

A Beginner's Guide to Data-Driven SEO



INVESTIGATION

Create buyer personas

Whether for B2C or B2B, consumer personas should be at the core of your data-driven strategy – this is the creation of your ideal customer base, and the primary focus of your SEO endeavours will be to make the site as relevant and appropriate to these personas as possible. Though these should be open to change based on the data you discover during the investigation process, it is important for you to have at least sketched an outline to build on, and here's how.



Target demographic

This will feed back into many other areas of your strategic planning, so is a good area to start with. Whatever service you provide will, obviously, fall into a few generic types – whether it is 'female marketing managers 25 – 50 interested in email marketing', or 'house husbands 30 – 40 interested in topiary and motorcycle racing', knowing the audience you're pitching at will begin to give you an indication as to how to satisfy their needs with the services or products you provide.



Device use

Understanding what devices your customers use, and how they use them, is important for a number of reasons – not least of which is in the development of your site following the so-called ‘Mobilegeddon’ update that rewards mobile optimised sites with improved mobile rankings. Device use also offers correlation with intent – with buyer research, search investigation, and resultant purchasing being performed predominately on desktops, while solution based searches, local searches and voice searches tend to drive mobile search.

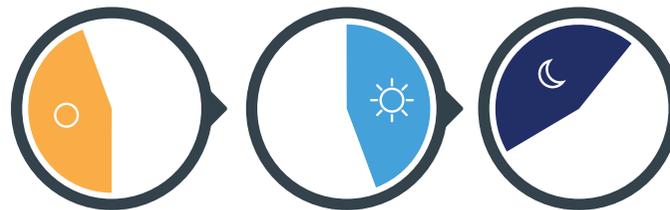
Usage charts

As much as knowledge of device use will help you to plan your site and the way you deliver product and service information, knowing about times of use is also important in deciding when these things happen. If use peaks in working hours then this should be your focus, or if an e-commerce site is to make the most of its consumer base it must also look to work to its strength during periods of high seasonal or holiday activity – think Christmas for toy manufacturers, or summer for BBQ equipment, garden furniture and umbrella manufacturers.

Being able to determine device intent will feed directly into any good SEO campaign, permitting brands the ability to design strategy to offer cross platform personalisation that nurtures the buying cycle to increase eventual conversion.

Mobile search also tends to be influenced more by location, offering brands with a location specific, or multiple location specific offers or products – whether this is a store-locator or direct call function - the ability to drive mobile users to convert in person, while desktop users are expected to purchase online.

It’s not enough to be online for these periods, it is important to use gathered data and your buyer personas to make your best pitches at times when your services are most required, to help you stand out from the competition. Though this is predominately of relevance to paid search campaigns, it is also useful when planning asset marketing for inbound sales and even for seasonal SEO updates to product feeds.



KEYWORD RESEARCH

Keyword research is a vital part of any SEO campaign, whether it is used to mould on-page copy, or to develop brand or product positioning, it is imperative that it is not only done, but done thoroughly and well.

For example – if someone is looking to make a purchase for a new hobby in which they are interested, but about which they lack a degree of knowledge of key terms, then they are going to be searching more general terms, and relying on strategies that account for this to deliver them the best results.

