

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

SEO



2017 Edition



The Basics of SEO

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of fine tuning your online presence to improve your website ranking amongst search engines for a particular keyword search. Beyond “ranking higher on Google”, SEO is also the process of finding keywords that match inquiries by prospective buyers with serious purchase intent. Identifying and targeting the keywords that are most strongly associated with the prospects seeking your solution is generally the goal of SEO.

The process of SEO is often filled with numerous tricks and tips (many contradictory) that will be a waste of time without a strategic plan in place. As the saying goes “if you don’t know where you are going, any route will take you there.”

Therefore, we need to identify which keywords we want to target first. Then we need to figure out which of those keywords we can actually target to outrank other web pages listed on the first SERP (Search Engine Results Page). To accomplish this task, it requires some creativity, some lateral thinking, a host of tools, analytical skills, numeracy, and a firm understanding of the process.

While this list of requirements may seem slightly daunting, it shouldn't. That's why we will provide a step by step process to help you gain a solid understanding of the basics, and provide actionable steps for you to follow at every turn. What's more, SEO is actually pretty fun. Learning a new skill that combines various mental faculties with a comprehensive game plan is a rewarding experience.

Throughout this document, we will explain SEO strategies and techniques that will help you increase the digital footprint of your organization without spending a dime. Plus, we will provide web links to resources that are completely free, and share information about higher-end tools that require payment. In the end, it will be your choice on which resources to adopt.

Since this is an introductory document, you can also contact us to have a greater in-depth discussion. Please let us know if you have any questions or if you can suggest alternative practices or tools. At Mirabel Technologies, our goal is to spread knowledge about SEO and help people make a positive impact on their SEO rankings as quickly as possible. Please let us know what works best for you and where you struggle. We will be glad to help and learn from you as well.

How to Rank Higher on Google

A common (and not particularly funny) joke among SEO analysts is that we do not practice search engine optimization as much as we do Google optimization. Poor jokes aside, there is some measure of truth in that aphorism. Google is the dominant search engine with over [77% of the daily 6,500,000+ searches](#) and it is expected to [grow](#) its dominance in the US market for the near future. Given this type

of scenario, it makes sense to focus the majority of efforts around Google.

Nevertheless, the situation may be different if you are operating in China, Japan, or Korea, which have other search engines like Baidu, Yahoo and Naver taking the dominant positions in their respective countries. For the western world, Google is the big dog.

Ranking higher on Google is a complicated prospect with at least [200 factors](#) being weighted in Google's proprietary algorithm. Google never directly tells you how to rank higher but they do provide guidance on "Best practices". Often these Best Practices are parsed by SEO analysts trying get clues about the algorithm. Between trial and error, and crowdsourcing other experts' feedback and results, we can figure out the algorithm more and more.

Once you have these Best Practices figured out to a reasonable degree, it is then time for Google to change the algorithm and send everyone scrambling to figure out what has changed and how to best capitalize on it. As an SEO specialist, this can be frustrating, but it is also a constant challenge and a way to give you job security.

The truth is there are many factors that contribute to the algorithm. However, the most commonly accepted key features are as follows: keyword optimization, backlinking, technical aspects, and user experience. The confluence of these broad categories represents the strongest drivers of rankings.

The process of creating a page that is optimized to meet these needs is ongoing and will require a delicate balance between meeting the SEO tips, creating quality content and innovating new ways to drive users to your site. This is a mix of art and science.



SEO Strategy for Startups and Small Businesses

When deciding on keywords to target, you may want to consider focusing on “long tail” keywords, which are 4+ words long and tend to have a much lower search volume than basic words. While this may sound discouraging, the truth is that ranking high for broad and basic terms means you will be competing against the titans of your particular industry, which will most likely be a losing battle. Therefore, you will want to find long tail keywords (which may be a misnomer) that match your prospective customers’ search engine queries. Ideally, you’ll want to answer these longer format search questions, and be the first one to answer them best.

Throughout this guide, we will focus on the strategy of identifying groups of long tail keywords that are being neglected by the giants of your field, and help you pick queried search terms where you can outrank your competitors on the 1st page. Plus, by focusing on this long tail keyword strategy, you can create better web content than what is currently ranking at the top, optimize these pages from a technical SEO perspective, build backlinks from quality “high-authority” sites, and promote better content that resonates with your target via social media and digital marketing.

How to Find the Best Keywords

This first step for search engine optimizing your website is to find keywords. Many people say they “want to rank higher on Google” but an SEO analyst will often respond with, “Great! Rank higher for what?”

