

# HOW TO MAKE ANY CONTENT SEO-FRIENDLY



A 3-Step SEO Guide for Writers  
and Content Marketers

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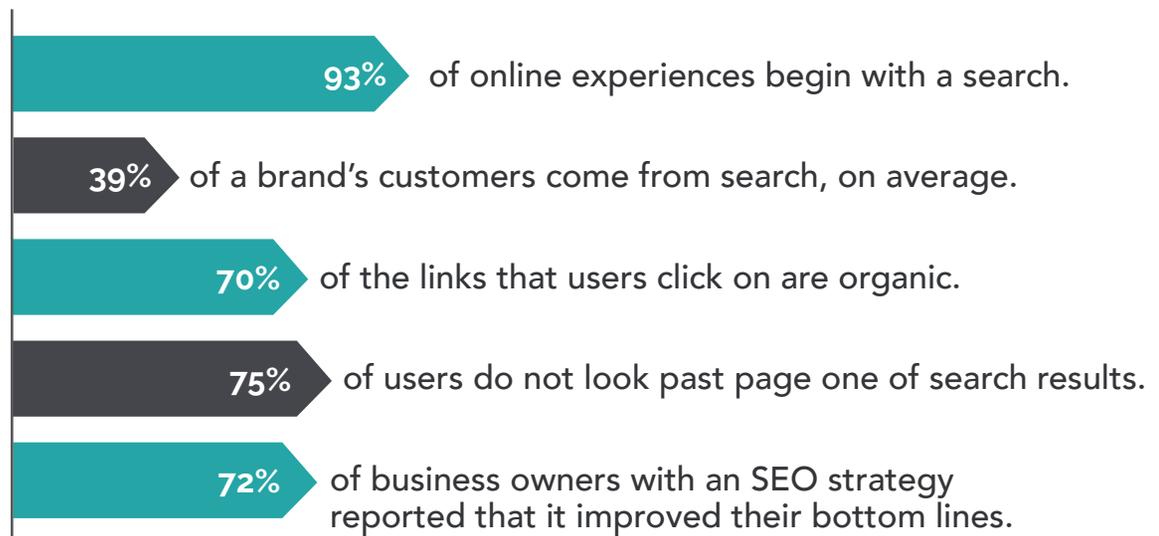
Search engine.

# Introduction

## PURPOSE

This purpose of this eBook is to help writers understand how to optimize their page content for SEO. By itself, content optimization is not terribly complicated (and has the added benefit of falling entirely within the copywriter's purview, so you won't need to consult your developer until the time comes to push it live). We'll share traditional tricks of the trade regarding keyword research, selection, and placement, as well as some emerging best practices that you can use to help search engines make the most sense possible of what you write.

So: You've been charged with writing something for a website. Maybe it's an article or a blog post; maybe it's a major page that describes one of your brand's core products or services. Or, maybe it's every last page of a completely new site. Whatever the scope, you know enough about the value of the search audience to understand that a big part of your job will be to ensure that the page(s) you write can, and will, be found by search engine users. The numbers speak for themselves:



# Answering the Big SEO Questions

**To succeed in online marketing,** you simply must capture the attention of the mass of humanity that relies on organic search. To do so, you need to be certain that each page you've written maximizes its potential to be seen by searchers. In other words, your content must be optimized for organic search, or in other words SEO-friendly. Trouble is, if you consider this necessity even for a second, a deluge of questions arise, e.g.:

**Isn't SEO complicated stuff, given how many people seem to make a career of doing it?**

**In light of how often we read about Google making changes to its algorithm, and how many changes appear in the lists of ranking factors that get generated every year, what does "SEO-friendly" even mean anymore?**

**Can you apply search engine optimization to a piece of content retroactively, or are there principles you must bear in mind from the start?**

**Most importantly: What exactly would those principles be?**

## **Where to Begin:**

If your goal is to take a thorough, complete, and holistic approach to optimizing your site for search, there will be much more to the task than simply optimizing your content; you would have to consider enhancing the site's page speed, hedging against duplicate content risk, and maximizing the flow of authority between pages, to name three specialized tactics among many. If your scope extends this far, then your SEO does indeed qualify as complicated stuff, and we recommend consulting with an SEO agency or dedicated specialist, as such efforts would require the guidance of an expert.

Let's begin by talking about the search environment we work in today. The prime directive of a search engine is to serve the content that will be the most satisfying to the searcher. Google (the field's undisputed leader, but also its most ambitious participant) has invested heavily both in human polling to determine what constitutes a satisfying site experience for most people, and in compiling a massive and ever-growing database of knowledge to advance the endeavor of semantic search, wherein the search engine strives to see through the words that a searcher enters and determines that searcher's true intent. That is, Google is getting smarter, and, consequently, its algorithm changes over the past few years – chiefly the many iterations of Panda, Penguin, and Hummingbird – have served to put less emphasis than ever on mastery of these traditional tricks, and more emphasis than ever on the fundamentals of good writing. **On that note, let's begin with the single most important piece of advice in this entire eBook: Write for people – not for search engines.**

# “Write for people – not for search engines”

While it wouldn't be prudent to dismiss all concern for search engines during the writing process, it would serve even less to be so preoccupied with SEO best practices that you forget your human audience — that would be letting the tail wag the dog, so to speak.

Never forget that what you're writing is meant to be read by real people. The experience that they have on your site once they get there is the most important consideration of all. Much of Google's changes of the past few years have been made entirely to emphasize that message to writers like you and me. We must listen!