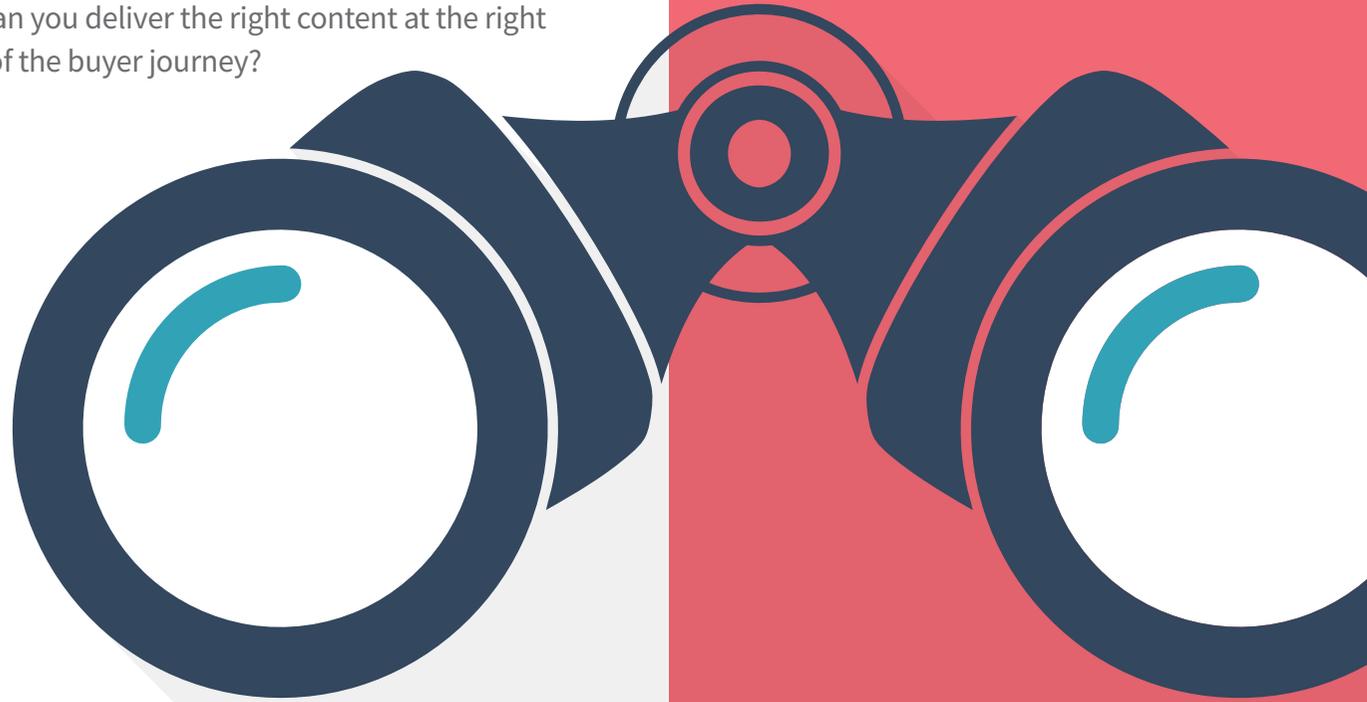
In addition, good keyword research will reveal gaps – areas your competitors are not competing in, or competing only marginally. If your brand is new to a marketplace, the chances are that competitors will be well established for trophy keywords, whereas there may be appropriate, industry specific long tail gaps that can be exploited for early gains.

Think about levels of interest and expertise of your buyer personas – are people looking for brand specific items, using specific industry jargon more likely to want to buy or to need information than those searching for generic, non-specific terms?

