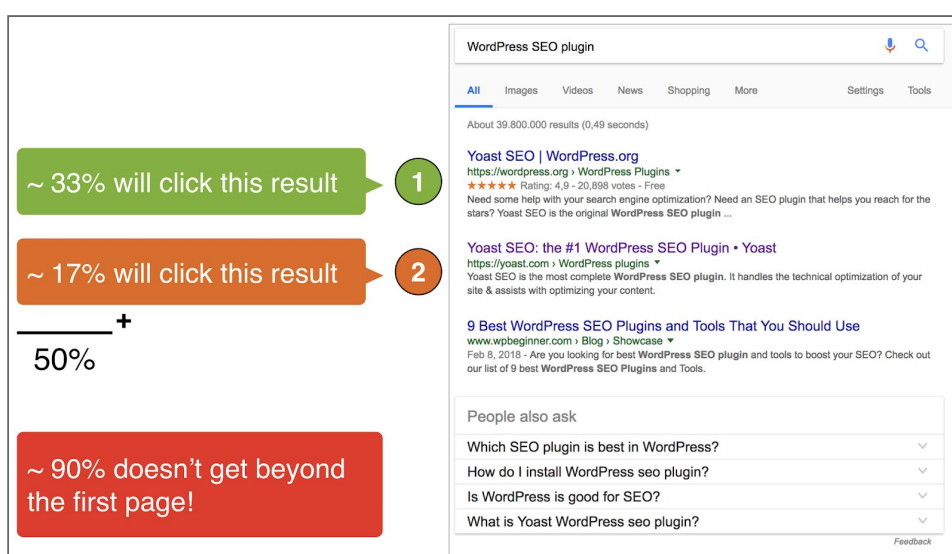


Image 1: The importance of ranking

The numbers steadily decline for each result. Ranking top 3 for a long tail keyword is, therefore, likely to be more valuable than ranking number 9 for a short and much broader keyword. Of course, this depends on how valuable a keyword is and how many people search for it. Ranking 9th for “vacuum cleaner” may still drive a lot of sales, for example.

What ranking factors are there?

Before you can start researching your competition, you need to know what SEO factors you should research. Ideally, you would mimic Google’s algorithm to determine why your competition is ranking, but that’s not possible; the data simply isn’t available.

Luckily, we know from experience [what influences rankings](#), so we can identify a number of important factors: relevant content, the general SEO authority of your site, links, good technical SEO, and user experience, for example. How many of these factors you actively research depends on how much time you can reasonably spend on your research. Taking everything into account costs too much time. You should aim to achieve a reliable estimate.

Gauging the competition

There are several aspects of your competitor that are definitely worthwhile to research. We’ll discuss a few of them.

The competitor’s position

A good start would be to research the position in the search results of your competitors. Do a search for your own keywords and see who your competitors are by writing down who ranks higher than you and for which keywords. We’ll explore how to use Google to compare your own and your competition’s position later on in this lesson.

Content opportunities

Furthermore, the quality of the content on the page often gives you a good idea of whether you'll be able to outperform a competitor. What have you written about your company and products, and what did your competitor publish on their website? However, not only the content of the pages, but also their site structure and their product pages could provide you with valuable insights to improve your own ranking.

Backlink analysis

Lastly, the number of quality links to a page is also an important ranking factor. There are several tools that can help you do a [backlink analysis](#) of your competition.

Keyword research

Researching your competition

Of course, there are different ways of researching your competition; we distinguish two main options. Firstly, you can pick a number of direct competitors and analyze what they're doing SEO-wise, to see whether you stack up. Secondly, you can research every keyword in your keyword list and see what the top-ranking pages are doing to rank for that specific keyword. We will focus on the latter approach because it allows you to tie your competitor research directly to your keyword strategy. Moreover, as we'll see later, your keyword competitors may not be limited to a number of companies which resemble you closely. Your competition is much broader than that. Sure, to properly assess your position in your market, analyzing your close competitors' entire websites can be a great strategy. Knowing what external links they receive from other websites, for example, could be of great help when you are trying to build backlinks. But in the context of this course, focusing on keyword competition makes the most sense.

When it comes to researching your competition for a keyword, it's very important to realize that every keyword comes with a different intensity

of competition. Let's explore what factors you have to account for in your keyword strategy.

Every keyword requires separate research

First, we need to establish that every keyword comes with a different intensity of competition, and thus requires separate research. In most cases, the big fish can focus on head terms, while the smaller fish often have to settle for crumbs. We've already talked about finding the sweet spot between optimizing for keywords with a lot of traffic potential and keywords you have a chance of ranking for. That's why [going down the tail](#) is so important.

By now, this probably seems obvious, but it's easy to get bogged down focusing on a couple of key competitors in your market. You should analyze every keyword individually and draw conclusions from the actual rankings themselves. And don't forget, you may need to readdress these conclusions over time. Empires rise and fall and new opportunities may arise. Keywords that used to be promising may be pounced on by others quickly. You should update your keyword research sheet accordingly.

Competition depends on your business and niche

The second factor is your own business and niche. We've already talked about finding a niche, but there are some other factors as well. For example, if you write in English, it's much, much harder to rank for head terms than if you write in Dutch.

Another example: imagine running a local business. In this case, trying to rank top 3 for terms worldwide generally doesn't make sense. Make no mistake: this happens A LOT. You're better off optimizing your local SEO to make sure that you rank for local searches. Google is becoming better and better at recognizing whether someone has a local search intent. If you type in "bakery", for example, the first results are often taken by bakeries near your current location.

Moreover, when you type in "bakery", the search bar autofill function will suggest "near me", which helps Google to understand that people are in fact looking for a result close to their current location. You

shouldn't use words like "near me" in your keyword list, because it's not something you can optimize for using keywords. You should optimize for local SEO separately.

How to optimize for local SEO

Instead of adding words like "near me" to the keywords in your keyword list, you should make sure in other ways that you will appear in local searches. Below are several tips to optimize for local search. We'll start with some keyword and content specific tips. Then, we'll add some other tips your local business could benefit from:

- **A local audience uses different search queries**
Someone looking for a local result may search differently from someone casually browsing for just any information. Take the perspective of the local searcher into account. Adding a place name to important products ("lego store Amsterdam") can help. Google is generally pretty good at drawing those conclusions itself, but it's still good practice to add it, especially if you don't use schema to clarify your location (more about schema in a later tip).
- **Optimize for close variants of keywords**
We've seen that local search results vary based on slight variations when it comes to local searches. So make sure you account for that by putting variations of your keywords in your keyword list and using slight variations of your keywords in the text. This is all about adding extra context to your articles. We'll go into this in the next module.
- **Add your location to title tags where it makes sense**
For some of your pages, it may be a good idea to add your location to your SEO title. A product page about handmade local products is a good example. People will recognize you as a local result more easily. This depends on the content landing page itself, though, so apply with care.
- **Write about relevant topics in your local community**
As a local business, it might be worth trying to get a solid footing in your local community by writing relevant content about e.g. the role of your business or products within the community. This

helps reinforce your position within your local niche. But don't go overboard: your content needs to be relevant to your niche.

- **Add your NAP details to your site**

We're talking Name, Address, Phone number, in an easy to read and index format. Preferably, we recommend adding one page per location, if you have more than one.