Read on and this guide will teach you how to polish your text content for maximum search visibility without compromising its prevailing spirit, while always keeping your readers' pleasure in mind as your foremost consideration.

## Google Is Getting Smarter

As Google grows smarter, it seeks less direction and less input from site owners and is able to do an ever-better job of reading and analyzing web pages on its own. What's more, its growing talent for parsing human speech also applies to the query side, in that it has progressed noticeably of late (particularly after September 2013's Hummingbird update) in its ability to see through the particular wording of a query to the true searcher intent behind it. In short, Google is now asking for considerably less explanation from humans, and honing its ability to understand all on its own. This means that you can get further in search than ever before simply by writing with clarity and elegance. Of course, the flipside of this coin is that good writing is now a firm prerequisite to success in search as well.

# STEP ONE: Choose Your Keywords

***For all the intelligence strides that Google has made in recent years, content optimization is still more about the proper selection and use of keywords than anything else.***

A keyword is a word or phrase that a person might (realistically) input as a query into a search engine, and for which you would like to see your page served in the results for that query.

How do you know what keywords will be right for your page? First, figure out what your page is about. This is the single most important thing to do. Determine the substance and the tone of your page the way you already know how: by doing the required research, and then harnessing the unique combination of knowledge and passion that you can bring to bear on the subject. That is and should be the true basis of your content, and that is where you must begin. Do not try to choose your keywords first, based on some assessment of their popularity. Popularity is a secondary consideration here. Relevancy is king.

For writers or marketers tasked with writing an entire site, there is one SEO-oriented consideration to make room for at the very start, and that is to minimize content overlap. This means ensuring that you don't have any two pages so alike in subject matter that they risk competing with one another for visibility on the same keyword(s). As you undertake the process described below for each page individually, make a note if you end up with two or more pages that seem to be inclined toward the same keywords. You're going to want to diversify one or both to put some topical distance between them (or just delete one of them outright, if that seems better). Entertain the same consideration when writing a new page; is it essentially a duplicate of a topic you already have? If so, it might make more sense to write your new page as a substitute for the old one rather than as a supplement.

# How Do Search Engines Determine Which Results Are Served for Which Keywords?

In the early days of search, results were served on string-matching alone. The entire mechanism consisted of crawling and indexing every page on the accessible web, rifling through each one to look for strings of text that matched what the user had entered, and then serving them up ranked from the page that used that exact string the most (or with the greatest emphasis) to the one that used it the least. That was how relevancy was determined. Algorithms have gotten considerably more sophisticated now, but keywords still form the firm foundation of a search engine's understanding of what a webpage is about. If there's one SEO-specific consideration you'll want to make room for early in your process, it's determining which keyword or keywords correspond to the search audience most likely to be satisfied by reading your page.

# The Keyword Brainstorm

1

## WRITE A THESIS STATEMENT.

Start by trying to express the core idea of your page in a single declarative sentence (this is what I learned to call a “thesis statement” back in high school). It can be valuable to do this with an old-fashioned pen and paper. Revise as much as you need to until you have a sentence that captures the whole idea of that particular page and avoids all risk of being misconstrued.

2

## IMAGINE SOME QUESTIONS THAT YOUR THESIS STATEMENT COULD ANSWER.

Turn that thesis statement on its head and try to come up with some questions that your page would answer for anyone reading it. The more, the better, as long as you find them all realistic and reasonable. (These questions might have a direct way of serving your page’s search visibility in the process, so keep a record of them in their full, intact form, but also be prepared to manipulate them for the next phase of this initial process.)

