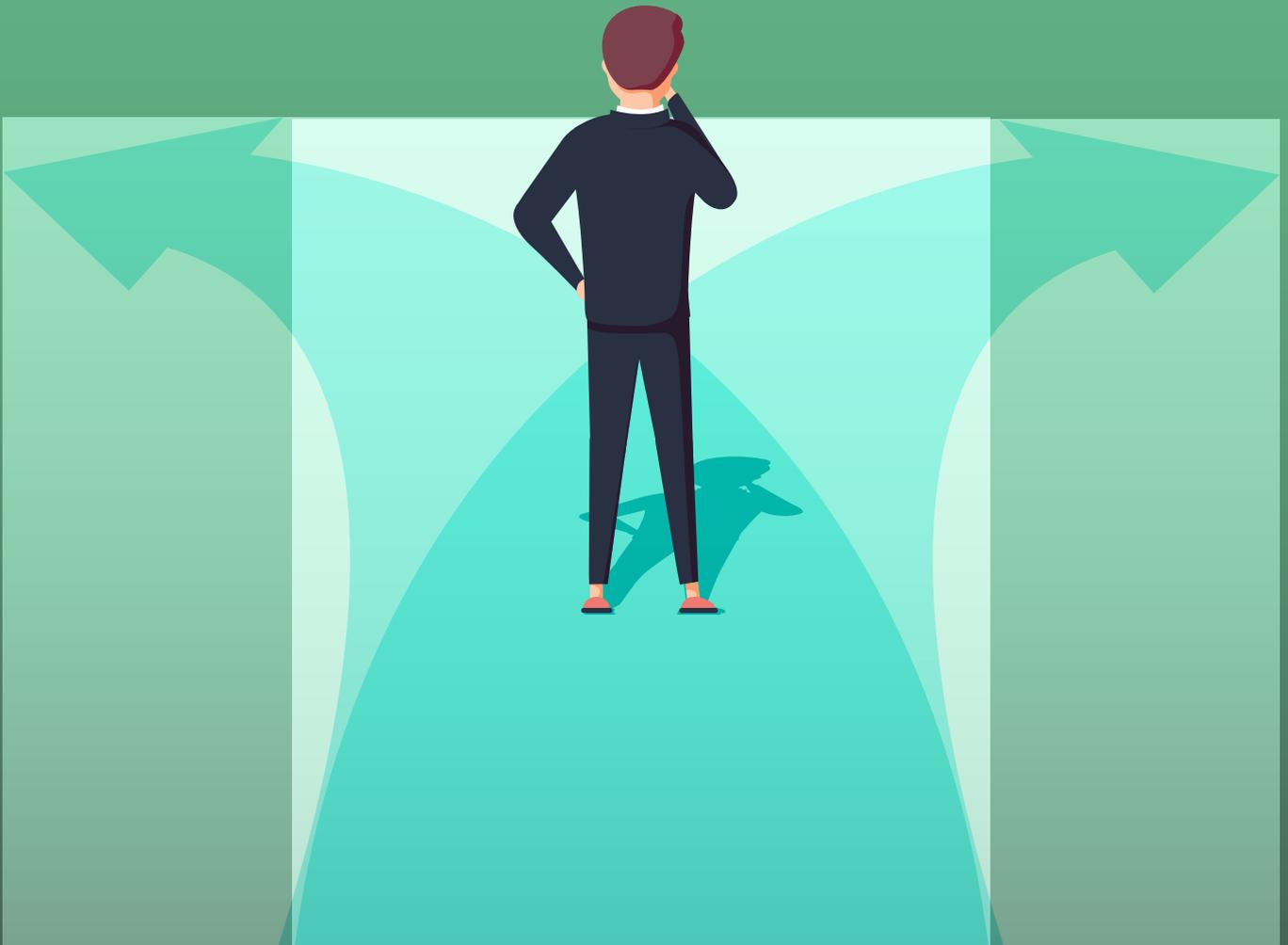




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CONTENT MARKETING OR SEO? YOU DON'T HAVE TO CHOOSE!