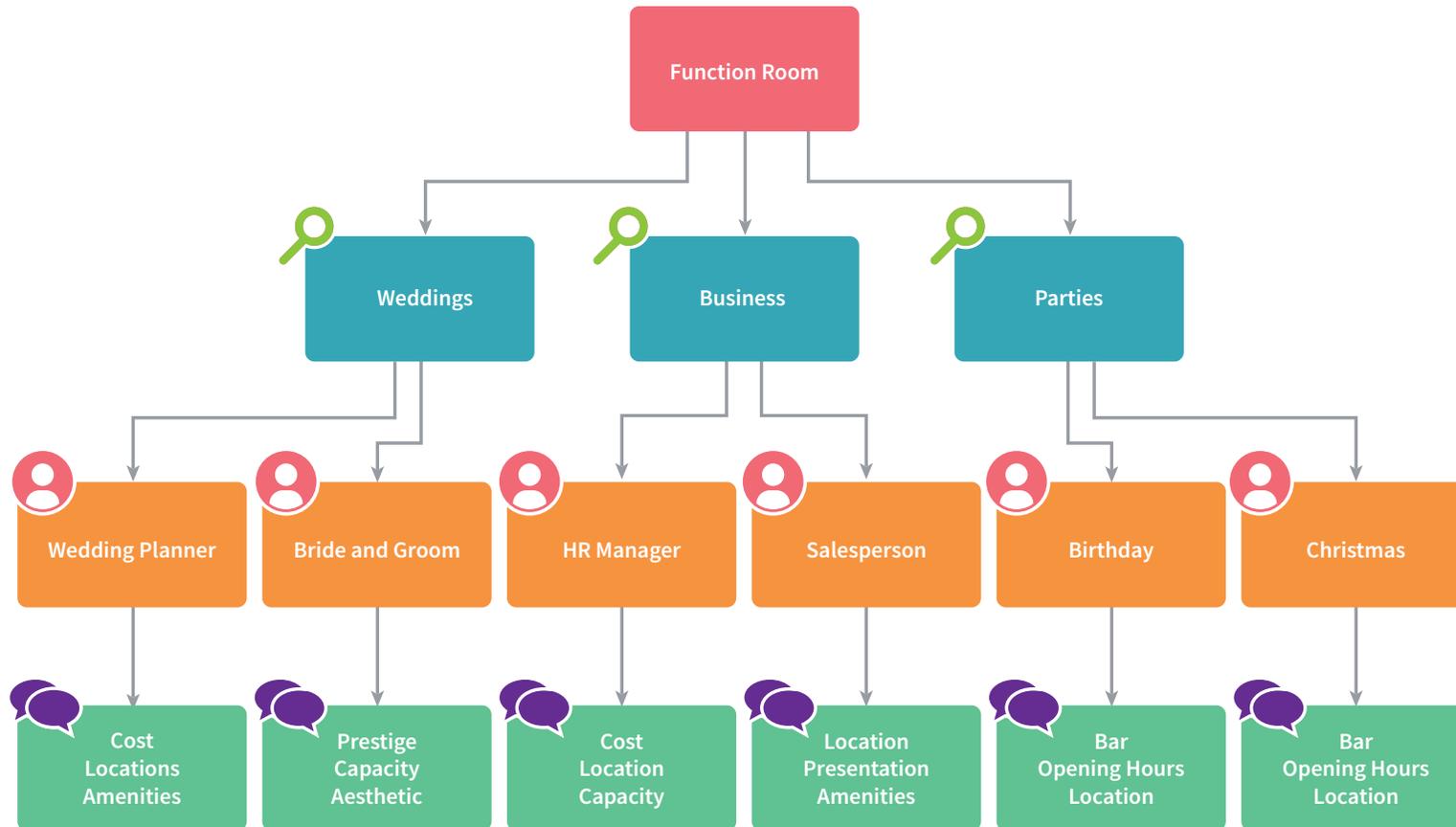
How can you deliver the right content at the right stage of the buyer journey?

Once you have assembled lists of key terms and questions, use online tools to quantify search volume to identify which of these should be the focus of your efforts. Ideally you're looking for the golden ration of low competition and high volume.

Also, use Google Analytics to monitor in-site searches – those customers who are searching while on your page – as well as popular landing pages and seek to consolidate these terms externally.



BASIC OVERVIEW OF KEYWORD SELECTION

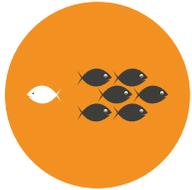


 Room uses  Personas  Keyword themes

Four easy steps to great keyword research



1. Think like a consumer – pick short and long tail keywords likely to be searched by your buyer personas.



2. Look for gaps – in a crowded marketplace it can be difficult for newcomers to compete against established companies. So don't compete: find where they aren't present, or aren't present in force.



3. Rank for priority – it is counterproductive to spread yourself too thinly across trophy keywords, so choose your targets wisely over a wide area of potential long tail keywords and look for the golden ratio of high volume, low competition.



4. Consolidate gains – if you begin to rank for certain terms, don't rest on your laurels but continue to target these keywords as you expand your target list.

REVIEW YOUR OWN PERFORMANCE

On-page analysis and SEO

We have a specific, comprehensive resource to help you with your [technical on-page SEO](#), but to explain briefly why this is an important part of a data-driven strategy – it is your on-page analysis and technical SEO that can reveal problems with internal linking, XML hierarchy, as well as issues with visibility, and possible penalties that could be hindering your progress in search engine results pages (SERPs). By carrying out thorough analysis and review, there are easy gains to be made simply by adhering to best practice.

Are there areas with high traffic, but low conversion?

If so, it may be that your call to action is confusing, unclear or badly positioned. While performing the competitor analysis, check for similar landing pages and see if there is anything you can learn from the way they detail and position their calls to actions (CTAs).

High traffic, but a higher than normal bounce rate?

Here you may be suffering from a failure to resolve the customer's initial search query. Clearly you do not want to lose the traffic, so in this instance it is important to ensure that the searches which might bring them to the page, or for which the page ranks, are definitively resolved by what they find when they reach your site.