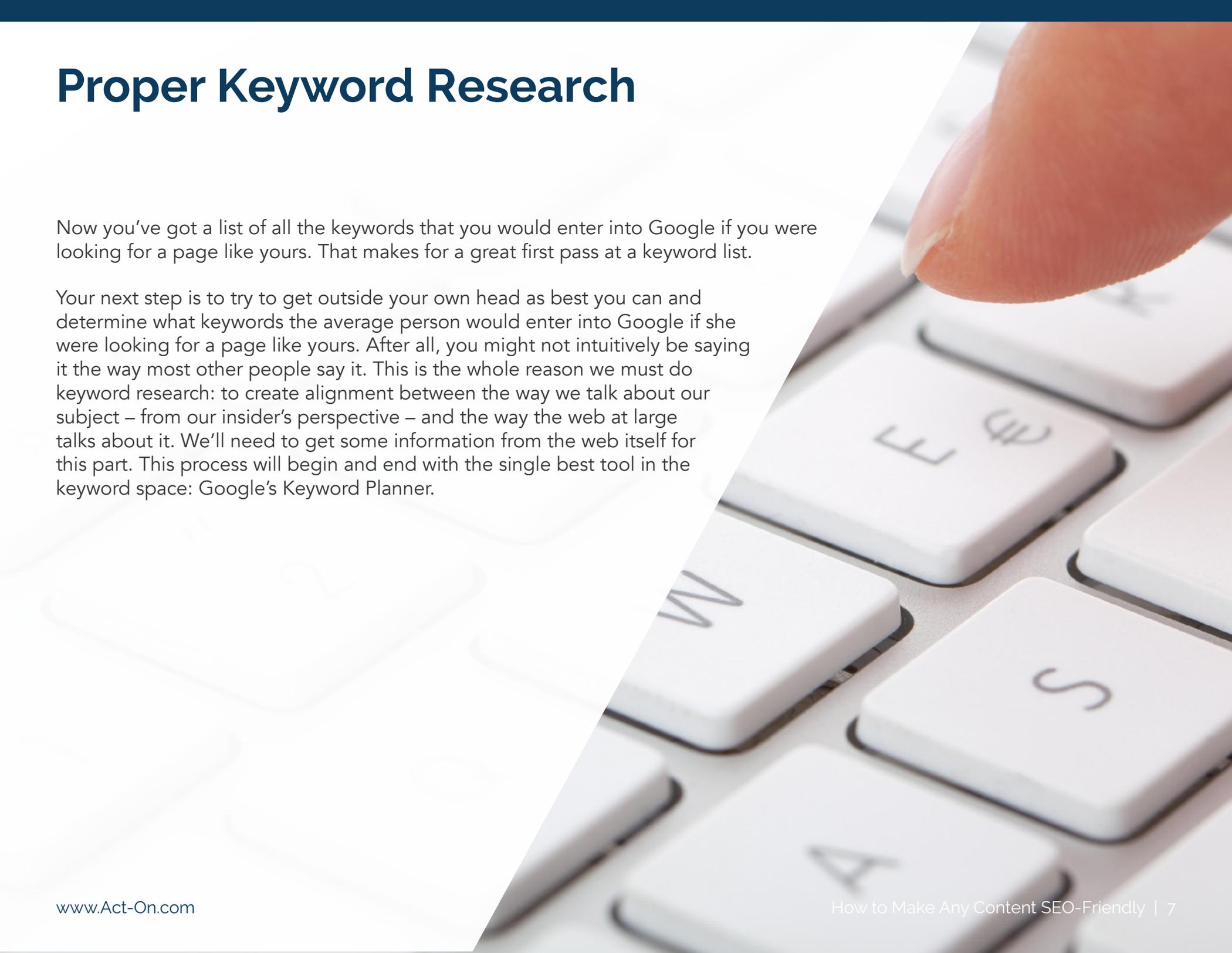
3

## IMAGINE WHAT YOU WOULD TYPE INTO A SEARCH ENGINE IF YOU WANTED ANSWERS TO THOSE QUESTIONS.

Chances are extremely strong that you yourself are a search engine user. Put yourself in the shoes of somebody seeking an answer to each of the questions you wrote down in the previous step. Write down those potential queries in every way that you might word them if you were the one seeking the information.

Those potential queries that you’re left with at the end of this process make up your initial keyword list. This is your starting place. The tool-driven steps that follow will help you refine it for maximum search power.

# Proper Keyword Research



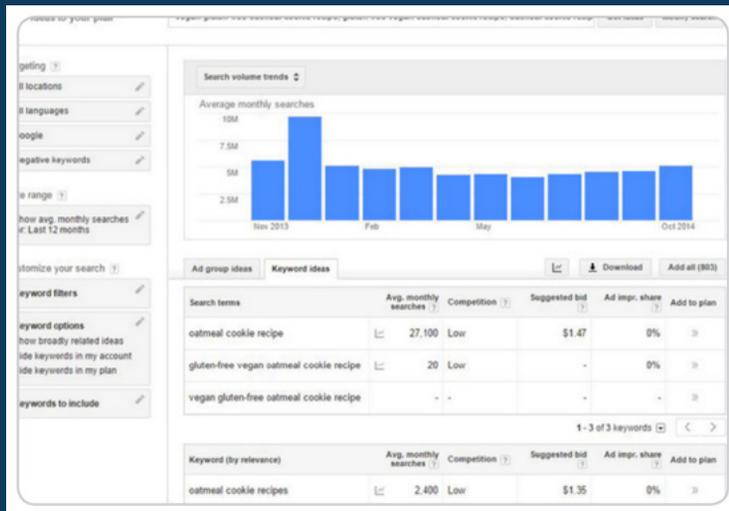
Now you've got a list of all the keywords that you would enter into Google if you were looking for a page like yours. That makes for a great first pass at a keyword list.

Your next step is to try to get outside your own head as best you can and determine what keywords the average person would enter into Google if she were looking for a page like yours. After all, you might not intuitively be saying it the way most other people say it. This is the whole reason we must do keyword research: to create alignment between the way we talk about our subject – from our insider's perspective – and the way the web at large talks about it. We'll need to get some information from the web itself for this part. This process will begin and end with the single best tool in the keyword space: Google's Keyword Planner.

# Google Keyword Planner

Keyword Planner is a tool that, for any keyword you enter, will output:

- 1 An estimate, based on real data, of the total number of searches performed on that keyword every month. (This total describes exact matches only. It can be tailored to any geographic region).
- 2 A list of up to 800 keywords that its algorithm thinks are similar to the one you entered (based on past searcher behavior), along with the same estimated total for each of those.



To call this significantly helpful information is an understatement. Not only is this where you're going to see how the keywords you brainstormed earlier measure up against one another, but it's also – more importantly – where you're going to get your first exposure to those crucial alternate phrasings.

What if you were already deep in the process of writing an article about the health benefits of garbanzo beans, and Keyword Planner informed you that significantly more people search for "chickpeas" than "garbanzo beans"? (They do, by a factor of 74.) That would be terrifically valuable knowledge to have, and it would no doubt inspire you to rethink your entire article's choice of term, which you could almost certainly do without altering its main thrust. This is the kind of thing that Keyword Planner's suggestions can point out to you.