DEVELOPING A UNIFIED SEARCH STRATEGY



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INTRODUCTION

While they do require different skills for the best implementation, the purpose of both search engine optimisation (SEO) and content marketing is to improve the ranking of a site in search engine results pages (SERPs) for key terms which are important for the brand. With this fact in mind, it is surprising how often they are treated as completely separate – when, in order for the best results, a brand needs both to be working in unison.

Without a good content marketing strategy, though it's not impossible, a brand will find it much harder to build authority – but without a well-crafted SEO strategy in place, your site will not be able to either make the best use of any traffic coming from earned links, or earn links with the right anchor text or to the right pages.



WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach involving the creation and sharing of materials – both online and offline – including blogs, videos, reports, whitepapers and social media posts among others with the intention of earning links, business and exposure and building consumer relationships.

WHAT IS SEO?

The core of search marketing services, organic search (SEO) optimisation refers to the methods, markups and technology used to achieve a high position in search engine results pages or to improve rankings across a number of algorithmically driven search engines.

KEYWORD RESEARCH

Keyword research is vital to both content marketing and SEO, while for the former it can be a pivotal part of ideation, for the latter it can demonstrate what kind of [anchor text](#) you need the links you earn to feature to ensure your site is able to climb the SERPs. There are a number of ways you can do this which blends the needs of content marketing and SEO.

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

This is one of the single most important factors to consider in the face of making an effective strategy. If you are able to see what works in your market and what competitors are doing then you can learn from this. In terms of the content side of things, this can be a little more difficult to track.

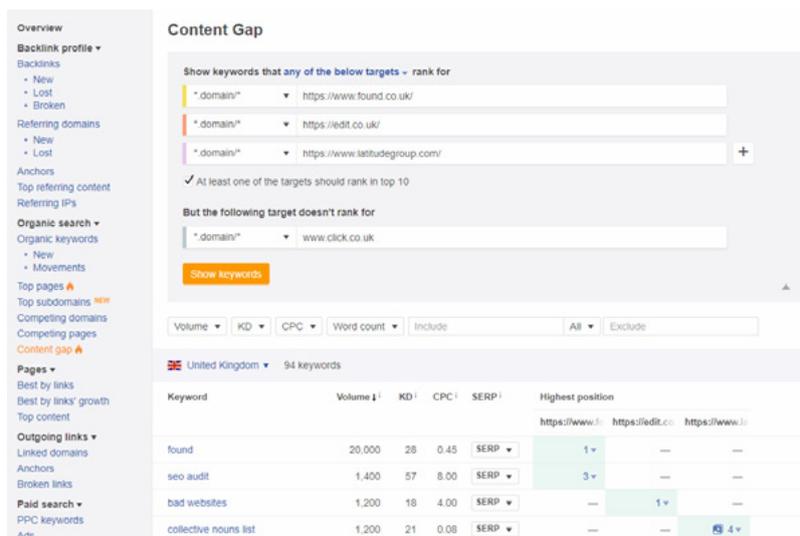
One suggestion would be to look at the actual body of the content and see if there are any market specific keywords which are frequently being used and if your competitors are ranking higher for them. You can build your future content around this and try to close the gap.

Another part of competitor analysis in terms of idea generation could be to utilise social media channels by setting up social listening. If you are able to track mentions of your brand or of some of your closest competitors, you can measure what is attracting and retaining the interest of the audience.



CONTENT GAP ANALYSIS

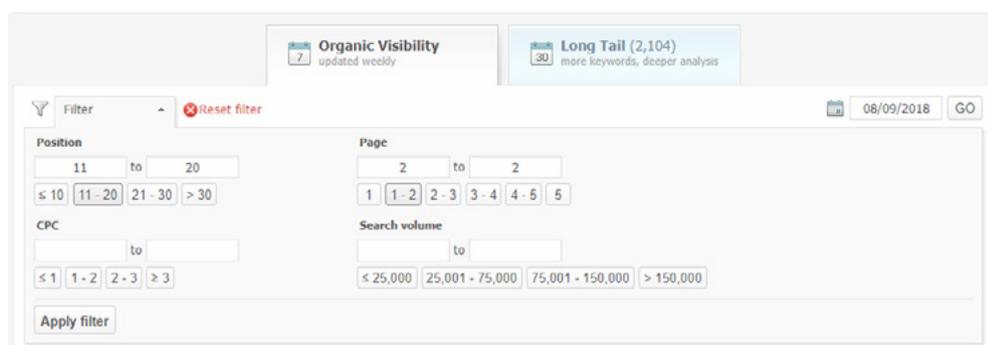
One way to generate content marketing ideas that are relevant to your SEO efforts is to look for content gaps – you can use things tools such as Ahrefs, which has a specific ‘[Content Gap](#)’ tool which allows you to nominate some of your competitors and search for keywords for which you do not presently rank.



