A Smarter SEO Content Audit: Aligning For Performance, Purpose & LLM Visibility via @sejournal, @coreydmorris

A major category, focus, or pillar (as I have defined it for decades) of SEO is content. Influencing a range of on-page factors, but more so to develop authentic context and authority status over the years, content has been an engine of so much SEO and is a focal point in the shift from keyword-focused to visibility in the era of LLMs, AI search results, and organic search results in integrated thinking.

With a focus on content needs of today, combined with those from the past few years, a popular way to understand content's effectiveness is to conduct SEO content audits. As we look at content auditing in a more versatile way for broader visibility, I believe it is important to address the fact that audits often fall into one of two extremes:

- Too shallow to be useful – using an automated tool and lacking data and a point of view.
- Too deep and detailed to be usable – so much data, so much crawling, and so many topics that it's difficult for search engines and LLMs to understand the actual focus.

With AI and LLMs changing how content is discovered and interacted with, we can't afford to rest on the content we have created in the past and to assume past performance will provide future positive results. I believe a better model is a performance and purpose-driven audit that prioritizes actions

based on business impact and newer visibility models.

SEO content audits, which evolve to stay relevant in today's search and AI environment, need to account for the fact that search behavior is shifting. I'm not going to unpack the stats or talk about search market share in this article, but trust that you're seeing the impact in your stats and dashboards. As we shift with the market, we do have to think more about answers and authority signals.

Even if we have a finely tuned content machine that has every possible AI-driven efficiency built into it, we can't afford wasted efforts and content bloat. Flooding search engines and LLMs with bloat, whether human-generated or AI-generated (or some combo), is wasted if it isn't working for us. This is especially true for B2B and lead-generation-focused companies that have longer customer journeys and sales cycles.

Marketing and corporate executives expect performance and find out too late that outdated or ineffective content didn't translate from keyword rankings to AI visibility. Leveraging a content audit that balances having enough depth, but being actionable and focused on business value, is as important as ever.

How To Conduct A Performance-Driven, LLM-Aware Content Audit

I'm advocating a modern and repeatable framework that replaces traditional SEO content audits with one that is more useful and aligned to how things work today.

1. Define Purpose

We have to start off by getting on the same page with what spurred us to do an audit and what our ultimate goal for the effort is. Whether we're trying to clean up legacy content

overall, to shift focus to LLM visibility that we want to improve, seeking to get more conversions out of existing content, or other noble goals.

It is important to understand what “good” looks like. Whether it is visibility, traffic, authority, engagement, or some other measurable outcome.

2. Segment By Type And Funnel Stage

A challenge of content reviews and analysis is how specific content is prioritized. We want to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

That means we need to break down the categories of content for the audit by type. That can include blog posts vs. core landing pages vs. gated assets. However you look and classify the types of content on your site and that your team creates, you’ll want to use this as a filter.

Additionally, you want to look at your content in the same way that you consider your funnel. Whether it is top, middle, and bottom-of-funnel content, or if you look in a different way at customer journeys and classifications, use this as a second important filter and prioritize what you want to analyze and why (going back to the defined purpose of the content audit).

3. Score Content 3P’s (Purpose, Performance, Potential)

This is where our audits and processes start to take a more custom approach based on the steps we’ve completed so far. You’ll need your own custom scoring system. It could be as simple as a 1-3 scale for the categories of Purpose, Performance, and Potential.

Purpose:

- What is this content meant to do?

- Is it aligned with:
    - Brand?
    - Positioning?
    - Goals?

Performance:

- How does it drive:
    - Traffic?
    - Conversions?
    - Citations?
    - Engagement?
- Does it actually:
    - Bring people in?
    - Move them forward?

Potential:

- Could it rank or be rendered in answers in AI with updates?
- Could it be:
    - Repurposed?
    - Repositioned?

As third-party tools continue to add to their data sets and measurement capabilities, you could do your own checks, combining Google Analytics 4, Google Search Console, and ChatGPT to see what content feels useful for LLMs.

4. Determine What Stays

At this juncture, it is time to add a business-focused or aligned lens. Considering content for things like it helps us get found for the right reasons, if it would resonate with our primary audience, and if it would be prominently perceived as expert and authoritative by further stakeholders (current client, journalist, industry colleagues).

For each piece of content that is reviewed within the audit

and analysis, arrive at a final decision:

- **Remove:** With no performance, future, or purpose, this content can be removed.
- **Combine:** This category is typically for topics that are competing or have cannibalization.
- **Update:** Whether it is a topic that isn't optimized, is misaligned in the current iteration, or needs some other type of identified improvement. LLMs prefer sources that are timely, so refreshing content on a regular basis to stay as up-to-date as possible can help improve the longevity of a piece being sourced by AI.
- **Keep:** This category is for content that needs no change and that you'll keep as-is currently.

5. Optimize For Search & LLM Visibility

For the content you have determined that stays or gets updated, you'll want to consider both search and LLMs and what they reward for your content and brand to be found.

For search engines, starting with intent can often help to not get bogged down in old-school thinking about keywords and help with thinking of topics and the opportunity that exists for visibility in organic search results.

For AI, while this article isn't a primer for what matters for being found in LLMs, there are things like content structure, clear and authoritative answers, brand signals, and external validation (PR, etc.) that are important here, too, in the edits and updates that you make.

6. Create Prioritized Action Plan

While it might feel like, at this point, the heavy lifting is done and that you've got a solid spreadsheet, list, or way that you've organized the work so far, this is where the follow-through and implementation can get derailed quickly.

You need to work at this juncture to score or plan out what is required for implementation based on effort vs. impact. Additionally, you need to layer in your team's capacity, skill sets, and cost (or opportunity cost) of resources. Lastly, you need to organize the effort into sprints or milestones to do over time so it doesn't become a never-ending project or one that is too big to accomplish.

7. Track Business (Not Search) Metrics

As the content audit work wraps up and turns to implementation of the action plan, you need to make sure you're set up to look beyond rankings and traffic.

Deeper business-aligned metrics include conversions, form submissions, and demo requests as the bridge from online to sales processes. Quality metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) still apply as you weave in conversion rate optimization (CRO) efforts and mapping to expected aspects of the customer journey or funnel.

And, as you evolve from SEO metrics to visibility, third-party tools or your own qualification and quantification efforts in customizing GA4 or other data capture and analysis work will be important in understanding the impact of your content auditing and update efforts.

Final Thoughts

Content audits aren't dead. However, the way we've done them in the past likely does need to change. There's no such thing as a perfect process, tool, or spreadsheet, but we can leverage solid practices that integrate our own goals, potential, and value to our target audiences.

SEO this year and beyond is about visibility, usefulness, and what we can impact across search engines and LLMs.

Remembering that the right audit balances depth with being actionable, the steps I outlined and your team’s dedication and focus can help you see it through to measurable success.

More Resources:

Featured Image: Roman Samborskyi/Shutterstock

https://www.searchenginejournal.com/seo-content-audit-aligning-for-performance-purpose-llm-visibility/556584/