That's an extreme example based on a very simple substitution, but the potential for discovery here is far greater. Consider this: "vegan gluten-free oatmeal cookie recipe" gets an average of zero searches per month, but "gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe" gets an average of 20. All we did here was reverse the order of the two modifiers. Who would have guessed what a difference would show from that simple switch?

# Some Other Tools You Can Use to Augment Your List of Potential Keywords...



**WIKIPEDIA**  
The Free Encyclopedia

## Wikipedia

It may seem obvious, but Wikipedia is a stellar resource for learning your way around a discourse. Especially in cases where the page topic is not a matter of great personal interest to you and thus requires more careful research, Wikipedia is a helpful place to go and see all the other words and phrases that most commonly surround the one you started with.



## Übersuggest

For any keyword you enter, this tool will scrape Google's "autosuggest" feature — the feature that enables Google to see the start of the query you're entering and suggest ways for you to finish it — and return the most commonly searched long-tail queries that begin with your input. The value of long-tail keywords will be further revealed in the next section, so remember this tool when you begin your quest for them.



## MergeWords

This is a jQuery tool as basic as it is useful, giving you three columns into which you can input words or phrases, and spitting out a single list containing every possible ordered combination of every string in every column. This is particularly useful when you're dealing with a page topic that could be expressed using different potential combinations of terms for which multiple synonyms exist, and the list it generates can be copied and pasted directly back into Keyword Planner.

By making thorough use of these tools, you put your initial keyword list through the semantic wringer and emerge with a much longer list. Most likely, you're now looking at a few keywords that already appear to show strong potential (some of which may still appear in exactly the same form in which they appeared on your initial list), and a longer list of "maybes." As long as they all appear relevant to the topic as only you can know it, they all qualify for the next round.

# STEP TWO: Refine Your Choices

## *Getting to the Good Stuff:*

What you're ultimately going to want is a list of no fewer than two and no more than eight keywords for your page. The most relevant one will be your primary keyword, and the remainder will be supporting keywords.

Let's talk about how to get from your full list of potential keywords down to the few that are perfect.

*You Want:*

**1**

**PRIMARY  
KEYWORD**

**1-7**

**SUPPORTING  
KEYWORDS**

# Cutting Out the Obvious Nonstarters

## The 3 Kinds of Keywords That You Should **Never** Choose for SEO

1

**The ones that don't sound like a naturally occurring English phrase.**

The prevailing rule here is that, unlike in PPC, SEO keywords will ultimately need to be integrated into page copy, and page copy will always need to sound natural. Therefore, you don't want to choose keywords that would be difficult to construct copy around. "Cookies oatmeal" has some search volume – chances are, you yourself have entered backwards queries like it before – but it would be a disastrous choice to optimize for because of how tortured any phrase built around it would have to appear. Your keywords need to "disappear" into your page copy, so don't set yourself up for certain failure this early in the game.

2

**The ones that sound like adspeak.**

This is another rule that is much more about the principles of good copywriting than about SEO per se: The copy that you write describing your product or service will sound like used car salesman chatter if you optimize it for keywords including touts like "best" or desperate pleas like "for sale." As with the above example, people do indeed search that way, but the copy will suffer if you play to those search queries explicitly. Keep your keywords purely descriptive.

3

**The ones that mention a competing brand by name.**

Another common practice in PPC is to bid on competitors' names for impressions, and this too will not fly in SEO. The only way in which you could reasonably mention a competing brand in your page copy is pejoratively, and that kind of ill will only put people off. Keep it classy.

Now that you've gotten rid of the truly hopeless ones, you're likely left with nothing but honest contenders. The next essential step will be to pick your primary keyword; all selections of supporting keywords will follow naturally from that task.

# Determining Your Primary Keyword

***A page's primary keyword is the one that does the single best job of standing for the page as a whole.***

Though you'll strive to include as many keywords as you can in the copy of this page, the following section below will demonstrate that many of the most important locations on a page for keywords won't easily accommodate more than one, so it makes sense to pick the most valuable in the bunch.

Your primary keyword should always be the one that is the most precisely relevant to that page's content, i.e., the one that captures the most dimensions or nuances of the idea. In most cases, this will not be the keyword that shows the highest search volume in the lot. As noted above, "gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe" gets an estimated 20 global searches per month to the 110,000 that "oatmeal cookies" gets, but if your page is about a gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe, then the former, more precise keyword is the one you'll want to choose.

Keyword	Possible Searcher Intents	Possible Relevant Destinations
<b>Oatmeal cookies</b> Global Monthly Searches: <b>100,000</b>	<b>Oatmeal cookie knowledge</b> (historical, nutritional, cultural)  <b>Oatmeal cookies for sale</b> (by mail, local)	<b>Reference site</b> (e.g. Wikipedia)  <b>Retailer, local directory</b>
<b>Oatmeal cookie recipe</b> Global Monthly Searches: <b>27,100</b>	<b>Oatmeal cookie recipes</b> (any kind)	<b>Recipe site</b>
<b>Gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe</b> Global Monthly Searches: <b>20</b>	<b>Specialized oatmeal cookie recipes</b> 	<b>Specialized recipe site</b> 

# Why Choose Relevance Over Search Volume?

It goes without saying that it would serve search engines better, as it would give them a richer wealth of information about the page, but that alone is no reason to favor a lower-volume term. How would it benefit you to do this? As a matter of fact, it would benefit you in up to three ways:

**1** Even though many more people search "oatmeal cookies" than "gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe," the ones who search the latter are all but guaranteed to want exactly what your page offers,

which cannot necessarily be said of everyone searching the former. You potentially lose out on some visitor quantity by targeting the longer-tail keyword, but you gain immensely in average potential visitor quality. The searchers that you will attract on that more precise keyword are in a sense already moving through the conversion funnel before they even touch down on your page. And besides, losing out on quantity isn't even a sure thing, because...