You can then export this report and, once you’ve filtered out their brand terms, you have a list of keywords you can potentially look to build content around.

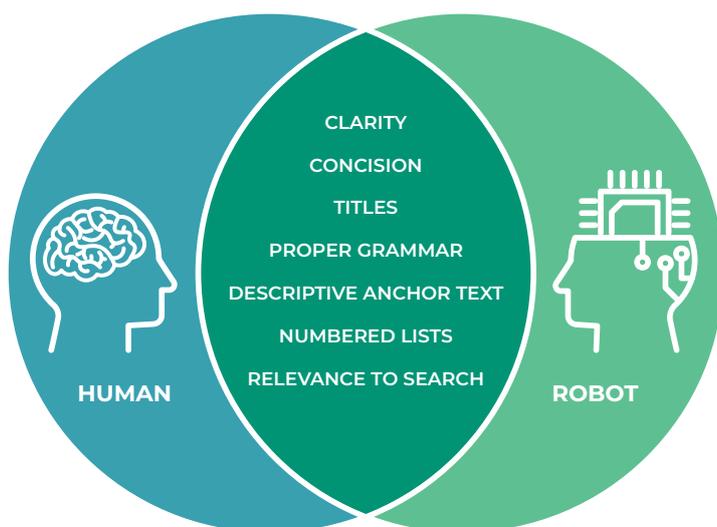
RANKING FILTERING

Another way to generate content ideas is to use the Searchmetrics rankings filter.



By filtering your content by those ranking between positions 11 and 20, you can see the keywords which you have a good chance of pushing up to the first page. Equally you can do this for pages three and four and on and on, even from positions two through to ten if you want to try to push certain terms in to position one.

HUMAN AND ROBOT NEEDS



KEEP THE ROBOTS HAPPY

Realistically, all content creators must now be technical to some extent to ensure success of their content. While there will always be outliers that succeed seemingly without any attention paid to rankings or audience, they are and will always be outliers.

What is noticeable is that, along with some standard writing tips, there are a number which are clearly aimed at simplifying the meaning of content for machines.

Rough overlap of human and robot requirements for information parsing

Using **and** for delineating importance and **for** visual emphasis respectively, for example, will make zero difference to the average human, they're both just bold to the eye, but it will help a machine to better understand your writing.

In addition, there are tips against long sentences and metaphors alongside those against slang, technical jargon and exclamation points. All of which, after all, are very difficult for machines to understand.

Slang and jargon can have meanings peculiar to areas and to industries, for example, while exclamation points offer no insight into where the emphasis of the exclamation should be placed - unlike which does, while metaphors can be difficult for machine learning to contextualise.

