

A fresh look at SEO.

Our Goal

To craft a marketing strategy that both humans
and search engines
love

Google's Mission

“Our mission is
to organise the world's information
and make it universally accessible and useful.”

What is the purpose of SEO?

In essence, the SEO practitioner wants to bring a relevant and interested audience to their website or app by ranking highly in the search engine results pages (SERPs) of queries that are related to the problems their website or app solves.

Understanding Google's mission statement is important for SEO practitioners because it helps us to understand what Google wants to show at the top of a search engine results page (SERP.)

If we know what Google wants to have in the number one spot for a given query, we can create content that helps Google achieve that goal, making sure that we will always place well.

Algorithms and Technology

The algorithms that create the logic that Google uses to decide what pages should display at the top of a SERP change frequently, without warning and often without acknowledgement by Google.

According to Moz's [estimates](#) there have been 177 updates to the way SERPs are generated in Google's history, of which only 124 have actually been acknowledged publicly by Google.

So what do we need to know?

- Google's own best practices for SEO are found at the [Google Search Console Help Center](#). If you follow these rules you're in a great starting place
- Trying to 'game the system' e.g. by [keyword stuffing](#) is a losing strategy because Google actively seeks out these types of strategies and introduces penalties for bad actors.
- Serving high-quality content to users is the most efficient strategy to ranking over the long-term and to avoid being negatively impacted by algorithm updates. (The biggest problem whenever Google releases an update is that some sites are negatively impacted. These tend to be sites that were exploiting a mechanism in the Google decision making process.

How Google Understands

For many years, Google's core search algorithm has been designed to better understand searchers' intent. So, green cleaning products and eco-friendly cleaning products will yield the same results

- To achieve that, it has to **parse phrases, not keywords**
- It places emphasis on natural language queries, considering context and meaning over individual keywords.
- It looks deeper at content on individual pages of a website.
- It has the ability to lead users directly to the most appropriate page rather than just a website's homepage.
- Google also uses sophisticated machine learning technology to interpret searches and returns **related** search results
e.g. trainers >>> sneakers >>> sport shoes

All this has a significant impact on 'traditional' keyword analysis – that's not how SEO works these days

What Top SEOs Do Differently

As a result of understanding how search engines work; particularly how they focus on phrases and interpret search terms, SEO practitioners have moved away from just building their content around exact-match keywords.

Instead they are:

- Producing comprehensive & semantic-rich content around specific topics (which we call topic clusters)
- Emphasising SEO-friendly site architecture and consistent internal linking
- Aggressively promoting their content through link building, repurposing, syndication, etc.

Research from HubSpot

This is not new, but old SEO strategies persist. As long ago as 2015, HubSpot's [Anum Hussain](#) along with other colleagues presented the results of "more than three months of experiments, learnings, analysis" around SEO.

They came up with a content strategy that they summarised as "topics over keywords." and this is the foundation for what you have been reading today.

During the research, they grew their:

- domain authority* from 40 to 60 (HubSpot's domain authority is now 98)
- weekly organic sessions 13% W/W
- clicks from Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) for one keyword over 1,500%

Some of her key findings were:

- Linking internally really helps ranking positions (as does linking externally)
- Adding related links to old blogs helps the old blog and the pillar page
- The more you write on a single topic and link all the content together, the higher you will rank

If you're interested in how this approach to content strategy was created, [Anum Hussain's article](#) is a fascinating read.

*Domain authority was not originally a Google concept but was developed by SEO giants [Moz](#) as a way to predict how a domain would rank on SERP. It has become a standard way of referring to a domain's ability to rank.

Topic Cluster Methodology

One of the best ways to put Hussain's research into practice is to adopt a topic cluster methodology.