- **Add your site to Google My Business and verify your location.**

Google has to know your business is local. [Google My Business](#) is how you do it.

- **Add NAP to Google My Business**

Add your details to your [Google My Business](#) page. If you have multiple locations but only need to promote one being the main headquarters, add multiple locations to one listing. If your business consists of a number of smaller businesses, feel free to add multiple My Business pages/accounts. *Don't forget to update your listing when you move!*

- **Add schema.org data to your address**

We made a couple of plugins for that: [Local SEO](#) and [Local SEO for WooCommerce](#). These add the appropriate [LocalBusiness](#) schema markup to the address listed on your website, making it easier for the larger search engines like Google and Bing to index these details.

- **Write local snippets**

Make sure that the snippet of your web page that Google shows in the search results is [optimized for local SEO](#). You want to do that because Google will know you're focusing on a local audience, but you also want to do that because your audience will recognize you as a local business.

- **Get positive reviews**

We can't deny that positive reviews on Google, Yelp or similar websites influence the strength of your local ranking. It's like the marketplace; if locals, users or simply any other people recommend a business, we'll be more tempted to go there. Search engines obviously pick up on this.

Not just your direct competitors

One last thing before we go: take advantage of the fact that your competitors may not consist of one static group of the same four or five companies. We've already mentioned that your competition may be broader than just your direct competitors. Sometimes this makes perfect sense and presents an opportunity to learn. Take a look at what happens when you google "superfoods". You might expect superfood webshops to dominate the rankings, as it's very important for their type of business to rank. But that's not what happens: Google, in this case, prefers ranking pages with information over ranking retailers. Because people searching for "superfoods" are probably looking for information rather than a biased product page.

So by analyzing the type of competition you encounter near the top of the results, you can draw conclusions about the type of content you should provide. A purely informational piece, as we've discussed earlier, can still direct your users towards your products eventually. Competitor research can offer great insight into what types of content are likely to reach your audience. That depends on what your users are looking for. We'll discuss the different types of search intent in the next module.

Conclusion

Let's wrap this up. We laid out the basics of researching your competition. The key takeaways are:

1. Investing in researching your competition allows you to determine the best way to spend valuable time and resources.
2. Ranking top 3 is so valuable that it's often best to pursue keywords you're able to rank top 3 for.
3. When researching your competition, the position of your competitors in the market, the quality of the content on the page and links can give you an idea of your chances of successfully competing.

In the next lesson, we'll show you exactly how to get the most out of googling your potential keywords and analyzing the top search results.



Keyword research training – Module 5.2

Googling your competition

In the previous lesson, we discussed why you should research your competitors when determining a keyword strategy, and what factors you should take into account. In this lesson, we're going to do some actual research. We'll use Google to determine who our competitors are and see if there are ways to try to outrank them. We're going to look at a head keyword first, and then a more long tail keyword.

Using Google search

Incognito

First, let's make sure we're set up correctly and don't make any rookie mistakes. The first step you need to take when researching your keyword opportunities is opening Google in an incognito screen in your browser.

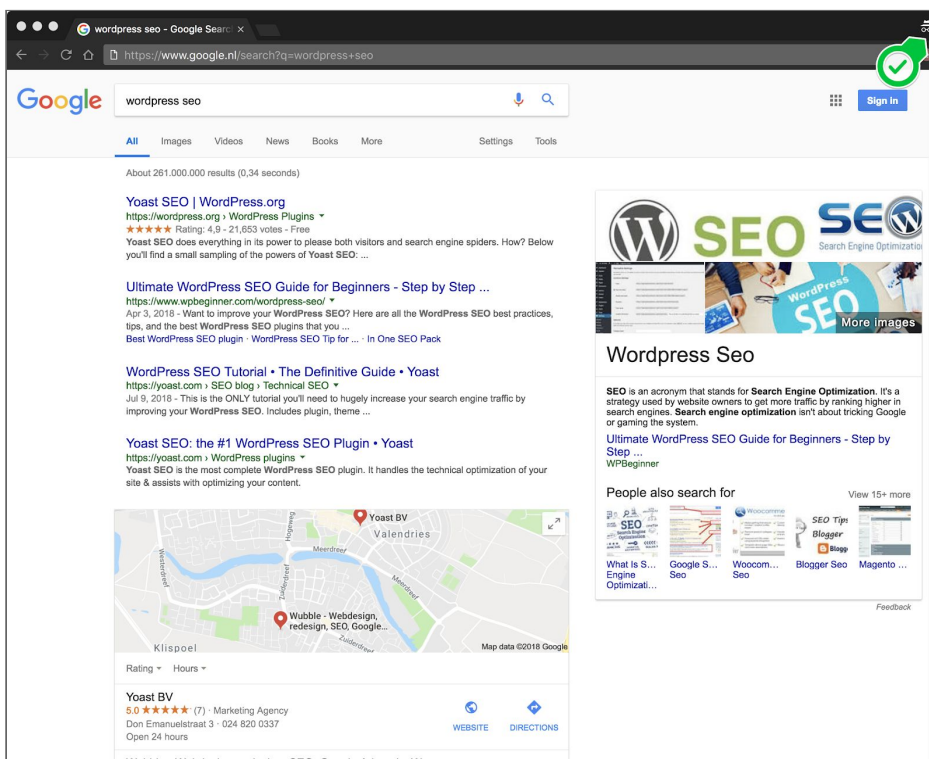


Image 1: Incognito browsing in Google Chrome for the keyword “wordpress seo”

Searching incognito prevents Google from taking previous searches into account. Google's algorithm tends to show you results based on your preferences. You probably visit your own site a lot, so when searching for a keyword, the chances of your own site popping up might be much larger based on your search history if you are not using an incognito screen. This will skew your idea of how high your site is actually ranking for this particular keyword.


There is still a local search component, even in an incognito screen. If that is a problem for you, consider using a VPN to mask your location. A VPN establishes a secure connection to a server in a location of your choice, which then connects to the website you want to visit (in this case the Google search result pages). The search results will then be displayed as if you were searching from the location of the server instead of your actual location.

Analyzing search results: a 'solar panels' case study


Once you have opened your incognito screen, you can type in one of the keywords you want to investigate. So imagine you have a business that sells solar panels. If you google for 'solar panels', you will see a whole list of sites that rank on the first page in Google. Let's take a closer look at the top 3 results and see what these sites have to offer compared to your site.

However, first, you'll notice that an advertisement takes a spot above the first organic search result. Even if you rank first place, it's always possible that an advertisement will be placed above you.


Shop for solar panels Sponsored ⓘ




Ring Solar Panel voor Spotlight...
€59,00
50five.nl
Free shipping
By Google




Goal Zero Yeti 1250 Solar...
€2.379,00
Allprepare
Free shipping
By Google



Solarguard set 20 meter
€91,91
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By Google



Canadian Solar Standard 275 ...
€132,55
Installand.nl
By Google

>>

Solar panel - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_panel ▼
 Photovoltaic solar panels absorb sunlight as a source of energy to generate electricity. A photovoltaic (PV) module is a packaged, connected assembly of ...
 Solar panels on spacecraft · Solar cell · [Solar water heating](#) · Grid parity

People also ask

Do solar panels add value to your home? ▼

How many solar panels are needed to run a house? ▼

How much will my solar panels generate? ▼

What is difference between monocrystalline and polycrystalline solar panel? ▼

Feedback

The Best Solar Panels For Your Home (2018) | GreenMatch
<https://www.greenmatch.co.uk/solar-energy/solar-panels> ▼
 Installing a typical solar system starts from £1500. Solar panels are energy efficient, sustainable and mid-term money-saving solution for your house, but many ...