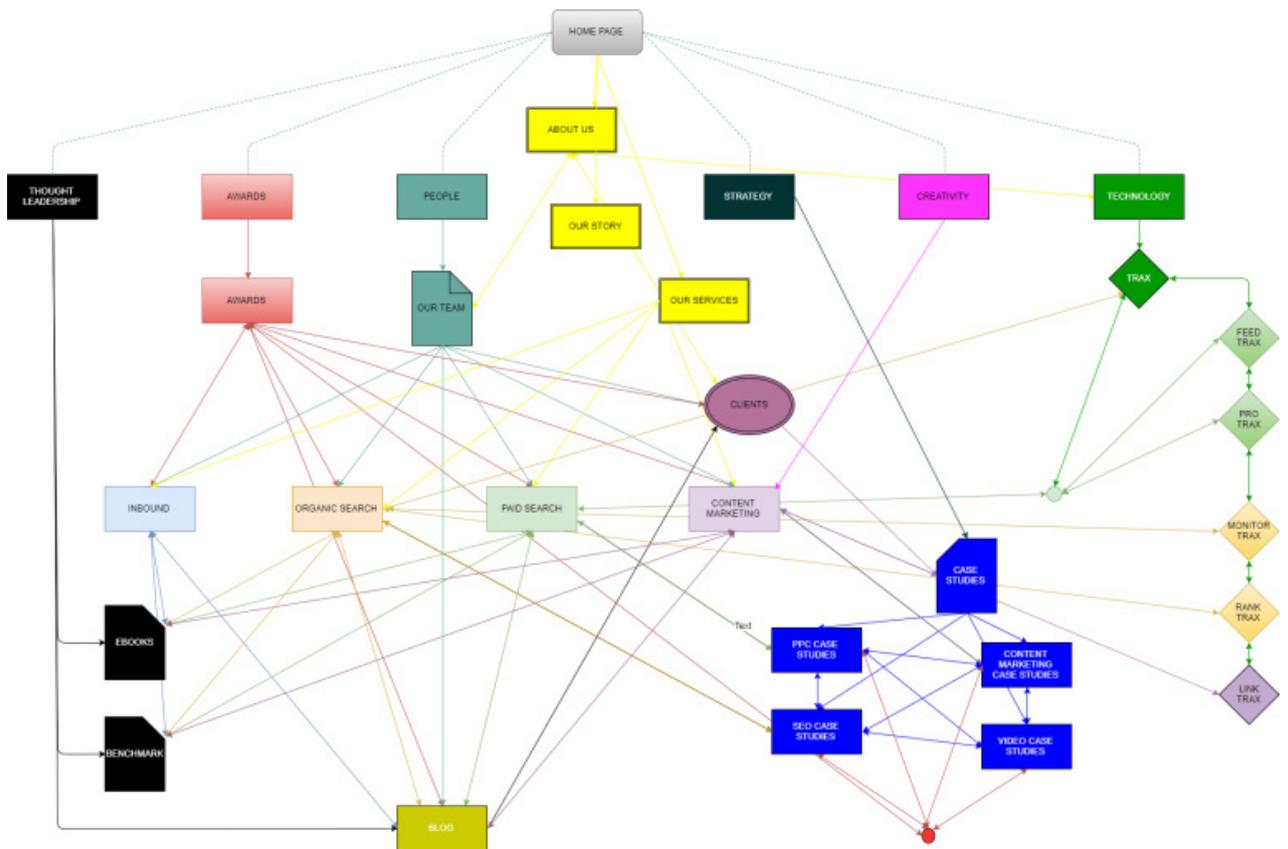
Essentially, what we're seeing in the guidelines at the moment is a simplified lesson plan for the artificial intelligences that will one day rule the SERPs and, while we have to ensure that content is written for a human audience, so long as there are limitations to what the [Google algorithm](#) can understand, we need to help it on its way. While the machine is learning, we have to make sure that we're not pitching above its head.

For those in search marketing, this means learning to juggle the needs of both our human and mechanical masters more efficiently. This does not mean disregarding your human audience, but requires us to sign-post meaning, wherever possible, behind the scenes by rendering our content in a manner that is easily converted to data - through proper deployment of JSON, HTML and any other relevant markup (see the 'Important HTML elements' section).

LET THE AUTHORITY FLOW

Navigability is an important part of the customer journey and crawler indexing, but internal linking is also vital to the flow of Domain Authority (DA), Page Authority (PA) and, as a result of all these, to website conversions.

Even a relatively simple journey and authority flow (such as that of Click Consult itself) is a web of sprawling interconnectivity when visualised.



With this branching complexity in mind, it is vital for brands to perform regular audits of their site structure for both user experience (UX) and authority flow in order for their site to be performing at the level it should be.

Optimise for authority flow

While your homepage will almost always have the majority of your inbound links pointed to it, there will no doubt be some better performing pages lower down in the substrata of your site.

Authority, even internally, is passed through links so to ensure the pages you want to earn that authority are receiving their share, it is necessary to run a content report in whichever tool you presently use ([Search Console](#) has one if you don't use any third party tools).