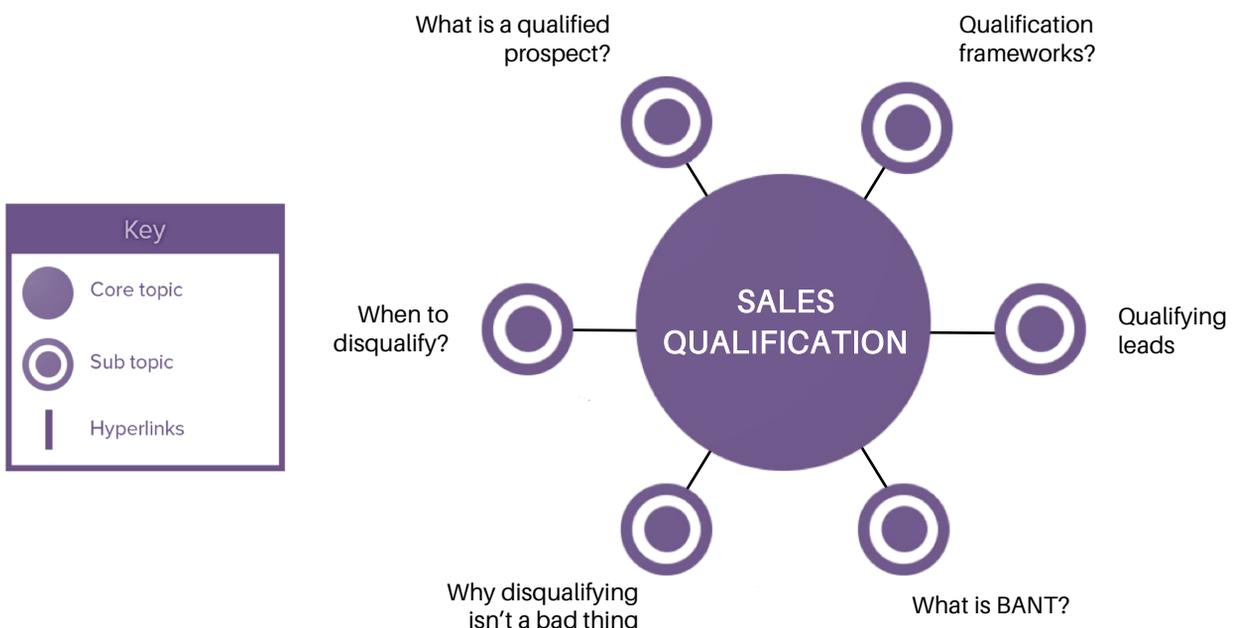
This means having a central ungated 'pillar page' on a topic, such as our studies on [FinTech Lead Generation](#) and [Conversion Rate Optimisation](#) which are both highly relevant to the theme of this eBook, then linking smaller, related blogs to that central page.

Why do this?

Linking relevant internal content within a topic to a pillar page, creates a semantic relationship between the pages' content. Remember how Google technology is focused on related key phrases, not key words?

Linking topics together generates more depth in the content, which gives the pillar page more authority. Google's RankBrain rewards this linking with higher search placement.

Quick win: Take your existing blogs, group them together by topic, link them to a central long read, thematic page and that will help your content to rank higher over time.



Pillar Content

As we have seen, a pillar page is an **ungated** website page that covers a **core topic** in depth and is linked to a cluster of related content.

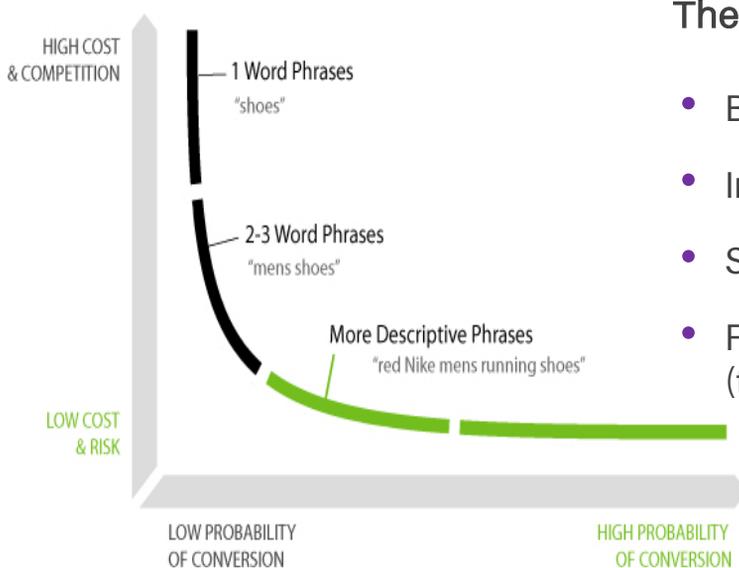
Why ungated?