**2** ...you have to succeed in ranking highly for a high-volume keyword in order to capture its traffic...

and a keyword with higher search volume is almost invariably one for which it is more difficult to rank. You likely won't have to wage nearly as fierce a battle to rank for a keyword of such comparatively little volume because there are fewer and smaller fish going after its search traffic. And finally, the search volume numbers you're working from are far from completely trustworthy, because...

**3** ...Google has reported that approximately 70% of its daily queries are very-long-tail...

not one of them popular enough on its own to show as having more than zero average searches per month, but almost all of them have variations of keywords that do. By choosing the extremely precise and more relevant long-tail keyword "gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe," you qualify the site not only for searches on that exact phrase, but on the millions of possible but undocumented variations that are even longer and still likely to be relevant, e.g.:

*"gluten-free iced oatmeal cookie recipe"*

*"tasty gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe"*

*"gluten-free oatmeal cookie recipe for kids"*

...and so forth. Google has even said that 20% of its daily queries are unique and brand new, i.e. queries it had never seen in its history until that day. This is every day we're talking about. Every single day. It is plain to see that the full diversity of searched keywords is staggeringly greater than this tool could ever convey.

So don't think that going after the keyword next to the largest number in Keyword Planner is the answer. The answer is to describe your page as carefully as you can, building on keywords that demonstrate search volume whenever possible, but never making volume your first consideration.

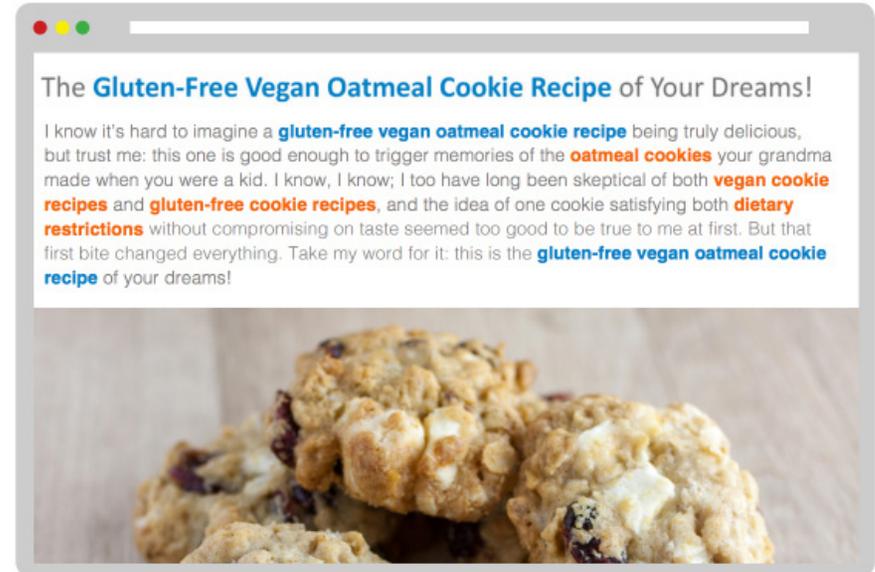
# Determining Your Supporting Keywords

Now that you've chosen one primary keyword for your page, the next task will be to choose a handful of supporting keywords.

*Supporting keywords should expand the range of queries to which the page could be considered relevant, without sacrificing its focus.*

This is every bit the tightrope walk that it sounds like. Generally speaking, there are two approaches, depending on how narrow the focus of the page is.

**If the page covers a breadth of topics** — as is usually the case for a homepage or a page that describes a whole range of products or services — then the primary keyword is likely something speaking to that full breadth, which means the supporting keywords can be more narrowly focused and speak to more granular sub-topics. For instance, if the page describes the company's entire slate of services, then the supporting keywords could spotlight each service individually and could set up subsections of content on the page that describe them all in greater detail.



**If the page has a narrow focus**, as is the case for a page that describes one single product or service, then the primary keyword was probably something fittingly narrow and long-tail. In this instance, you can invert the above paradigm and choose broader head terms for your supporting keywords, to cast a wider net...

# What If I Have to Pick Keywords for the Whole Website?



***“Do not assign the same primary keyword to more than one page.”***

Those of you tasked with writing an entire site are now wondering: “What do I do if I’m writing the broad page that describes all the services as well as the granular pages that describe each service individually? How do I make it so that these various pages help each other in search rather than undermine each other?” All you must be sure of is that you do not assign the same primary keyword to more than one page. That is the only scenario that would foster true and mutually destructive competition between pages.

It is perfectly all right to select a primary keyword for one page that you also use as a supporting keyword on one other page, as long as the keyword in question can fairly be called relevant to both. If you’re lucky, search engines might return both in results for that keyword (that’s what we’re gunning for, anyway). You can also get added mileage by cross-linking between these related pages and using the primary keyword of each destination page within the anchor text of your links.

# STEP THREE: Optimize

## *Optimize Your Page for the Keywords You Chose*

The more spots on the page that your primary keyword appears in, the more convinced Google is of the page's relevancy to that keyword. In step three, we'll cover the essential locations for your keywords, both on the page directly and in the peripheral elements.