What are your best performing pages and are you using their full potential?

If you have pages which perform consistently well, have you ensured that you are utilising them to the best of your ability? Are there subsequent relevant CTAs or conversions that this page could drive secondary traffic toward (think 'people who bought this also bought' or similar as an e-commerce example).



By competitor research, we're not talking industrial espionage, but learning from the competition. Through thorough competitor research, it is possible to learn a lot about what to do and, of course, not to do, to help you deliver the best user experience (UX) possible. Monitor the common industry tone – are articles consistently serious, are they jokey, statistical or research based?

In the same way, are there gaps in the services they offer which you can fill with your own services? What are the standard layouts for products/services/information? Which do you enjoy personally and are there ways you can improve access for consumers on your own site? From where are they receiving their backlinks and are there any ways to make these channels work for you?

Backlink profiles

Tools such as Ahrefs, Google Search Console and Moz Open Site Explorer can prove invaluable when taking stock of a link profile. It is not enough – and has not been since Google began penalising link farms and other varieties of link building misconduct – to simply have links; these links must add value to aid site visibility. If the highest ranking brand in your industry boasts a considerably higher domain authority (DA)

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than your own website, take a detailed look at their backlink profile. In particular, analyse the number of linking domains and IP addresses; and high quality backlinks. Use the insights you find to inform an outreach strategy that has the potential to boost your website's DA. If you already have a high DA compared with your competitors, look for opportunities to maintain this and boost it further.

What is your industry tone?

Tone can make or break your SEO – zany can work some areas, for example, but is less likely to work in life insurance, while the somewhat pretentious tone of the perfume market is unlikely to transfer well to generic alcohol marketing. You may well decide that the tone of your industry is wrong or outdated, but it is nevertheless important to know what that tone is and to back up your assumption with research. Why does the industry, bearing in mind the target demographic and consumer profiles you have built, use the tone it does and why do you believe they would react better to a change?

KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY

Competitor research



FIND YOUR NICHE

The illustration features a central target with a red bullseye and concentric white and red rings. A yellow arrow with a brown shaft is embedded in the center. The target is held by a hand from the right, wearing a black watch. Another hand from the top left is shown adjusting a gear. The background is a teal gradient with faint silhouettes of human heads, gears, and clouds.

Positioning

Once you have decided upon the tone in which your brand will communicate, decide how it will be positioned – your keyword analysis will help here, and again your buyer profiles – are there areas where your industry underperforms, but in which you seek to excel? Then you can look to position your brand as an expert in this particular niche.

If there are any gaps in your keyword research that suggest a lack of coverage for certain areas of your consumer interests, then look to position your brand in those gaps. These early endeavours in positioning are the key to early success – the key here is to build a following in easily accessible areas before broadening that consumer base.

Competing across the full gamut of industry trophy terms is likely to be expensive, time consuming and counterproductive unless your brand is already well established in its field. Instead, look to capitalise on the gaps in between the trophy terms and combine terms with your USP – if you are offering the best prices, look to compete for cheap+brand, bargain+brand etc.

What can you offer which is unique?

Further to finding gaps in existing markets, are there any areas of your brand that provide a unique product, asset or service which may drive business? Again this will be revealed by good keyword research. If there are areas of high search volume, but low competition but for which you can offer a solution, then list these areas among your top priorities.

Monitor social activity

Social channels such as Facebook offer you the ability to add and track competitors, but it is also important to track consumer interaction across other social platforms. Search for industry-related hashtags or follow leading industry brands on Twitter, Google Plus and LinkedIn, and begin developing an industry specific newsfeed to keep on top of trending topics and identify areas of interest you may be able to capitalise on.

INTERPRETATION

Choose your tools

Though, clearly, if you have budget available there are some fantastic tools available, there are still free tools, or limited version of premium packages, available to help you mine the data you need – such as Ahrefs, Google Analytics and Moz which were mentioned earlier.

During the research section of your strategy planning, you will have accustomed yourself with some of those available: it now becomes necessary to decide which tools you are going to use and, importantly, stick with when looking to understand data. Though we don't recommend specific tools, we would suggest you limit yourself to one tool per data-set – except when exploring link profiles, in which case the more tools used, the less chance you have of missing links overlooked from one tool to the next. Do not compare figures across platforms as this can lead to increased margins of error.