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 ★★★★★ Rating: 4,9 - 227 votes
 Which Solar Panels Are Best For You? Save time and money by learning about the different types of solar panels. Explore top solar panel brands and compare ...

Image 2: Analyzing the search results

Domain authority

The first organic result is from Wikipedia. As you already might have guessed this is a really well-known domain and hard to beat, because of its domain authority. This means that you can aim for ranking number 1 on the keyword 'solar panels', but you are not very likely to ever become the number 1 result.

Lessons learned

The second and third result look like online solar panel shops. These are particularly interesting results to take a closer look at, because these

competitors may be easier to compete with than Wikipedia. Although, note that a company like Tesla is right below them, so that's a bit of a red flag. Let's check the pages themselves though and see what they do.

The content on the second result looks impressive at first glance. There's a lot of information. It will probably be difficult to outrank this result.

When looking at the third result, it is immediately noticeable that this page is not very content rich. It has an introductory paragraph, but that's it. In order to be the best result for the keyword 'solar panels', it is plausible that more content that explains what solar panels do could get better rankings than this page. This is something to keep in mind when optimizing your own page on solar panels. It makes sense that greenmatch.co.uk outranks wholesalesolar.com.

Big budget

Another type of site you may encounter in the search results is a site with a big budget. For example, apart from domain authority, eBay also has the resources to spend a lot of money on SEO. It's not very likely that any company can beat them when it comes to budget.

Answer boxes

There are also cases in which Google decides to show an answer box as a result, instead of just a list of websites. This happens a lot when people google questions. They get a direct result in the form of an answer. This means that the rest of the search results become irrelevant because people can immediately read the answer in Google and don't have to click on any results anymore. Therefore, it becomes really important to be the site that Google uses for this answer box.

For instance, if you google 'how do solar panels work', then an answer box like you see in Image 3, shows up. It is important to take a good look at the result and figure out if you can give a better answer to the question than the current result offers. Make sure that this answer is reflected in the content of the page you want to rank with for this keyphrase.

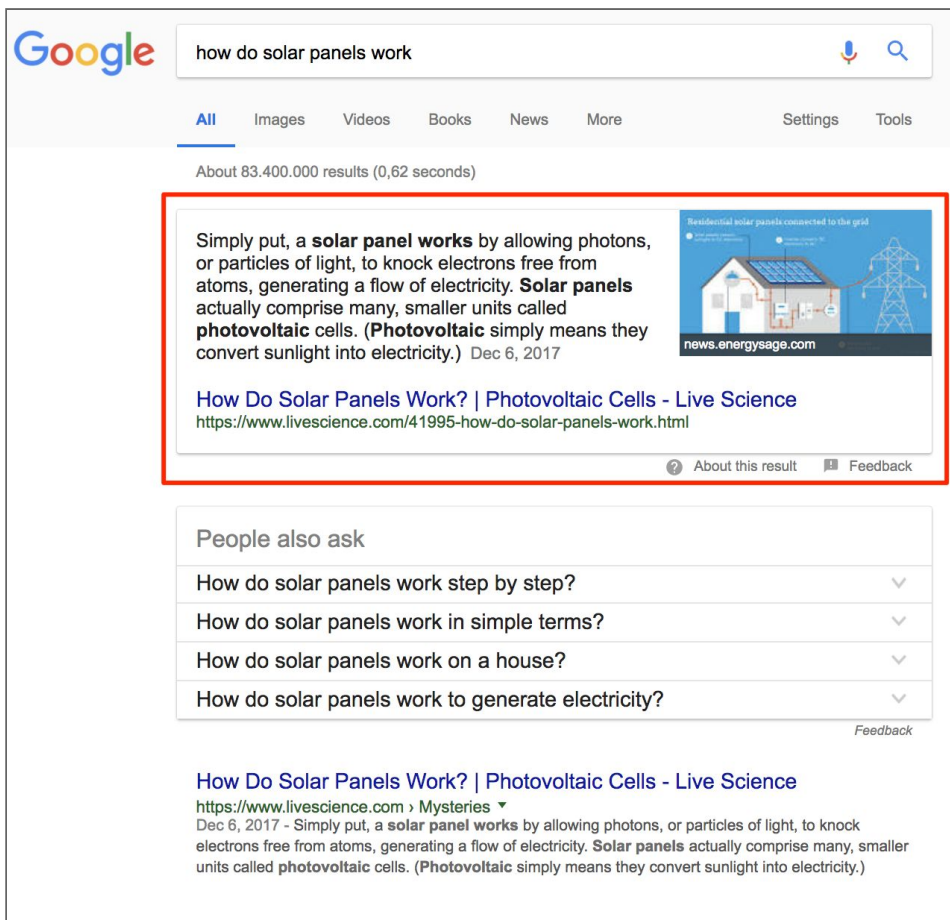


Image 3: An answer box

Rich results

Lastly, there's another aspect that you should take into account. Look at how your competitors are making use of rich results. This means that they are using structured data on their site which enables Google to give them more fancy results, such as these:

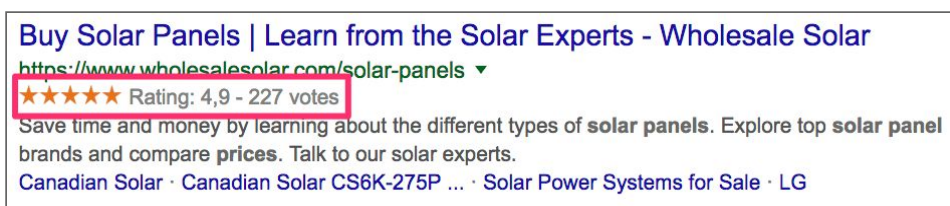


Image 4: A rich search result

This competitor has incorporated structured data in their code for ratings. This means that Google is able to show visitor's ratings in the search results. If a lot of your competitors are doing this, you have to

make sure that you use structured data yourself as well. But you should know that it is always up to Google to decide if they are actually going to show these rich results.

Conclusion

To recap, if you want to provide a better result than your competitors you have to look closely at what they are already doing and how you can beat them. Make sure to analyze their content, their budget, their answers to questions and if they are using structured data. Combining all of this information gives you some useful information on how you can improve your own content, and whether you have a chance of ranking at all.

Content

This lesson is all about content. Before we dive into the actual creation of content, we'll discuss two important terms: search intent and content intent. Then, we'll go into turning your keyword list into actual landing pages. We'll discuss three types of website content: cornerstone content, product pages, and blog posts.

Search intent and content intent

Before we go into how to turn your keyword list into actual landing pages on your site and how you should optimize your pages for SEO, there are two more terms we need to discuss: search intent and content intent. These two terms are closely related to each other. Let's first dive into search intent.

What is search intent?

