Aligning content and SEO for search success

From a 30,0000-foot view, capitalizing on organic search as a customer channel seems so simple. You need to create good content and secure good links – that's it!

Of course, in practice, this process is much more complicated. What is "good content?" And what are "good links?" These questions themselves could each be their posts. If you want to learn about these topics, I suggest reading these resources:

But I want to focus on process. More specifically, I want to discuss how to align your content and SEO strategies to work in the same direction and drive sustainable results for your website.

Many SEO professionals cite a lack of understanding of SEO initiatives as a barrier to success. By lifting some of the burdens of search success from the SEO team and incorporating more of the broader digital marketing team in the elements of SEO they influence, you'll achieve better outcomes.

To be successful with search, you need to integrate workflows and build a foundation for collaboration, as well as continue to foster teamwork before content development, during creation and through publication.

Let's walk through some best practices to help you align your respective teams and get content and SEO working together in harmony.

Integrating workflows

Building a foundation for collaboration is the first step towards aligning content and SEO. If you have two separate departments executing content and SEO, you need to integrate

their workflows.

Joint meetings are a simple, but effective way to increase collaboration. You don't need long, wide-reaching brainstorming sessions together, but quick weekly or monthly updates between the two departments can work wonders.

Another way to encourage collaboration is by aligning KPIs for both departments. When each team has the same measurements of success, they will naturally be more open to cooperating. Every team wants to be successful and demonstrate their value, so sharing a common goal and making both teams equally accountable for organic search success will bring your content and SEO teams together. One can't succeed without the other.

Finally, you need to ensure that lines of communication are established and remain open. Tools like Slack or Google Hangouts can support this communication, allowing team members to collaborate in real time.

With these elements in place, your teams will be positioned to work together to align content and SEO for optimal results.

SEO research informs content creation

Coordination between content and SEO teams should be happening long before any content is developed.

Content teams should be given creative freedom for topic ideation – they are the experts and creatives – but your SEO team can help them make more informed decisions. Much of the keyword and niche research SEOs can inform content marketing to be more strategic and positioned to capitalize on search.

If you want to earn organic traffic you need content – but not just any content, you need the *right* content and your SEO team can guide your strategy to target the right opportunities.

SEO teams can guide content strategy in **two primary ways** – competitor and audience analysis through the lens of search.

Competitor analysis for content creation

SEOs can analyze competitor content to understand which pages are performing best and driving visitors to the competition.

Using tools – such as SEMrush, Majestic, Ahrefs, Moz, etc. – SEOs can identify competitor pages with the most organic traffic as well as top linked pages on competitor sites. This information is critical for the content team because these competitor pages represent opportunities. These are topics that your audience has a proven interest in, and if you don't have similar pages, you need to create them (and improve on what the competition is doing).

By identifying a competitor's top posts, your SEO team can also gain strategic insight into:

- Optimal formats for content (video, checklists, image-heavy, etc.).
- Unique SERP opportunities (snippets, knowledge box, carousel, etc.).
- Ideal content length and structure.
- Potential linking audiences.
- Potential promotional opportunities.
- Alternative and related keyword ideas.

This information empowers your content team to craft pages that earn visibility for your site and have the potential to reclaim audience share from your competition.

Audience analysis for content

creation

The audience analysis SEO teams are uniquely suited to deliver can also benefit content creators before content development.

The keyword research SEOs perform will provide valuable insight that can help the content team prioritize opportunities and topics. This research will uncover the true opportunity associated with top keywords and themes based on search volume, competition level and most importantly, searcher intent.

Understanding intent is critical to building a complete marketing funnel for your website. You need to craft content for each stage of the funnel and the associated intent with each of those stages. While searchers with commercial intent typically have the shortest distance to becoming a customer, they are also at the bottom – most narrow – portion of your funnel. Focusing solely on these searchers means your missing a significant portion of your audience with your content.