Once you have downloaded your top performing content (Search Traffic > Links to Your Site in Search Console), you can select the best performing 10-20 pages as a start to factor in to your linking strategy.

Ideally, you want each link to pass authority to the largest proportion of the site it can – therefore, these pages should be explored in the context of the whole site, with links placed on each of the pages, the higher up the chain you can link to naturally, the more pages it will trickle down to. However, these top performing pages can provide a ranking boost to relevant blogs and product pages by linking appropriately to folders further downstream.

In the same way, your content marketing (and earned links), should be seen as an extension of this – distributing external authority between the various layers of your site.



SOME BEST PRACTICES

WRITTEN CONTENT

Hold the reader's attention

The author Kurt Vonnegut summed this idea up tremendously well in his advice to 'use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted.' Whether you are responsible for your brand's written content or you have delegated the responsibility to another, your main concern must be that your audience, your brand's consumer must leave a piece of content, well... content.

Listen to your writing

In SEO it is not really practicable for a producer of written content to 'have a voice' in the traditional authorial sense of the phrase, because their voice will change depending on the brand for which they are writing. Yet listening to the prose they produce is just as important – if you ever witness a writer mumbling under their breath, they are checking the rhythm of their prose, or losing their minds – weighted slightly in favour of the former.

Avoid clichés like the plague

That is not to say don't ever use cliché – in SEO a shared language is important, and so the cliché aversion of the fiction writer must be somewhat subdued. Clichés become cliché according to their use (for extensive information on cliché, see any and all sports coverage); this offers the writer the ability to tap in to a collective culture, to immediately build a rapport. The danger is, of course, overuse – that is a stonewall fact.

Edit, then edit again

This is again applicable to all forms of writing, but is probably more difficult in SEO than with any other form due to extremely tight deadlines. There is, in this regard, a necessity for the SEO writer to abandon all sense of ego and allow suggestions and criticism to pour in from across a team of other experienced writers to help them polish their work – generally in-between writing further pieces.

Have something to say

This is another tip borrowed from fiction which takes on new significance within SEO. The SEO writer will not always be familiar with a subject they are writing about, or may not have an instant opinion or question about the topic, but good writing, engaging writing depends upon having something to say. Experience will make this easier for an SEO writer but whatever a brand is producing it must speak to the consumer.

Increase your vocabulary. That is not to say that you should seek to be sesquipedalian in your prose – pretension does not make for good prose, but words are the building blocks of a writer and the more blocks you have, the quicker and higher you can build your tower.

WRITTEN CONTENT (FOR SEO)

As search marketing and search engines become more advanced, stock answers to certain questions become impossible to give. However, it is possible to give some guidelines as to what makes for effective content for organic search purposes.

Unique

Google and other major search engines demand that content is unique to your site and, wherever possible, not available elsewhere on the internet (though there are some exceptions such as syndicalisation or translation). They also don't want to see the same content appearing many times on your own site.

While pages may contain elements which are duplicated, duplication should be kept to a minimum. Pages which are exact matches of other pages will have reduced rankings or will not be remembered by Google at all. Sites with significant numbers of duplicate pages may see their rankings reduced on a site-wide level.

Substantial

Written content, such as blogs and news articles, must be valuable to your audience. If you are writing on a subject covered by your competitors, search engines will expect your content to be as, or more, substantial than theirs and of a similar quality. If your pages have less unique, relevant content than your competitors, they will be considered less valuable and will consequently not compete with them well in SERPs.

Pages with significant amounts of content are also more likely to rank well for long tail phrases related to a main search term due to associated terms and synonyms which increase relevance. However, excessively long content should be avoided. Instead, it is recommended that you split lengthy articles into sub articles or hubs of related pages.