We've already established that you should take the perspective of your audience when crafting your keyword list. When it comes to creating pages, you need to take this a step further. We need to consider exactly what the searcher expects to find on a page when searching for a term. Only then can we craft a page that reflects those expectations.

So, whenever someone enters a search query into a search engine, they are on a quest for something. This is called search intent. Why are they searching? What are they looking for? Do they have a question that they want answered? Or are they looking to buy something?

Search intent and Google

Over the years, Google has become more and more able to determine the search intent of people. And Google wants to rank pages highest that fit the search term as well as the search intent of a specific search query. That's why it's essential to make sure your post or page fits the search intent of your audience.

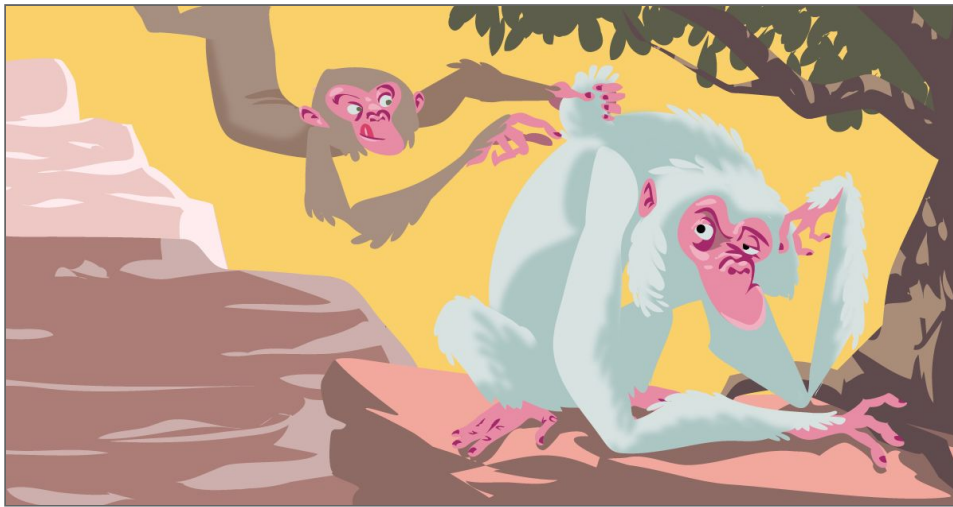


Image 1: Search intent

Different types of search intent

Now we know what search intent is and why it is important for SEO, let's dive into the different types of search intent. We distinguish four types of search intent:

1. Informational intent

This type of intent applies when people are trying to find information on a specific topic. This could be information about the weather, information about educating children, or information about guitars. For example, for yoast.com, we create blog posts for people looking for information on SEO. These posts are optimized for informational intent.

2. Navigational intent

The second type of search intent is called navigational intent. People have a navigational intent when they want to access a specific website by entering the term in a search engine. So, if people search for "Yoast", they're probably trying to reach our website yoast.com. And people who search for "Facebook" are usually on their way to the Facebook website.

Ranking high on a navigational term is only beneficial for your organic traffic if your site is the site people are looking for. A few years ago, Yoast had a Google Analytics plugin, and we ranked

pretty well for the term “Google Analytics”. However, it didn’t drive any traffic to our site because people searching for “Google Analytics” were looking for the Google Analytics website and were hardly ever interested in our plugin.

3. Commercial intent

When people have a commercial intent, they want to buy something sometime soon and they are doing research before making a purchase. For instance, what washing machine would be best? Or which SEO plugin is the most helpful? For example, on yoast.com, we’ve created sales pages for our plugins and courses. These pages are optimized for commercial intent.

4. Transactional intent

People have a transactional intent when they are looking to buy something after doing their commercial intent searches. Lots of people buy stuff on the internet and browse the web to find the best purchase. For example, the sales pages on yoast.com have multiple buttons through which people can buy our products immediately, so these pages are optimized for transactional intent.

Type of intent	People want to...
informational intent	find information on a specific topic
navigational intent	access a specific website by entering the term in a search engine
commercial intent	do research before making a purchase
transactional intent	buy something, after doing their commercial intent searches

Table 1: Types of intent

You should try to find out which intents apply to you, your searchers, and your keywords. On every page you optimize, you should try to provide people with the content they expect. As we’ve seen, this is especially important because Google has become better at recognizing search intent and ranking pages that match this intent.

Example: Anna's sustainable leather

Let's go back to the example we discussed in earlier modules: Anna's sustainable leather website. In her webshop, Anna sells products made from sustainable textile, a leather alternative made from pineapple waste. Anna could create sales pages that are optimized for a commercially driven keyword like "buy vegan leather shoes". The search intent for these pages is most likely transactional.

However, Anna doesn't just have a webshop, she has a blog as well. This is where the searcher with informational intent could enter her site. For example, she could write blog posts optimized for keywords like "how is pineapple leather made" or "how to clean vegan leather", where she gives information on these topics. So, Anna has to create different pages to accommodate the different kinds of search intents.

Content intent

From search intent, it's only a small step to content intent. Content intent is all about lining up your content with your audience's expectations. When creating your page, it's vital that you are conscious of what you're trying to achieve with that page. Before you start writing, carefully consider what you want that particular page to achieve. Should it be focused on providing information? Should it be optimized to convince potential customers to buy? Should it mainly engage users with your brand? Only when you have a clear idea of the goal of the page, you can start working towards achieving that goal.

Landing pages

Now that you've learned about search intent and content intent, it's time to go into landing pages. Landing pages are the pages you want your audience to reach when they are searching for a keyword. This means that you need to have good landing pages for your most important keywords. This is important for three reasons:

1. to rank well in the search engines;
2. to make sure visitors can find your landing pages;

3. to make visitors convert.

With a good landing page, you keep your visitor on your site, and you increase the likelihood of them taking the action you want them to take, whether it's buying a product or any other type of conversion.

For each keyword, you want to identify one page you want to rank with. If we, at Yoast, want to rank for “keyword research”, our [Ultimate guide to keyword research](#) would be a great candidate for a landing page. You don't have to create landing pages for all of your keywords immediately. And don't forget: you can optimize one page for multiple keywords. Creating landing pages for your keywords can be a long-term project. The more specific your term is, the further down into your site structure the term's landing page belongs.

Creating cornerstone content

We've discussed search intent and content intent, now let's dive into the actual content of your site. We'll discuss three types of website content. First off: cornerstone content, also called cornerstone articles. Cornerstone articles are the most important articles on your website. These articles directly reflect the mission of your company, and you definitely want to rank for them. You usually want to rank for your most important keywords with your cornerstone articles.

Which articles are my cornerstones?

You should choose your cornerstones carefully. Think of four or five pages you would like someone to read if they first visit your website. These articles should be the cornerstones of your site. In other words, they should form the basis of the topics you discuss on your site. For example: at Yoast, we write ultimate guides for every important SEO-related topic. We have ultimate guides for site structure, SEO copywriting, mobile SEO, blogging, keyword research, et cetera. These are our cornerstone content articles. You should write cornerstone articles about the keywords you definitely want to rank for.

The importance of cornerstone content

Now that we know what cornerstone content is, let's dive into the importance of cornerstone content. Cornerstone content should play a significant role in any SEO strategy. It can be rather hard to rank for search terms that are very popular. A cornerstone approach could help you tackle those competitive search terms. If you write a lot of articles about similar topics, you need to tell Google which one is the most important. This article can be a cornerstone article.