In many niches, commercial pages are often among the most competitive or present the least opportunity in terms of organic search performance, particularly when it comes to e-commerce sites.

Providing a range of valuable content on your site that focuses on different parts of your marketing funnel and is targeted to keywords with the most opportunity is essential to SEO success. The best opportunities are typically a combination of:

- Low competition and
- High search volume.

Or

- Search results where the existing ranking pages are lacking, and you can create something better.

Crafting these pages is integral to building a complete content marketing strategy. These strategies start to move the needle when combined with conversion rate optimization (CRO) best practices and a solid user experience on-site, like sound internal linking and proper use of calls-to-action.

It can always benefit your content creation team to dig into the SERPs, see what's ranking and determine why.

For example, if you sell ergonomic keyboards, there will undoubtedly be searchers with commercial intent that want to find your product pages. However, there will also be an audience searching for general health tips for the office. Through keyword research, your SEO team can find relevant topics that target these larger audiences and bring them to your site. Topics such as:

- [chair exercises] – Search volume: 8,100
- [desk exercises] – Search volume: 5,400
- [desk workouts] – Search volume: 1,900
- [exercise at work] – Search volume: 1,000

Furthermore, each of these opportunities has even more search potential with associated long-tail keywords. For example, if we dive deeper into [desk workouts] in SEMrush, we can see even more opportunity:

- [desk exercise equipment] – Search volume: 1,300
- [exercise at your desk] – Search volume: 1,300
- [under desk exercise] – Search volume:1,300
- [exercise at work] – Search volume: 1,000
- [exercises to do at your desk] – Search volume: 880
- [workout at work] – Search volume: 880

That's 6,000-plus cumulative search volume that our hypothetical content team could be missing if they aren't aligned with our hypothetical SEO team.

SEO research can also inform content formatting once an

opportunity is identified. Going back to our ergonomic keyboard website, if the SEO team flagged [deskercise] – a term that has 720 search volume – as a good opportunity for content creation, they should also share that there is the opportunity for video content in these results:

This knowledge will empower the content team to craft content in the format searchers prefer, increasing the page’s ability to rank.

Competitor and audience research are integral to creating strategic content for search, and by aligning SEO and content, you can craft pages that are positioned to be competitive in the search results.

Keeping SEO involved throughout content creation

The SEO team's job isn't finished after they hand off the data from their research – SEO should remain involved throughout content creation to consult on content optimization.

Consider developing a templated checklist your content and SEO teams can run through together that addresses important optimization questions for each piece of content you create. Your checklist might look something like this:

Content-focused questions:

- What is the goal of this webpage or piece of content?
    - Which pain points can this address for my audience?
    - How does this content relate to our business goals?
        - Does this piece of content serve an SEO goal – will it rank for target keywords or earn links?
- Who would read this, and why?
- What should someone who visits my site do after reading this content?
- How might this content perform socially?

SEO-focused questions:

- Are images optimized?
- Are title tags and headers properly applied?
- Are meta descriptions properly created and reader-centric?
- Does this page meet speed requirements?
- What is the bounce rate on this content?
- Have proper conversion rate optimization factors been considered?
- Are there opportunities to build internal links?

External links?
- Would this page benefit from schema markup?

Particularly for some of these SEO-focused items, your team will need to review content performance after publishing, so make sure everyone on the team is aware of the company content calendar. Set reminders for SEO and content team members to review each post after they've had a few weeks to perform.

And remember: just because these questions are divided by focus, everyone on the team should be accountable for both sets. This will help prevent "reactionary" SEO and siloing.

Simply getting your SEO team to share research and data with your content team isn't enough, make sure these teams continue to work together throughout the creation process to ensure your pages are well-suited to succeed in organic search. Even after publication, SEO and content should be in communication about content performance in terms of social awareness, keyword rankings and link building.

When content and SEO are aligned, you'll not only see better results, but your team will be more broadly empowered to take responsibility for search success.

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the guest author and not necessarily Search Engine Land. Staff authors are listed here.

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