Engaging

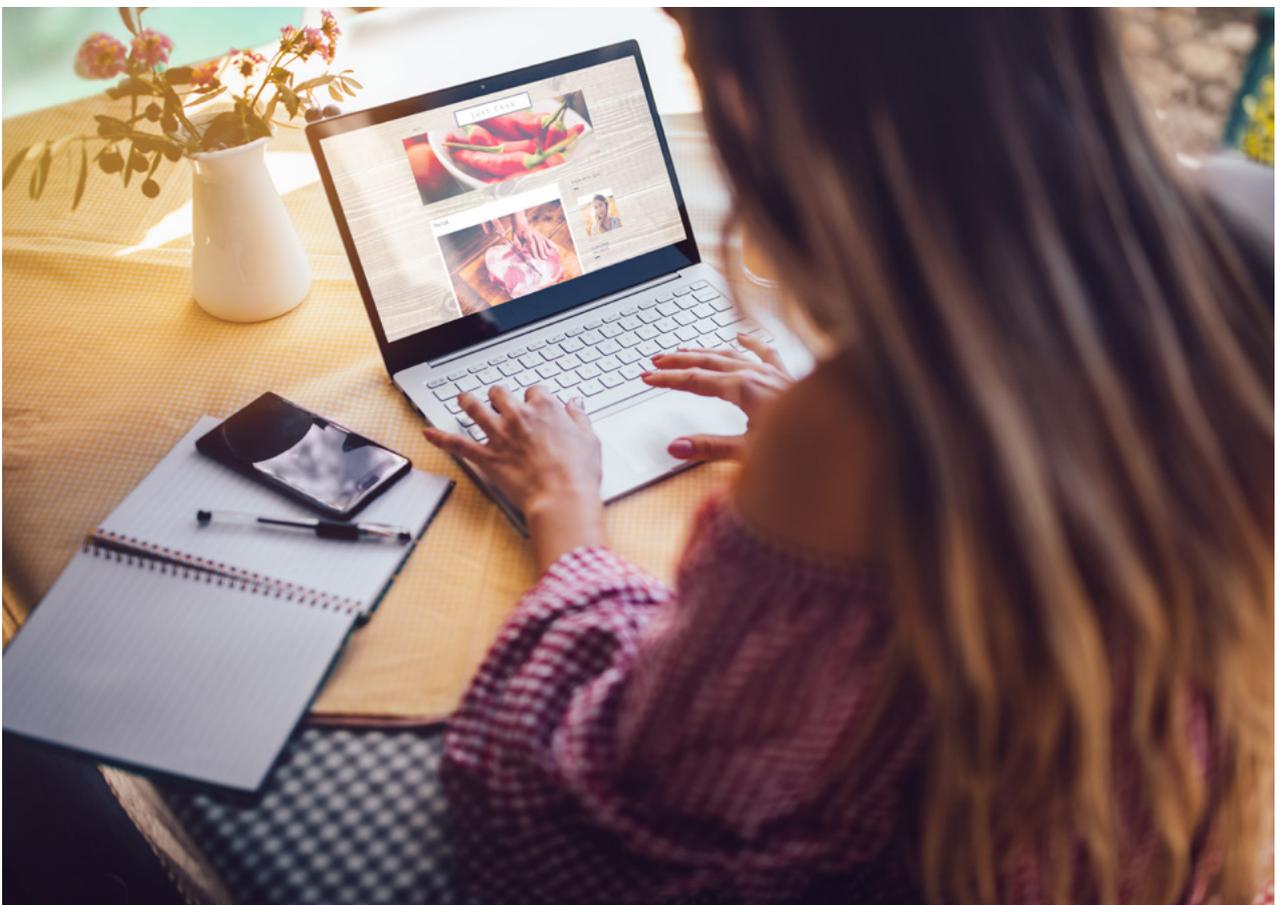
Creating content that your audience will want to read should be your first priority. However, to see real results, your content should inspire further engagement. This engagement may take the form of a blog comment, a 'like', 'share' or other promotion on social media, an eBook download, or a response to a call to action.

By analysing your bounce rates, page views and other engagement statistics using Google Analytics and other tools, you can accurately measure the engagement levels of your website. This can help you to find out what your audience is interested in and build a strong content strategy.

Websites that search engines do not consider engaging can suffer from low rankings, while websites which are considered engaging rank more highly. Beyond the search engine results pages, content that incites a response in your audience can have a significant effect on conversion rates, helping your business to meet its overall commercial objectives.