What should a cornerstone article look like?

In general, cornerstone articles should be lengthy articles which are timeless, and very regularly updated. Cornerstone articles should definitely be informative articles, where you explain something to your audience. You want them to understand more about a topic or you want them to use the information by putting theory to practice. Even on an online shop, cornerstone content should be informative, rather than focused on convincing people to buy your products. For example, you could give your readers information about the uniqueness of your products, or about the use of the products. Of course, you can use your cornerstone articles to send people to your product pages, but the main focus of the text itself should be on informing your audience about the topic at hand.

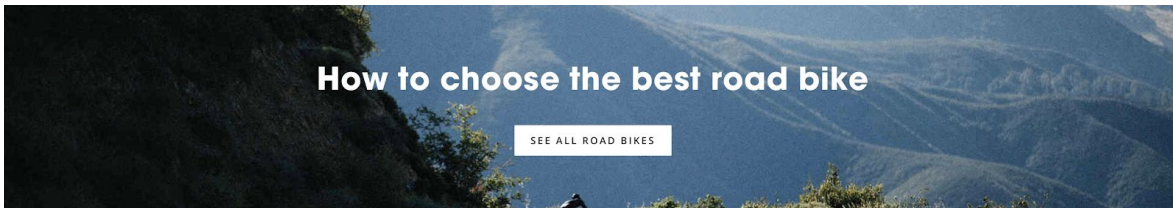
Site structure and internal linking are very important here. When writing a cornerstone article, always consider what other pages on your website you could link to. Cornerstone articles usually contain information on topics you've also written more specific posts about. Make sure you're linking internally from the more specific posts to the cornerstone content so it's clear for search engines that that is the most important article for you for a particular keyword. This will improve your chances of ranking for your cornerstone article.

Example: Choosing road bikes

A great example of a cornerstone article is [this article](#) (also shown in Image 2) on how to choose the best road bike. This article discusses which road bike you need in different situations and for different riders. It answers questions like:

which bike should someone choose for riding on rough pavement? Or for riding on gravel? What are the specifications of the various road bikes? Which bike is suitable for climbing and descending?

Furthermore, the page links to more specific pages if you need more information, like pages providing information on different materials, the different bike models, and the different techniques that are used for the bikes. And it links to product pages as well (see the pink arrows in Image 1). It makes sense here to link to different road bike product pages because that is probably something people will be interested in.



How to choose the best road bike

SEE ALL ROAD BIKES



Domane

Domane is designed to provide the smoothest, most stable ride, and offers the most versatility among our road lines. These attributes make it an ideal choice for endurance riders going out for long century rides, sportive, or fondo events.

Domane is the best choice for riders looking to ride on a variety of surfaces. Its combination of endurance geometry and IsoSpeed technology, provide predictable handling, more stability, and an overall smoother ride. This results in more comfort and control over rough, cracked pavement. Additional clearance for wider tires and disc brake options also make Domane an optimal choice for riding on gravel roads.

The Domane family is available in 4 distinct carbon and aluminum platforms with either disc or rim brakes in addition to Women's models for those riders looking for women's-specific components.

[See all Domane bikes](#)



Checkpoint

Checkpoint is the gravel bike that gives you the versatility and capability you need to tackle everything from epic backwoods adventures to fun-filled commutes and gravel racing pursuits. It's packed with gravel-specific features and off-road capability, and was designed to be set up in a wide variety of configurations depending on what the ride calls for. Checkpoint has all-weather disc brakes and massive tire clearance that allows to run the tires that fit the ride of the day. Checkpoint comes equipped with ultra-versatile 700x35c gravel tires, but we're not ones to limit ourselves, so the bike comfortably accepts tire widths from 28-45c. Checkpoint is also designed to carry and haul everything you need for an epic adventure on and off the road. Multiple mounts for water, bags and racks give you the choice to go light and fast or all-in for multi day adventure rides.

With multiple carbon and aluminum models, as well as women's-specific options, there's a Checkpoint model perfect for everyone. Checkpoint SL models feature lightweight OCLV Carbon construction and Rear IsoSpeed for additional comfort. Checkpoint ALR models feature performance and value oriented 300 Series Alpha Aluminum frame with a carbon fork.

[See all Checkpoint bikes](#)



Image 2: Example of a cornerstone article

Creating product pages

The second content type we'll discuss here are product pages. The most important goal of a product page is obvious: to convince your visitor to buy the product you're offering on the page. But how do you create good product pages? How can you improve your chances of converting a visitor?

Search intent and product pages

Keep in mind what we've told you about search intent. Before creating any page, you should try to find out which intent applies to your page and your keyword. You should always try to provide people with the content they expect. For instance, people visiting a blog are probably looking for information about a certain subject. Those visitors have an informational intent. This is different for an online shop. People looking for products usually have a transactional intent: they are looking to buy a product. This means that a product page should differ from an informational post on your website. Product pages should help your visitors to get the product information they need and to make them want to buy your product.

Building strong product pages

If you want to sell your products, you'll have to build strong product pages. But how do you go about that? Let's explore a few basic principles.

Basic principles

Product pages should always contain:

1. the product name;
2. a proper description of the product;
3. an image of the product;
4. the price;
5. a clear call-to-action, which brings your visitor to the cart or checkout.

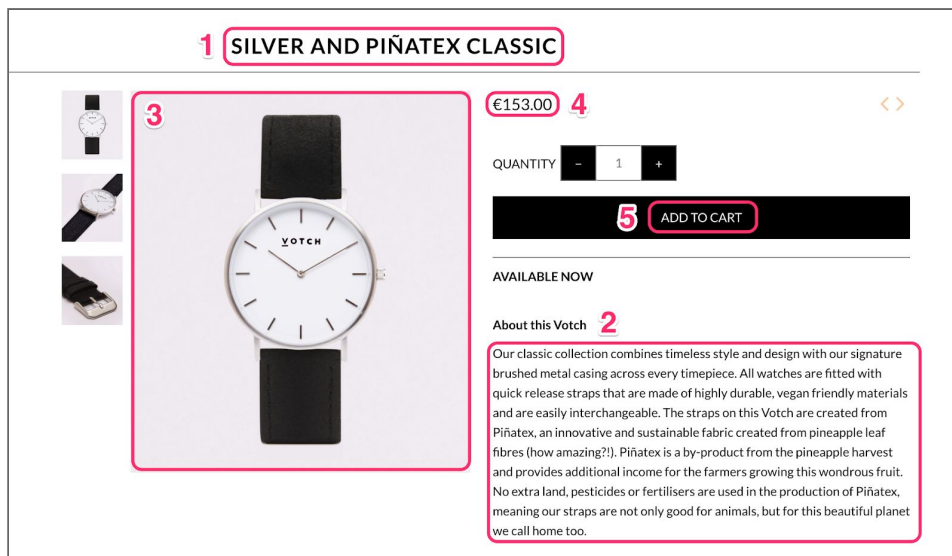


Image 3: Example of a product page with basic principles

Things that make you stand out

But let's be honest, a product page with just these basic principles isn't going to make you stand out. Most of your competitors will have these elements on their product pages as well. So how can you make your product pages stand out? Let's explore a few principles you can apply to make you stand out.