There is a difference between landing pages and pillar pages. You need both - they do two different jobs and they complement each other.

Landing pages put a lot of steps in the way of a reader getting to a solution, because you, as publisher want something in return for your content, normally, permission and the information needed to start a conversation.

Pillar pages, on the other hand, allow you to provide a reader with a great deal of value, here and now. That shows your expertise (and that of your company) on a broadly cast topic, and showing that expertise in turn creates trust – you know what your talking about and you are prepared to offer at least some of it for free.

If people trust you, they are more likely to trust your gated offers too, and so not only do pillar pages improve your SEO, but also your [CRO](#).



The core topic should be a **broad term**

- Between 2-4 words in length
- Industry specific, educational
- Supporting your products or services
- Focus on long tail key phrases (the green area in the graph)

Sub-Topic Content

Pillar pages cover broad topics in long reads. The sub-topics that link to the pillar page should be much more specific and **semantically related** to the pillar page. This is absolutely key as the aim is to build up the authority of the pillar page through this network of connected and relevant content.

Your pillar page on the role of challenger banks may have links from a blog on enabling regulation; an infographic on the cyber risk over time; a video on client reactions to current banking standards; something on payment systems in the cloud; blockchain for securities' settlement; the cost of managing legacy systems compared to new technologies and so on.

As long as all these are covered in the pillar page, and relate to your products and services, then they are all valid subtopics and should be linked back to your pillar page.

Any format

Sub-topics can of course be in any format that works for you and your prospects and clients. Video has been well documented as a powerful medium, and vlogging may well be in your mix alongside infographics and text blogs.

Personas

[Buyer Personas](#) are key to finding the right topics and media through which to distribute your pearls of wisdom. They should inform all your content at all times.

Tools:

HubSpot has an excellent SEO tool for building and if you are a HubSpot Marketing suite user you really must be using this.

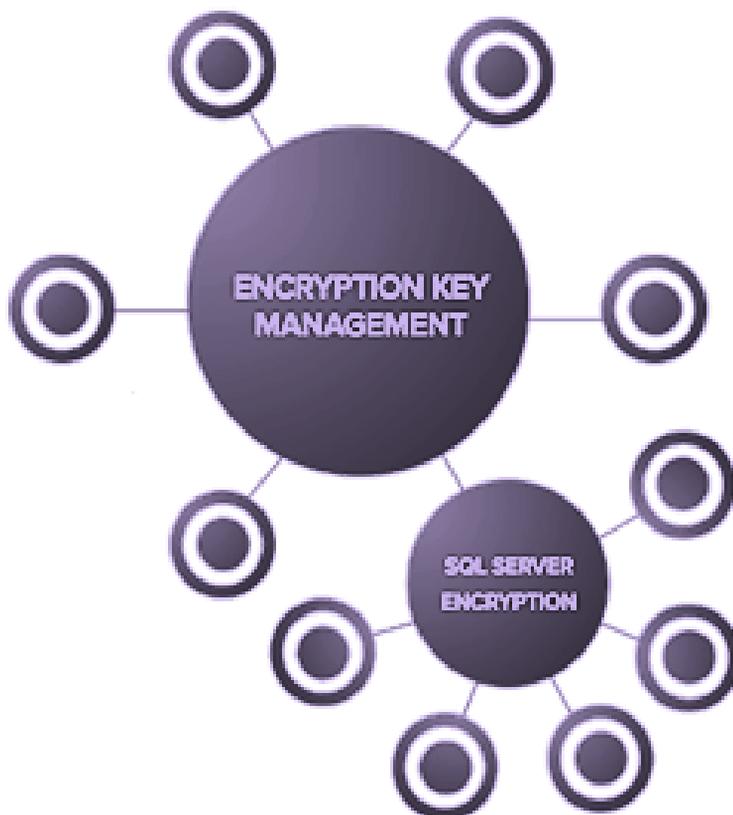
For topic suggestions, Neil Patel's UberSuggest has recently added a topic generator, as do many others.