1 Body Copy

2 Heading

3 Page Title

4 Meta Description

5 URL

# The 5 Most Valuable Page Locations for Your Keywords

## Body Copy

Too little use of the primary keyword in the copy, and your efforts to optimize the remaining locations for it won't count for nearly as much. Too much, and you could trip search engines' spam alarms. The ideal is to write 300 words or more of copy per page, and use the primary keyword two to three times in the opening paragraph (earlier is better because search engines read top-to-bottom and left-to-right, just like people), but err on the side of less if you would have to compromise the text's natural tone to reach that density. Supporting keywords can be used more freely, and the copy should include exactly as many as will naturally fit.

## Headings and Subheadings

These are the tags that appear as "headlines" of varying size on the page. They are rendered with HTML tags in a hierarchy of <h1> through <h6>, and you should use them as needed to indicate the start of a new page section. Think of a term paper outline, as by all accounts this was the model used when these tags were codified: The <h1> heading is analogous to the title of the paper, and the <h2>-and-below tags act as "chapter headings" for sub-sections corresponding to lower levels of depth. Accordingly, tag the title of the piece as an <h1> heading and place your primary keyword in it (if at all possible), and integrate supporting keywords into subheadings where you can.

## Page Title

In spirit, the page title is similar to the <h1> heading in that it's meant to contain a single statement that sums up the core idea. The difference between the <h1> and the page title lies in how

we encounter the two; the <h1> heading is what displays at the top of the page itself, and the page title is what shows on search results pages. This second forum is the one we need to write to, as the page title will serve there as a call-to-action for users, inspiring them to click through. (Any keywords that a user queries that appear in the page title of a search result will show there in bold). We must therefore write page titles to the strict formal constraints of a search results page: They must not exceed 55 characters in length, must include the page's primary keyword, and must place their descriptive, keyword-loaded component before any brand identifier.

## Meta Description

The meta description appears only on search results pages, as the short snippet right below the page title (usually in blue hyperlinked text) and URL. Words in a meta description that match words in a search query will also show in bold, so the meta description, like a page title, is most valuable as a call-to-action. These should be written as fully composed statements (a complete sentence or two), should limit themselves to 120 characters or less, and should also include the page's primary keyword.

## URL

The URL itself is the very first page element that a crawler sees, and as such is another very useful location for a primary keyword. Use the primary keyword here if you can, and separate all words in a URL using hyphens, not underscores. Search engines read hyphens as spaces, but read underscores as letters, which means they would read an underscore-separated URL as one long, meaningless word.

# Anatomy of a Perfect Page

Primary Keyword in the Page Title

3

Primary Keyword in the Page Title <H1>

2

5

Primary Keyword in the URL

1

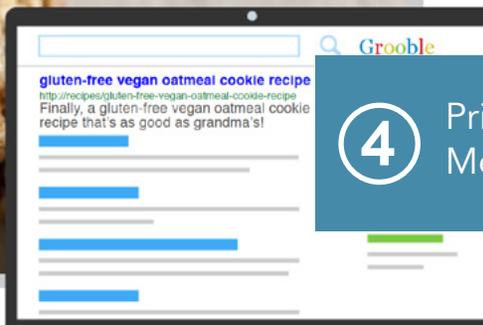
Primary Keyword in the Body Copy

4

Primary Keyword in the Meta Description

The **Gluten-Free Vegan Oatmeal Cookie Recipe** of Your Dreams!

I know it's hard to imagine a **gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe** being truly delicious, but trust me: this one is good enough to trigger memories of the **oatmeal cookies** your grandma made when you were a kid. I know, I know; I too have long been skeptical of both **vegan cookie recipes** and **gluten-free cookie recipes**, and the idea of one cookie satisfying both **dietary restrictions** without compromising on taste seemed too good to be true to me at first. But that first bite changed everything. Take my word for it: this is the **gluten-free vegan oatmeal cookie recipe** of your dreams!



*Although we didn't tag it here, your keywords should be used in the "alt text" of any high quality, topically related images you will be adding to your page. Well-chosen images serve to strengthen your message and Google places relatively high value on alt texts to determine not only what is contained in the image, but also what is in the surrounding text.*

# Warnings!

In SEO's storybook past, there was no such thing as too much keyword use. So great was the trust that the primitive early search engine algorithms placed in the web that they believed every word on a webpage to be sincere and substantive. Therefore:

**1** Once upon a time, the more you used a keyword on a page, the more relevant search engines believed that page to be to that keyword.

**2** Once upon a time, there was no hard limit to how many keywords a single page could be considered relevant to.

**3** Once upon a time, words highlighted with bold and italics were sincerely trusted to be of greater relative importance than their surrounding words.

**4** Once upon a time, a special meta tag existed — called "meta keywords" — that search engines innocently suggested sites use to inform them directly as to what keywords they felt were most relevant to the page.

*That time has passed and none of these conditions hold true anymore.*

It took about five seconds before this trust was abused by spammers running junk sites that paid them on the basis of ad views. The web became cluttered with pages that were nothing but wall-to-wall keywords, all of them unrelated to one another and chosen for their search volume alone, and all of them bolded, italicized, and reproduced in the meta keywords tag. Before long, a whole industry had sprung up around tricking the web's searchers into looking at a worthless page, and the search engines cried, "This is why we can't have nice things!"