1. Add checkmarks with your USPs

The first principle you could apply is adding checkmarks that state your USPs. Make sure to place them on top of your page, so your visitors can't miss them! For example, on top of the Yoast SEO plugin product page, you'll find the USPs of our plugin (see Image 4).

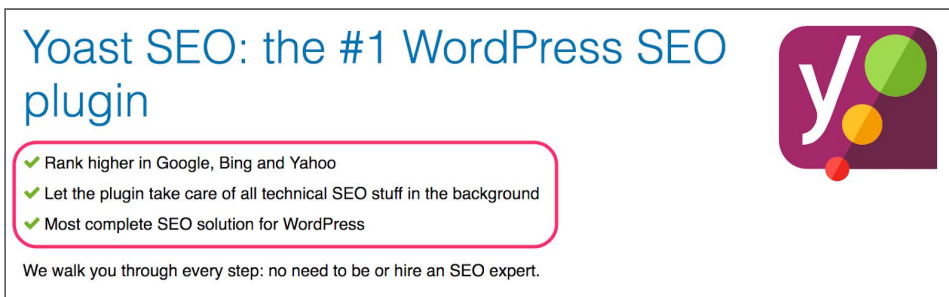


Image 4: Checkmarks with USPs on the Yoast SEO product page

2. Reassure your visitors

People like to be reassured. One of the ways to reassure people is by using testimonials from other customers or clients. It's much more effective if someone else says you're awesome than if you're claiming that yourself. For example, we have put the tweet in Image 5 on the product page of the Yoast SEO Premium plugin. We might think our plugin is awesome, but it helps a lot if an independent customer can confirm that! A reassurance can come from testimonials, but also from star ratings and reviews for products.



Image 5: Tweet we show on the product page of the Yoast SEO Premium plugin

3. Write clear and easy-to-read copy

The most important factor is your copy. You should write clear and easy-to-read information. Always consider whether your text addresses the concerns and questions of your visitors. Also, don't try to include every little detail. Less can be more. Adding tables which compare products to each other can be a great idea as well, like the table we used to compare two of our courses, shown in Image 6.

How does the *Basic SEO course* compare to the free *SEO for beginners course*?

	Basic SEO	SEO for beginners
• What is SEO and what does Google do?	✓	✓
• Content SEO: What are <i>keyword research</i> , <i>site structure</i> and <i>SEO copywriting</i> ?	✓	✓
• Technical SEO: what are <i>crawlability</i> and <i>rich results</i> ?	✓	✓
• How do I set up an effective <i>keyword research</i> strategy?	✓	✗
• How do I set up the optimal <i>site structure</i> ?	✓	✗
• How do I optimize my <i>copy</i> for SEO?	✓	✗
• How do I optimize my <i>site speed</i> and <i>security</i> ?	✓	✗
• How do I set up a <i>link building</i> campaign?	✓	✗
• How do I write effective <i>marketing newsletters</i> ?	✓	✗
• How can I use social media to <i>improve my rankings</i> ?	✓	✗
• How do I guarantee my users have a <i>great experience</i> visiting my site?	✓	✗
• How do I convince as many people as possible to <i>buy my product</i> or <i>sign up</i> for my newsletter?	✓	✗

Image 6: Comparison table for two of Yoast Academy's courses

Making your product pages rank

Once you've optimized your product pages, you want to make them rank. But how do you make your product pages rank? There are two practices you should definitely apply here.

1. Use the words your audience uses

As we've seen, using the words your audience uses is important for your SEO. Is the name of the product also the name people are looking for in the search engines? When your audience uses different words, you should think of changing the name of the product to reflect this.

2. Optimize the page title and meta description

Another thing you should always do if you want your product pages to rank, is to optimize the page title and meta description of your product page. Page titles are a ranking factor, so we recommend adding the product name to the page title. Your product name should preferably be your keyword, or at least very similar to your keyword. Also, don't forget to spend some time on writing a good meta description. Meta descriptions are not a ranking factor, but can convince people to click your result. For

example, adding a USP such as ‘free delivery’ could make people click on your result quicker.

Writing blog posts

We’ve covered the creation of cornerstone content and product pages. Now, we’re going to go into the process of writing blog posts. Unlike product pages, blog posts almost always answer an informational search intent.

Optimize blog posts for SEO

What should you do to optimize your chances of ranking with a blog post? Years ago, it was easy to get your content ranked. Keyword stuffing was the norm, so you could mention your keywords loads of times in your article and it would probably rank within a couple of days. Luckily, those days are over. Keyword stuffing is out the door, and with it, many other questionable techniques. Today, optimizing your blog post for SEO means something entirely different: it’s your job to provide the best and most relevant piece of content for your audience.

Write for your audience

But how do you go about that? As we’ve seen earlier, search engines use search intent to determine what a user wants to know. Because of this, you shouldn’t be writing to satisfy the search engines. You shouldn’t be writing for SEO, but for your audience. This is especially true for blog posts. To make sure you’re writing for your audience, ask yourself the following question:

“Does my text provide my visitors with the best possible information about the search term they entered?”

Go beyond keywords

It’s also important to keep in mind that simply using your keyword is not enough. Search engines have become too smart. These days, context is one of the most important words in SEO. Yes, you need your keywords to target audiences and you need related keywords to build topics to write

about. However, search engines increasingly use context to figure out what a piece of content is about and how it fits in the grand scheme of things.

This means you need to go beyond keywords and synonyms and look at the articles as a whole. Is it a clear and logically structured piece? Are there clear answers to questions your visitors might have? Is every paragraph meaningful and well-written? By answering these questions, you can make sure your content provides as much context as possible.

Tips for writing an SEO-proof blog post

There are several things you need to keep in mind if you want to write an SEO-proof blog post. Firstly, we'll list a few simple tips. Then, we'll go into a couple of tips in more detail.

Simple tips

- Remember to check **which sites are ranking now for your keyword**: these are the competitors you must beat. Uncover why Google thinks these results are the best and improve on that.
- **Cover the topic completely** and naturally include words that are related to the topic.
- **Make it unique** by coming up with an original angle.
- Start building **trust and authority**.

Tips in more detail

In addition to the simple tips we've discussed before, we'll go into a couple of tips in more detail.

1. Use synonyms and close variants of your keyword.

Search engines are becoming smarter and can recognize synonyms. You can make the topic of your article clearer by using synonyms often. So if you're selling bicycles, it's perfectly fine to use the synonym "bike" and treat both as your focus keyword. Moreover, you don't have to use an entire long tail keyphrase word for word several times in your article, if you're writing in

English at least. This may work differently for less common languages.

2. Include related questions and search phrases in your content.

You've probably noticed Google sometimes presents you with related search queries if you search for something. This is something you can use! Try googling your keyword and see what questions pop up. Would they fit your article? If so, by all means answer them! [Answerthepublic.com](https://www.answerthepublic.com) could provide you with hundreds of useful related questions as well.

3. Don't optimize different articles for one keyword.

It's perfectly fine to rank for multiple keywords with one article. However, you should never optimize different articles for one keyword, as you'll be competing with your own content in that case.