Relevant

The content of every page needs to be relevant to the subject matter of that page and to the keywords and search terms at which it is targeted. If content is not relevant, it should be moved onto another page or deleted altogether. Google will rank pages with significant amounts of unrelated or irrelevant content lower in SERPs.



VISUAL CONTENT

Use contrast

By contrast we do not mean ‘clash’ – think of it in the same way as fashion. You want colours to stand out, but also to complement one another.

Use consistent font and colour palettes

It is important for any brand to develop a consistent, canonical colour and font palette to impart a sense of order even when graphics deal with vastly different subjects. You want your consumers to have the reaction to your brand that they do to Coca-Cola or McDonalds – you want them to be able to recognise you on text and colour alone.

Keep it simple

Your graphics do not have to scream and shout from every pixel. Don't be afraid of allowing your graphical elements the space to breathe. The less you do to convey the message, the less work your audience will do in receiving it.

VISUAL CONTENT (FOR SEO)

Alt attribute

The alt attribute is vital when placing images anywhere on your site. Not only is it the text which will be voiced by screen readers, it is also how Google attributes subject relevance to any image. It is best to approach it with the screen reader in mind, however, as this will ensure the best result for both purposes – as Wikipedia states:

“Keep in mind the purpose and context of an image and what would be useful to someone who cannot see it.”

VIDEO/AUDIO CONTENT

Use the right equipment

If you can't tell your ABUS from your Go Pro, this is going to be an important place to start. The video camera you use to film a sports day will not cut it when filming a presentation, in addition to this is required a working knowledge of lighting rigs and sound recording, the failure to address any of which could leave you with a wasted budget.

Pay attention to audio

If you have a voiceover, ensure that voiceover is done by a professional or, at least, a very proficient speaker. You ideally want the message rather than the voice in which it is conveyed to be the most important thing. Also, never 'make-do' with a take if the audio is competing with background noise. If a plane flies past, or a boy-racer's car roars by in the wrong gear, I'm afraid you'll just have to take it from the top.

Edit to your audience

Knowing when to shut-up is just as important as knowing what to say, if you know your audience, and the social channel you are aiming to use for your video's distribution will tell you some of this, you will know how long their attention span is. Do not exceed this.

Tell a story

Even the most factual video can tell a story, and by this we're don't mean videos should be dramatised or fictionalised, but that they should have a beginning a middle and an end, and that the consumer should feel compelled to finish watching.

Be entertaining

Everyone likes to be entertained, so even though a brand may not operate within the most entertaining industry, there will always be ways to make a message entertaining – whether this is with graphics or cartoons, or simply a well written script, the reason you are making a video is to capture an audience and the best way to do this is to captivate them.

