By Kimi Mattig-Louria Posted March 7, 2019 In SEO

ARE YOU OPTIMIZED?

How to utilize keywords when writing for SEO to increase your online presence.

WHAT EXACTLY IS SEO?

Search Engine Optimization, a.k.a. SEO, is the process of improving a website's content so it gains the organic approval of search engines and achieves a higher search result ranking. Search engines use computer bots that help internet users quickly weed through tons of irrelevant websites in order to hone in on exactly what they're looking for. Writing for SEO helps position your website so it reaches the consumers looking for you before they find your competition.

Not long ago, we thought of Google as the exclusive internet search authority. Although it is still the top search engine used, online research has expanded to share the market with other engines such as Yahoo, Bing, Ask, DuckDuckGo, and more. For clarity of explanation, we're going discuss your company's most relevant SEO platform—its website—and how it works with Google's search engine.

KEYWORDS ARE KEY WHEN WRITING FOR SEO

To put it bluntly, how you utilize keywords in your web copy can make or break your website. These are the words or phrases most often typed into a search bar by a user to find what they're looking for. Your target audience will never find you if you don't select and use the keywords they are using … in the right places throughout your website. This is extremely important because, if your prospective clients can't find you, they can't use you.

The "key" to keyword usage is to have it so well supported by your content, tags and headers (we'll talk about those in a bit) that it helps propel your website onto Google's first page of results. The majority of Google's users don't venture beyond the first page of search results. According to ClickMinded, 75% of click-throughs go only to the top five. As you can see, for the best visibility over your competitors, you should strive to be ranked "number one."

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CRITICAL KEYWORD CONSIDERATIONS

When writing your website, you must select the best keywords for your target audience. Sounds simple, but there's more to consider here than meets the eye. Typically, generic terms are often searched by less committed users while "long-tail" searches (keyword phrases with 3 or more words) are used by those with immediate intent. Furthermore, a word or phrase most searched by your audience might already be taken by competitors … and this lowers its impact for your SEO. All of that needs to be considered when selecting keywords, and that's why doing keyword research is best left to those who specialize in it. If you're a beginner at keyword selection, here are some reliable resources that can help:

- Google Keyword Planner
- LongTailPro
- Wordtracker
- KWFinder

PLUGGING IN YOUR KEYWORDS

Previously, SEO writers could manipulate a webpage's ranking by cramming in as many keywords as possible—even at the expense of content clarity and user experience. But now, those trying to take advantage of search engine algorithms by "keyword stuffing" could find their websites dropping in rating status, thanks to the Google "bot police" who just won't stand for it. So, how do you provide those golden keywords that both people and bots will embrace? You simply ensure the proper placement of keywords, complemented by compelling and supportive content.

NO REPEATS

Each of your webpages should host its own keyword combo. Some pages may not have a dedicated keyword phrase due to their content, such as the "contact us" page … and that's okay. It's better to waste an optimization opportunity than to repeat keywords. If you assign the same keywords to different webpages, they will end up competing with one another for rankings. This lowers the impact of each webpage and defeats the purpose.

The top places your keywords should appear on each page are your title tags, meta description tags, URLS, H1s, H2s, H3s, alt texts and copy. Let's take a closer look at what the first three of these are and how they impact SEO.

TITLE TAGS

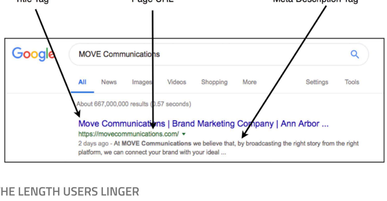
Title Tags are the blue headers that show up in Google's search results (see image below). Title tags are essentially bits of HTML code, acting as page descriptions, that help search engines and users understand the content on a particular webpage. Title tags should include the keywords assigned to that page at the front of the tag, and be relevant to the content within that page. If your tag is not relatable to the content on the page, Google will gloss over it. Try to keep tags under 60 characters in length or they might be cut off from the page view.

META DESCRIPTION TAGS

Meta description tags are also HTML code elements. To the user, these are short summaries that describe the content found on the page directly under the title tag. To the bot, these are validation that the page will cover what it says it will cover. Meta description tags should be compelling (use a call-to-action or an offer here when possible) and invite engagement from the user. Think of them as free ads for your page that invite a user to click-though. Their character count should be between 50-300 … whatever is needed to best do the job … and should also include the keywords for that page at the front of the blurb.

URLS

URLs are your webpage's web address. Just like your title tags and meta description tags, your page's URL should describe the page's content as succinctly as possible. URLs hold a little less weight in regards to helping a webpage's ranking, so don't force your keywords into them. Just consider the URL one more opportunity to help optimize your webpage if keywords fit in naturally.