4. Structure your articles using the Inverted Pyramid Theory.

Consider writing your articles using the Inverted Pyramid Theory. This means you start with the most important and pressing info. This helps both Google and your reader to understand your text. This is especially important on the internet: attention spans are very short. You need to grab your reader's attention. When you've convinced the reader to continue, you can go into the details and add other information.

5. Use your keyword in the right places.

Google pays special attention to some places in your text, and that's why you should include your keyword in these areas. You should add the keyword to the post title, URL, headers, body text, image file names, alt tags, and anchor texts. But remember: no spamming!

Conclusion

We've seen that you need to consider exactly what the searcher expects to find on a page when searching for a term – which is called search intent – and that you should line up your content with your audience's expectations – which is called content intent. Furthermore, we've discussed how to turn your keyword list into actual landing pages. We've discussed three types of website content: cornerstone content, product pages, and blog posts.

Analytics

Well done! You've reached the final lesson of this course. In the previous modules, you've learned how to execute your own keyword research. You've rolled out your keyword strategy, you've learned how to optimize your pages and posts, and you know how to create cornerstone content pages. Now, let's see how you can check the effectiveness of your keyword research efforts. In this lesson, we'll discuss two methods to check whether or not your keyword strategy has had an effect on your rankings: Google Search Console, and Google Analytics.

Google Search Console

Google Search Console (GSC) has been created to easily track the performance of your website. The first thing you should do – if you haven't done this already – is to [set up your account](#). When you've set up your account and added your website, you're ready to start using GSC.

We recommend you to switch to the new version of GSC, which was rolled out in early 2018. All of the information we provide in this lesson will be based on the new version of GSC. To switch to the new version, click “Try the new Search Console” at the top of the menu on the left-hand side, as shown in Image 1.

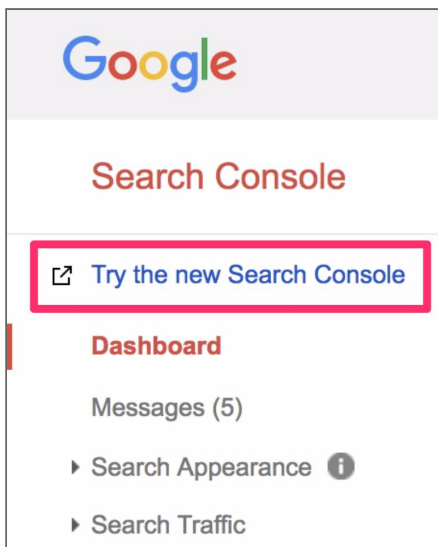


Image 1: Switch to the new version of GSC

Performance

In this lesson, we'll focus on the performance tab of GSC. This tab can be reached in two ways:

1. by opening the performance report through the dashboard;
2. by clicking on the performance item in the menu (*Status* → *Performance*), as highlighted in Image 2.

Within the performance tab, you can see exactly for which pages and keywords your site is ranking in Google. In the old version of GSC, you could see data up to a maximum of 90 days. However, in the new version, it's possible to see data up to 16 months. Keep in mind that the data is available from the moment you set up your account.

So, where to begin? Within the performance tab, you see a list of 'queries', 'pages', 'countries', and 'devices'. Each of those sections can be sorted by the number of 'clicks', 'impressions', 'average CTR' or 'average position'. Let's take a closer look at each of these data types.

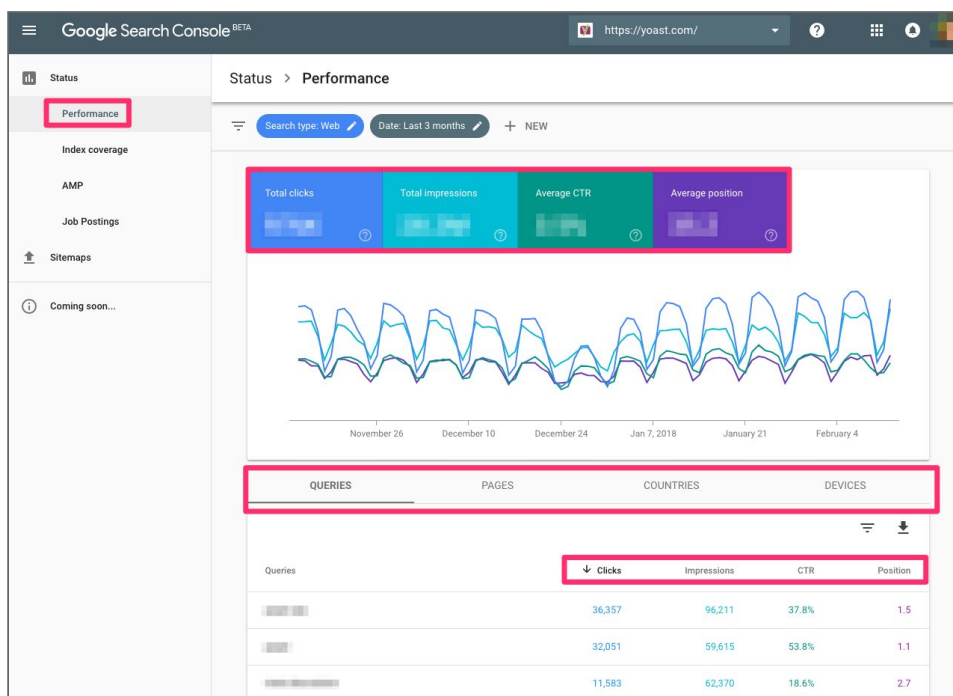


Image 2: Performance tab in GSC

1. Total clicks

The number of clicks tells you how often people clicked on your website in the search results of Google. This number can tell something about the performance of your page titles and meta descriptions: if just a few people click on your result, your result might not stand out in the search results. Of course, the position of the search result also impacts the number of clicks.

2. Total impressions

The number of impressions tells you how often your website in general or how often a specific page is shown in the search results. So, an impression is recorded when a page appears in a search result for a user. An impression is only recorded when the user opens the page containing this results. So, if the result is shown on page 2 and the user only looks at the first page, no impression will be recorded. However, if the user does open the second page, an impression will be recorded.

3. Average Click-Through Rate (CTR)

The average Click-Through Rate (CTR) tells you what percentage of the people that have seen your website in the search results also clicked

through to your website. As you probably understand, higher rankings mostly also lead to higher CTRs. However, there are some things you can do to increase the CTR. For example, you could make sure your meta description and SEO title are very appealing, so the snippet of your site stands out from the other results. Keep in mind that this will not have a big impact if you're not on ranking on the first page yet. You might need to try other things first to improve your ranking.

4. Average position

The last one in this list is the average position. This tells you what the average ranking of a specific keyword or page was in the time period you've selected. Keep in mind that this position isn't always reliable since more and more people seem to get different search results. Google seems to understand better and better which results fit best for which visitor. However, this indicator still gives you an idea if the clicks, impressions, and average CTR are explainable.

Analyze a specific keyword

It can be really helpful to analyze a specific keyword. By doing this, you can find out the number of clicks, the number of impressions, the CTR and the position for a specific keyword you've optimized for. To filter for a specific query, add a new filter and select 'Query...' (as shown in Image 3). Then, enter the keyword you want to analyze and hit 'Apply'.