Pro tip: Enhance generated content suggestions to be a perfect fit for your business

Topic Cluster Methodology

Over time, your subtopics may well become strong enough to take the shape of a topic cluster and pillar page.

At this point it is time to give your subtopic a pillar page of its own. That means writing a long-format article on the subject, ensuring that all the subtopics you have, link to the new pillar page as well as to the existing pillar page. Link the new pillar page and the existing pillar page together too, as they are relevant to each other.



Pillar Page Layout Tips

Here are some layout tips for your pillar page – remembering that these are long reads so good navigability is essential :

- Reference your core topic in the page title
- Reference your core topic in the URL
- It's a long read, use top navigation
- Reference the core topic in the H1 tag
- Use a landing page for pillar pages, not a blog page
- Put in all the conversion-focused landing page elements you can think of
- It can be helpful to have an anchor-linked table of contents
- Use images with the core topic referenced in the image alt text
- Use H2 tags for section headers
- Sprinkle related core topic terms throughout the page's content
- Add links to all relevant internal resources
- And... add links to relevant external resources
- Be kind to your reader – add a 'Back to top' button

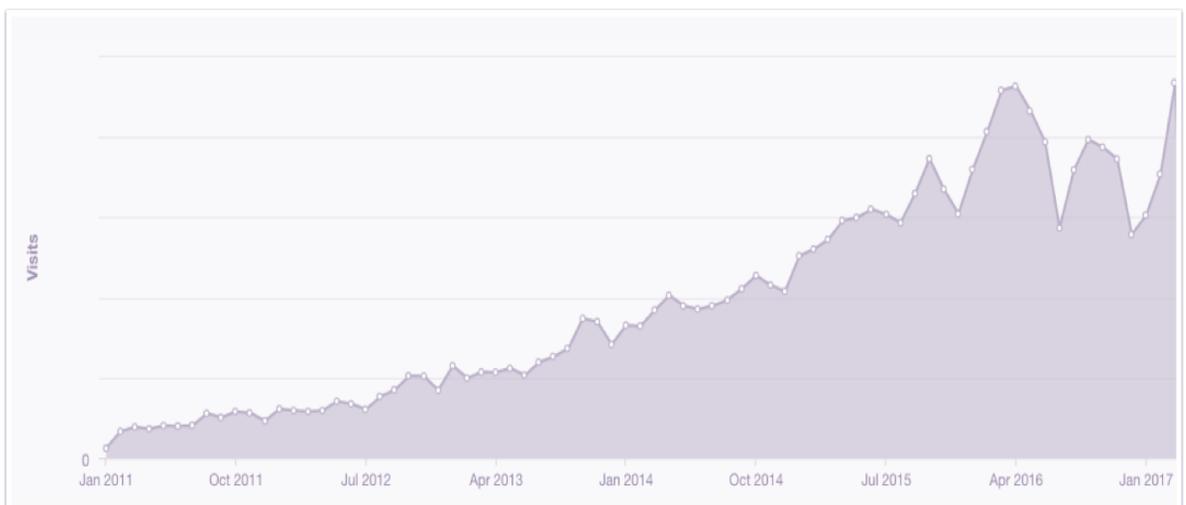
So Does It Work?

“We are receiving about **4x leads** (if you measure by quality) compared to before the text analysis content pillar.”

- Matti, Etuma

Townsend Security decided to create an ungated, comprehensive resource content pillar page around a broad topic.

Unpaid, organic traffic coming from search engines **increased 40% in less than 3 months.**



Content Promotion Checklist

Finally, once you have built your content, you have to promote it. Here's our checklist:

Short-term tactics to do for every piece of content

- Send email series to current contacts
- Create a series of social posts using interesting snippets from content
- Outreach to people who linked to similar content
- Answer five questions on Quora
- Comment on five blog posts on relevant, authoritative sites

Strategic tasks to achieve in the long-term

- Build relationships with industry influencers
- Contribute on industry newsletters
- Guest blog on authoritative websites
- Become active on industry communities
- Boost top-performing content on social media
- Launch remarketing ad campaign
- Syndicate your content
- Update/expand top-performing content
- Repurpose content into new formats
- Continue creating content to support topics

About Us

Flagship Marketing was founded in 2018 to partner with FinTech firms that want to grow more.



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