THE LENGTH USERS LINGER

The point of all the keyword SEO rules we've covered so far is to help your website turn up on the first page of Google's search results. This can drastically improve your click-through rate, and bring new users to your website. Yes, all of that is necessary and wonderful, but getting them there is only half the battle. Once they find you, you'll need to keep them there long enough to glean results.

Your primary goal is most likely to introduce users to your company and have them take the action you're directing, i.e., fill out a form, make a purchase, or make an appointment, etc. Your secondary goal should be for Google to realize that users "like" your webpage. Search engines jump to this conclusion based on length of time spent on your page. When enough users spend enough time, you'll get another boost in your rankings. The question is, how to keep users and bots interested in your page once they've found you.

THE IMPORTANCE OF H1S, H2S, AND H3S

Let's start with your H1s. Search engines look closely at your H1s (or "headings") in order to make sure they reflect the subject matter covered on that page. Yes, this is one more important place to plug in your target keywords, but here they should read more like an engaging headline rather than a catalogue listing. For example, if your keyword combo is "best hiking equipment," don't just write "the best hiking equipment." Make it better. Try something more promising, like "Hiking equipment best designed to take you to new heights." Use the words you have to your advantage, or risk losing your audience. Unlike a search engine bot, most users appreciate good writing.

Scrolling down the page, we find another SEO opportunity to be had by adding some H2s and H3s. These are subheadings to the master heading that help lead the user and search engine along the content outline of your webpage. Your H2s and H3s should support the overall page theme, but don't need to contain an exact keyword phrase. Just make sure they're in order and they relate to the heading above them and copy below. Take time to write these well. Make them interesting. You can plug in a keyword or synonym, but it's more important that they're well written than exact. That job is for your H1.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PHOTO OPS WITH ALT TEXT

I know we're talking about writing for SEO, so we won't take time to explain the many benefits of optimizing images in regards to user experience on your website. You can read a little more about that here, but it's worth a mention that utilizing your keywords in the image description or "alt text" is a "plus, plus." Your alt text is a brief summary of what your image is. This gives search engines (who can't otherwise see the image) one more proof that your website is providing the user the information it promised, which will be credited to your rankings.

THE RIGHT WAY TO WRITE SEO COPY

Okay, we've just covered all the keyword basics you'll need to address before you actually get down to copywriting. The most important rule from this point forward is to remain faithful to the subject matter while keeping your audience intrigued. Keywords should appear in the very first copy paragraph under the H1, as close to their order as possible. Beyond that, writers should strive to present informative, descriptive, intelligent, and subject-appropriate content broken down into scannable portions. Use relatable word choices and synonyms instead of awkwardly forcing in keywords, or you'll risk losing your audience and your optimization.

Forcing in keywords, puts you at risk of losing your audience and your optimization.

Simple SEO writing rules to live by:

1. **Know your audience:** Speak in the voice they would most relate to, so they feel a camaraderie with you. This will help trust your brand's experience.
2. **Never stuff keywords where they don't belong:** Use synonyms, relevant words, and creative word play to say the same thing in a new way. Stay on topic and support your subject matter with rich, informative content—not over repetition.
3. **Keep it simple and scannable:** Go out of your way to make the complicated easy to understand and offer it up in scannable chunks. A great way to do this is with short paragraphs, subheads, and bullet lists.
4. **Use images:** A picture can set the mood and motivate your user to stay or go. Alt tagging it offers another optimization opportunity.
5. **Add links to other reputable pages:** This helps validate what you are saying, adds factual support, and increases your website's value with search engines.
6. **Quality & Quantity:** More is still more. Shoot for 1500 words+ per page to capture a higher ranking, but only if your content is relevant and meaningful to the user. If not, keep it shorter, but always pack it full of informative copy.

WRITING FOR SEO IN SUMMARY

We've just covered how to gain the organic approval of a search engine through strategic and meaningful SEO content. To review, a writer seeking to optimize content should gather keywords from a reputable source. Those words need to be plugged into the website's title tags, meta tags, URLs, headings, and image alt tags. Website copy should be lengthy rather than sparse, and committed to supporting the subject matter promised in the keywords. Most importantly, it should speak to and interest the user, thereby inviting them to linger on the page.

ON THE MOVE WITH GOOGLE

With that, you now have a handle on writing for SEO to better manage your position in Google's search results … for the moment anyway. Google changes its algorithms hundreds of times each year and, as you can imagine, some of these changes can affect your website's performance.

If you're not already working with an SEO specialist or digital marketing agency, reach out to us today. We'll help you stay on top of current SEO best practices to give your website the momentum it needs to gain a position on Google's sought-after first page of search results. Remember, if you're not making it as one of the top five rankings, you might not make it at all.

Let's talk

By Kimi Mattig-Louria

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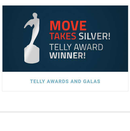

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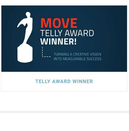

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