It took years before the algorithms managed to make inroads against these spammers and save search users from the daily experience of wading through a sea of scam artists' pages before finding one of actual value.

Now, if anything, the search engine algorithms are overzealous in their fight against spam; consequently, it's become downright dangerous to overemphasize a keyword because search engines are so inclined to see the choice as a deliberate effort to curry their favor. There are tales in the last few years (since Google's Panda and Penguin algorithms of 2011 and 2012, respectively) of well-liked and well-meaning sites incurring a penalty for overusing a keyword on the page, for constructing their domain name around a keyword, or for boasting a suspiciously large number of backlinks with keyword-rich anchor text. "Guilty until proven innocent" has now become the search engine's default perspective on pages suspected of so-called "over-optimization," and, as a result, SEO practitioners advise their clients to err on the side of less. This is meant purely as a word of caution and certainly should not be construed as negating the volume of keyword advice that came before. It is only to emphasize the value of quality writing over all other page properties, and the deployment of keywords in a surgically careful, thoroughly natural-sounding way. If you have any doubts about your keyword density, consult an SEO professional, as the matter remains more an art than a science.

# SUMMARY & BONUS TIPS

## *In Summary*

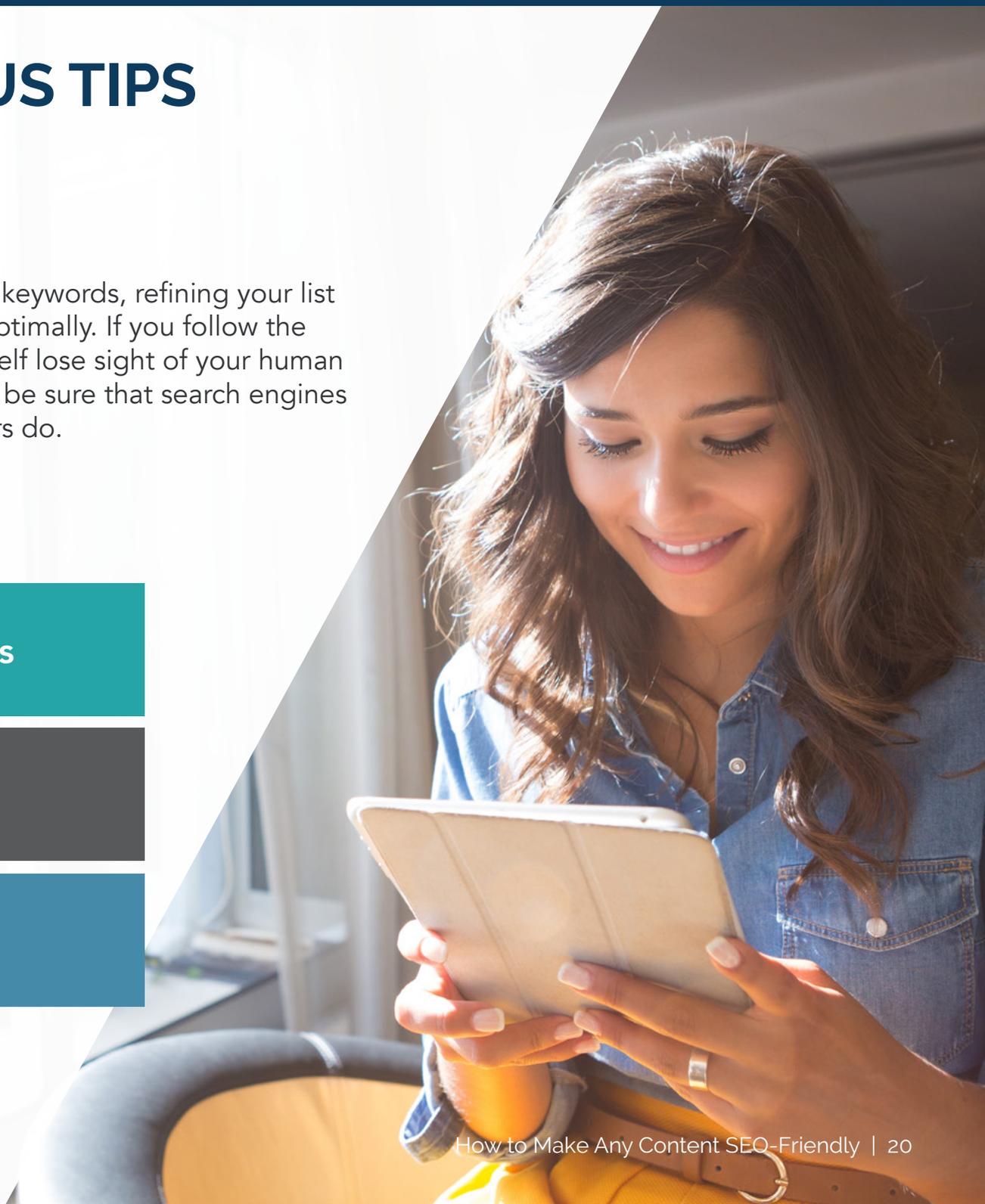
Remember the three steps: choosing your keywords, refining your list of keywords, and placing your keywords optimally. If you follow the tips above for all three and never let yourself lose sight of your human audience throughout the process, you can be sure that search engines will love your page as much as your readers do.