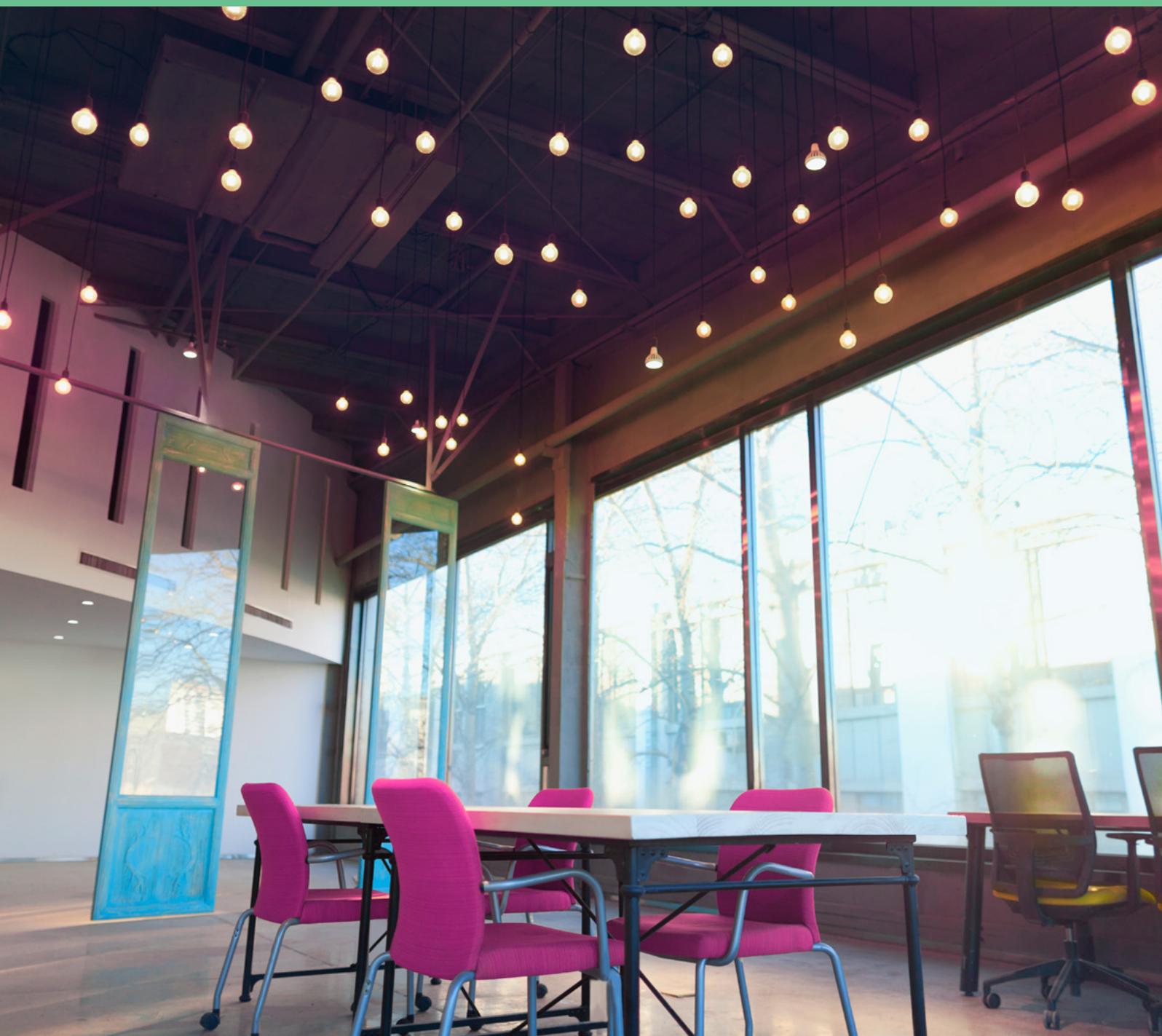
VIDEO/AUDIO CONTENT (FOR SEO)

Most video and audio content will be hosted externally (see our eBook which deals specifically with [SEO for YouTube](#)), but when embedding the content on your site, you should ensure that – as with images – the alt text is clear and descriptive. The search engine may not be able to read the video or audio, but it can contextualise it from the alt text.

CONCLUSION

While there's often a separation between content marketing efforts and SEO, it is not only possible to ensure that the two activities are connected, but that they become part of a positive feedback loop. The better incorporated the SEO is in your content, the higher you will rank, the higher you rank, the easier it is to place external links due to the implied authority of your rankings.

Search marketing is still a relatively young offshoot of traditional marketing – though one which has grown incredibly quickly – and, as such, there is still a lot of work to be done to discover the best techniques. This is especially true as the industry is almost constantly changing. However, the one thing we can say for certain is that the more holistically we are able to approach our search marketing, the better the results will be.



GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY

ABOUT US

Located in North West England, Click Consult is a multi award-winning search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC), with over 70 professionals employed and with a portfolio of over 60 clients from across the UK, Europe, Americas and Australia.

Click was named Search Agency of the Year 2018, adding to its long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within both RAR's and Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Blog

Click Consult regularly posts actionable insights on its blog – dealing with all aspects of search marketing. From technical SEO to PPC, content marketing and Analytics advice, the Click Consult blog has something for everyone of any ability.

eBooks

Click Consult produces in depth eBooks on aspects of search marketing on a regular basis, dealing with the latest best practices, changes to standard practices, methods of improvement and more.

Infographics

Sometimes what you need is a quick point of reference about complex subjects. Thanks to its team of highly talented designers, Click Consult is also able to distil its vast experience into easy to understand visual content.

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