Choose your data

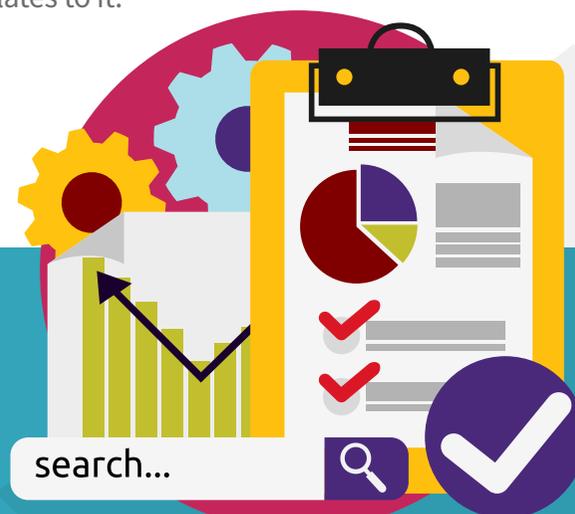
Your previous endeavours to understand your own performance and the performance of others in your industry will be the key to deciding what data you wish to analyse. It is not about picking up data about where you are doing well at this stage, but where you are doing badly. The aim of a good data-driven approach is accumulation of information that can allow you to improve.

Though it is tempting to identify areas of success and double-down on those areas, to really succeed it is necessary to focus on areas where there are real gains to be made. If you suffer from a toxic link profile, then look to amend this. If you have been penalised by an algorithmic update, then rectify the problem. Look for areas which need the most work and then take the data which relates to it.