## *Follow the Three Steps:*

**1** Choose Your Keywords

**2** Refine Your Choices

**3** Optimize Your Page



# 5 Mistakes You Really Don't Want to Make

**DO NOT** put search volume ahead of relevancy when choosing keywords. It certainly might seem like a good idea to optimize your piece for the short keyword with 2,000 average views per month instead of the long one with 400, but if the long one describes the content with greater precision, there are two reasons why it's the better choice:

- It will be less competitive and therefore easier to rank for;
- It will filter your audience, such that the average reader will be more keenly interested in the page and more likely to convert after reading it.

**DO NOT** over-optimize. This means using your keywords to excess in the text, and/or giving them unearned emphasis with bold or italics. Once upon a time, search engines thought that the webpage using a given keyword the most times was the page most relevant to that keyword, and that anyone using bold or italics on a given phrase must be sincerely indicating the relative importance of that phrase to the text. It didn't take long before so-called keyword "stuffing" and abuse of bold and italics became hallmarks of cheap, manipulative SEO, and Google began punishing offending content as such. No matter what, make sure your writing is natural. Insincere bold and italics, and the use of a focus keyword more than three times in one paragraph (including in the meta description) are both red flags.

**DO NOT** stuff the meta keywords tag. The meta keywords tag is no longer regarded as a positive quality signal, meaning that there is no way of using it that will make search engines like your page more. The only way in which it still factors into search engine

algorithms is as a negative quality signal, meaning that cramming it full of keywords in hopes of ranking for them is something search engines will notice and punish you for. We have this practice's long association with webspam to thank for that. Either use the meta keywords tag as an on-page store of the keywords that you've targeted on the page (in case you need an easy reference to help you navigate future content changes), or leave it blank.

**DO NOT** hide text. Also because of its long association with webspam, few practices are more dangerous in SEO now than hiding text on your page. "Hiding text" refers to any number of traditional methods by which webspammers used to pack their pages full of keywords that search engines could see, but human visitors could not. The most common shoddy practices were to render the text in white against a white background, to position it thousands of pixels off-screen using CSS, to layer it underneath an image, or to set its font size to 0. Do not do this for any reason. Seriously. Find another way.

**DO NOT** hold the piece to the keywords you started with if it changed as you wrote it. Writing projects evolve during the process. Especially if you're writing a blog post or article, you might discover that you didn't really know what it was about until you were more than halfway to your expected word count. If you find the content shapeshifting on you, revert to the act of distilling the premise into a single thesis statement and see whether that gives rise to some different keywords. Maybe there are some better fits out there.

# 5 Advanced SEO Tips

**1** In addition to the keywords themselves, sprinkle your page with synonyms of those keywords, and other words that relate to the same topic. This will likely occur naturally on its own, given that your page should ideally only cover a single topic and cover it in some depth, but it's worth formally noting how much Google loves to see pages that indicate relationships between different words. These pages connect dots of meaning for Google, thereby giving them a richer understanding of the universe of human language. This is the most basic example of a growing on-page optimization practice called "topic modeling," and it plays directly into the semantic search ambitions that define the Google of today (and can only be of further help to your readers as well).

**2** Remember back when you were manipulating your page's thesis statement into questions that you thought the page might be able to answer? Remember the recommendation to put aside those questions in full, intact form, because they might be useful for something? Well, here's the payoff: Questions make for excellent `<h2>` subheadings. You can earn great SEO bonus points by using commonly asked questions as subheadings to set up content subsections that answer those questions. Take your two or three best questions from your list and input them into Keyword Planner exactly as they are; see if any show any search volume or if Keyword Planner suggests any close alternatives that do. Even if none do, you might still capture some long-tail traffic by using one. Just word the question in the way that sounds most natural to you, and incorporate the most relevant of the page's already-designated keywords into it.

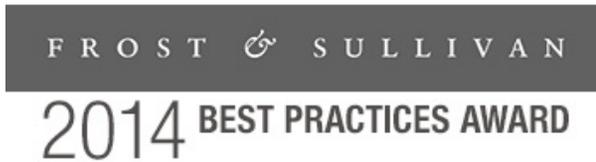
**3** Add social sharing buttons to your page. The more shares and recommendations a page gets on social networks, the better it will circulate on the web and the more likely it will be to rank well in organic search (especially on Google+, where shares and +1s have a demonstrable positive effect on a given page's rankings in personalized search). The best way to stimulate social shares for a page on your site is to arm it with social sharing buttons, which can easily be done using off-the-shelf solutions like ShareThis and AddThis. Just make sure that they can easily be seen, and that their recognizable icons are on display (rather than being hidden behind a generic "Share" callout and only visible on mouseover, for instance).

**4** If your page is more than 2,000 words in length, and especially if it's going to be published by a major site, it might qualify for treatment as an in-depth article by Google. Google answers certain "general informational" queries with a three-result Page One box that spotlights content of special depth. Use Article markup from Schema.org to increase your chances of qualification.

**5** If your page is a static page (and especially if you're writing an entirely new site), you can get some extra mileage out of your page's primary keyword by using it in the anchor text of any link that directs to it. The anchor text of linking pages count among the many strings of text that Google's algorithm will forever associate with a page and bring to bear on its understanding of the page's meaning.



# Acclaim for Act-On



## About Act-On Software

Act-On Software is a marketing automation company delivering innovation that empowers marketers to do the best work of their careers. Act-On is the only integrated workspace to address the needs of the customer experience, from brand awareness and demand generation, to retention and loyalty. With Act-On, marketers can drive better business outcomes and see higher customer lifetime value. The Act-On platform provides marketers with power they can actually use, without the need for a dedicated IT resource.

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