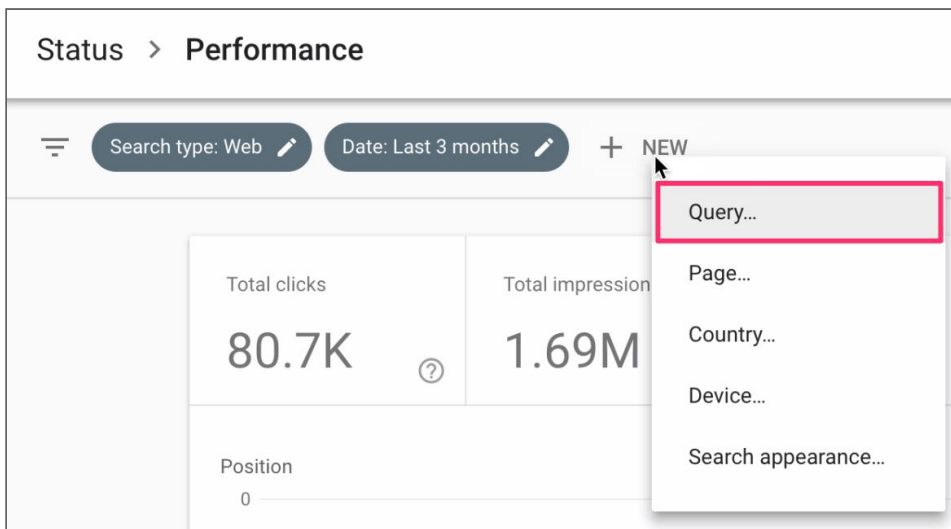


Image 3: Filter for a specific query

Google Analytics

The second method to analyze the success of your optimization efforts is by using Google Analytics. Google Analytics is a web analytics service offered by Google. It tracks and reports website traffic. As with GSC, you have to [create an account](#) and add your website before you can start using Analytics.

Finding traffic from search engines

The first thing you see when you open Google Analytics is the dashboard, called Google Analytics Home (see Image 4).

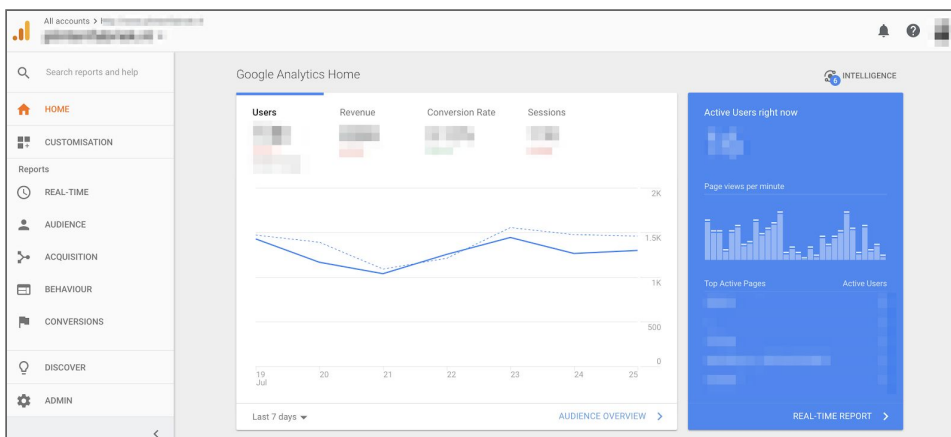


Image 4: Google Analytics dashboard

To find the traffic to your site that's coming directly from search engines, you'll need to go to *Acquisition* → *All traffic* → *Source/Medium* (see Image 5). Here, you'll see a list of sources where your traffic comes from. Usually, the traffic from search engines (more specifically, Google) is somewhere to be found in the top 3.

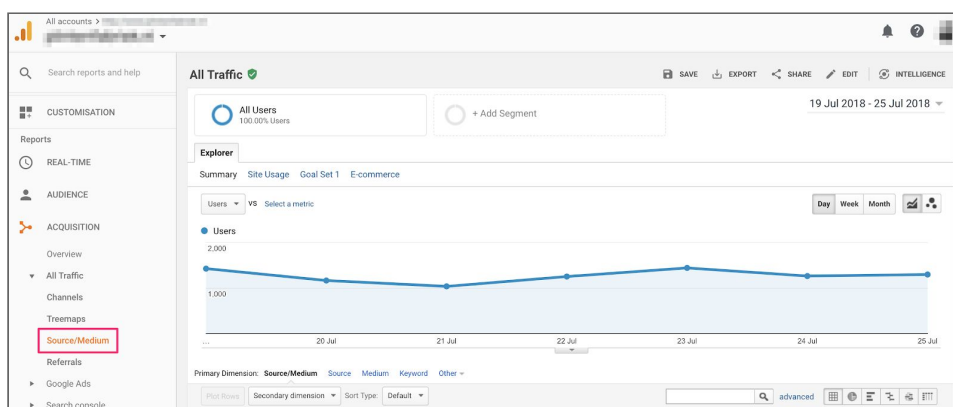


Image 5: Go to Source/Medium to analyze the sources of your site's traffic

Find the search engines you want to know the volume or traffic for, and select those checkboxes. If you hit 'Plot Rows' (Image 6) after that, you'll get a nice graph showing you the total traffic for the sources you've selected.

It's also possible to see all the data that's coming from search engines combined, if you hit 'Medium' in the menu just below the graph (Image 6). The data that's coming from search engines is labeled as 'organic', as shown in Image 7.

The grid table you'll see now shows a lot of data. You can see the number of users, the number of sessions, the bounce rate, and many more things. You can even filter this data, to get even more specific data. To do this, add a 'Secondary dimension' (Image 6). For example, you could filter for landing pages (the first page people see when they come to your website), to see an overview of the traffic on all your landing pages.



Image 6: Location of 'Medium', 'Plot Rows' and 'Secondary dimension' in Google Analytics

	Medium ?	Acquisition			Behaviour
		Users ? ↓	New Users ?	Sessions ?	Bounce Rate ?
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. cpc				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2. organic				
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. (none)				
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. email				
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. referral				

Image 7: Organic traffic in Google Analytics

Analyzing the data

Now you know where you can find how much traffic you're getting from search engines, it's time to analyze it! If you're not getting a lot of traffic from search engines, it's crucial to work on your SEO. There could be a lot of potential traffic you may be missing out on. The same goes for declining traffic. If your site is getting less traffic than it did before, think about what you've been doing lately that might have caused this decrease.

If you notice an increase in organic traffic, well done! Your SEO strategy seems to be effective. Your keyword research strategy may be effective, but there are other factors that may play a big role in this as well. Think about what we've discussed in the first lesson about holistic SEO. We believe a solid SEO strategy focuses on it all: it starts with proper keyword research, but it also covers good technical SEO, a great user experience, writing quality content, a solid social media strategy, and

mobile optimization. So even if things are looking great, think about what you've been doing lately. Have you made any changes recently? This helps you to better understand SEO.

Conclusion

In this lesson, we've explained how you can check the effectiveness of your keyword research efforts. We've discussed two methods. Firstly, we've seen how you can track the performance of your website with Google Search Console. Secondly, we've discussed how to track and analyze the traffic that's coming to your site, using Google Analytics.