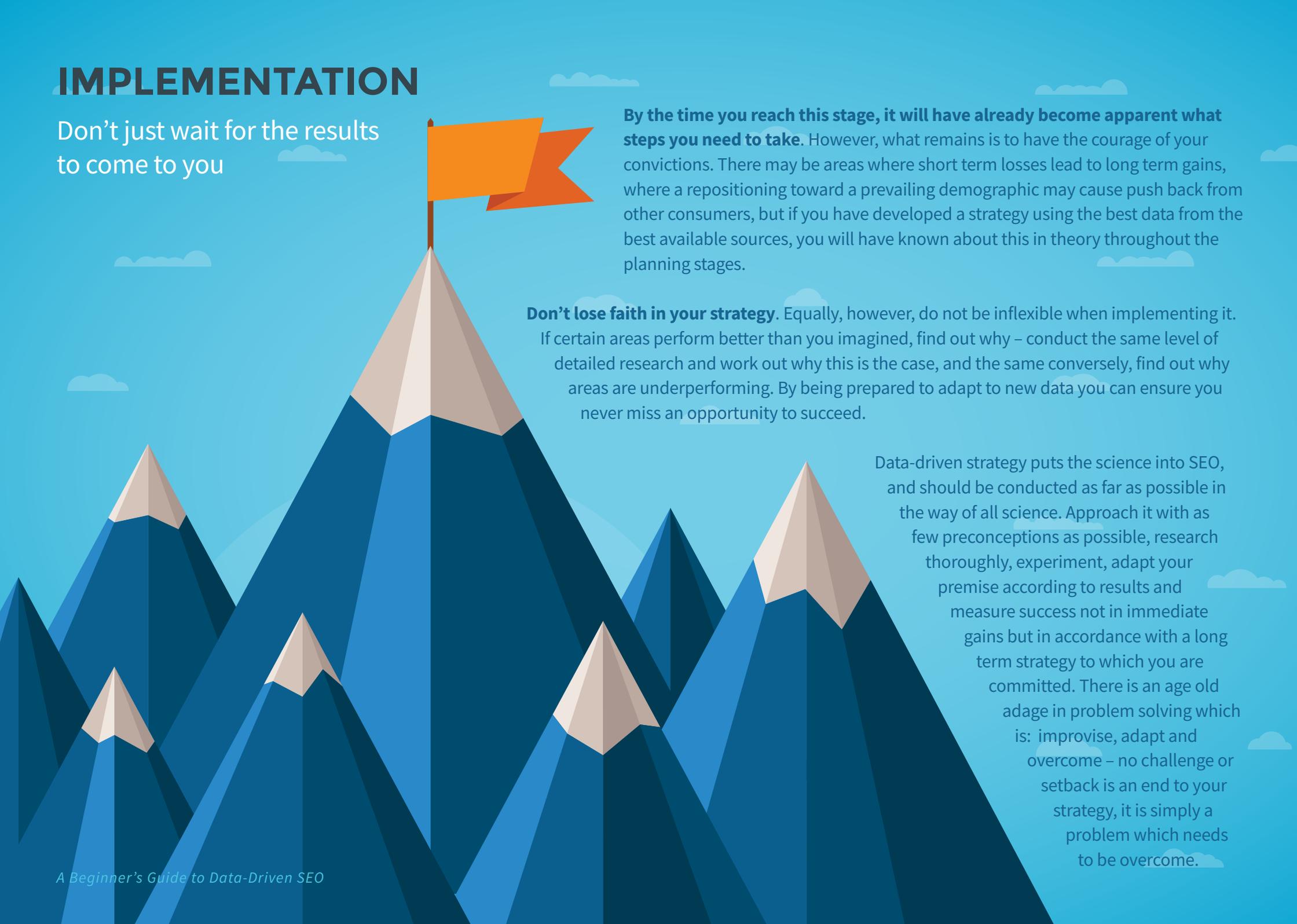
Create useful reports

This may seem obvious, but useful reporting isn't about an attractive layout, it's to place the facts in an easily digestible format to allow you to draw the right conclusions and create actionable strategies. This means choosing the right depiction of data – are you looking at a share of data? Then pie chart variations will be best, growth over time can be plotted as a line on an X/Y axis chart, demographic representation can be shown as a bell curve. The best way to facilitate understanding of your data-sets should always take priority over aesthetics.

In addition, think of the audience for those reports – reports for analysis and verification of methodology or research are likely to be in-depth, comprehensive data mines while reports which are to be used for communication of ideas, or to tell a story, should focus on key data points displayed in easily digested formats.



IMPLEMENTATION



Don't just wait for the results to come to you

By the time you reach this stage, it will have already become apparent what steps you need to take. However, what remains is to have the courage of your convictions. There may be areas where short term losses lead to long term gains, where a repositioning toward a prevailing demographic may cause push back from other consumers, but if you have developed a strategy using the best data from the best available sources, you will have known about this in theory throughout the planning stages.

Don't lose faith in your strategy. Equally, however, do not be inflexible when implementing it. If certain areas perform better than you imagined, find out why – conduct the same level of detailed research and work out why this is the case, and the same conversely, find out why areas are underperforming. By being prepared to adapt to new data you can ensure you never miss an opportunity to succeed.

Data-driven strategy puts the science into SEO, and should be conducted as far as possible in the way of all science. Approach it with as few preconceptions as possible, research thoroughly, experiment, adapt your premise according to results and measure success not in immediate gains but in accordance with a long term strategy to which you are committed. There is an age old adage in problem solving which is: improvise, adapt and overcome – no challenge or setback is an end to your strategy, it is simply a problem which needs to be overcome.

PROCESS OVERVIEW



Summary

As we can see – though each can be segmented and sub-segmented and may carry a host of buzzword laden titles across the web – data-driven SEO can be separated into three ‘I’s, or three pillars if you will. Though each of these stages is complicated in its own way, the cycle of investigation, interpretation, and implementation is an easily memorised loop that conveys the core principles of data-driven SEO.

- *Investigation is satisfying curiosity.*
- *Interpretation is developing understanding.*
- *Implementation is taking action.*

If a brand can commit to this process, they can guarantee results – to paraphrase JFK, ‘not because it is easy, but because it is hard’. The degree of dedication that causes you to pursue the next level for your brand will be precisely what delivers success in data-driven SEO.

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About us

We are a multi award-winning search marketing agency working with brands & smes that want a tangible, measurable return from their online budget.

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No other agency has returned such fantastic results for Adjustamatic. We are seeing a fantastic return on investment as a result of the work they are doing on our organic and paid search campaigns

Adjustamatic

From the outset of the project, Click Consult clearly understood our business objectives and formulated a search strategy that would help to deliver commercial results across key product areas. They have been professional in their approach, shown great attention to detail and the results achieved to date have been thoroughly impressive. We are looking forward to a successful future partnership

Lloyds Pharmacy





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