If you run a dog kennel, you really don’t want to rank higher when people search for oil changes. Therefore, finding the best keywords to target is a two-part process. First you must find keywords that represent a high volume of search traffic by those intending to buy your type of products or services. Then you must find keywords that have at least one weak 1st page of results that you could conceivably outrank.

To start researching keywords, you will want to go the Google Keyword Planner located in your Google Adwords account. Here’s how to find it:

- Log on to <https://adwords.google.com> and click on the Start now button.

- After that, all you need to do is give Google an email and the URL for your company.

Once you are all set up with the AdWords account, log in and look for the following three options under The Keyword Planner.

1. Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category.

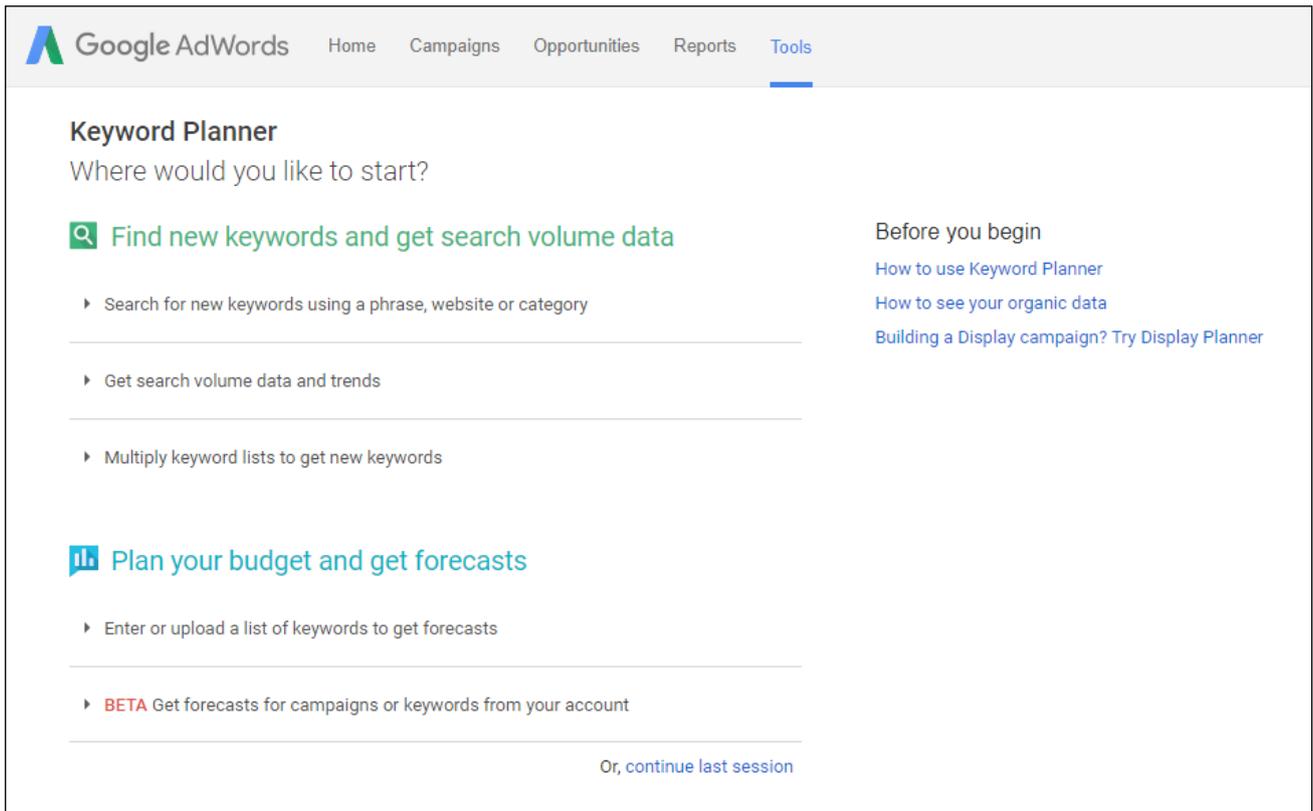
This tool allows you to come up with new keyword ideas by entering basic information about your field. This feature can help you get basic keyword ideas - but keep in mind that these keywords are also available to your competition. The other drawback is that this tool will not provide competitive keywords that could give you an advantage. However, we will cover some tricks to help you circumvent this obstacle.

2. Get search volume data and trends.

This is arguably the most useful tool. This will provide the stats surrounding each keyword and show you the average monthly search volume, cost per click to buy ads, and level of competition associated with it. This feature can be one of the backbone tools for guiding your target keyword decisions.

3. Multiply keyword lists to get new keywords.

For this tool, you input two lists of keywords, and it mixes list A with list B to produce new keywords. This can be helpful if you need keyword ideas, or experience a mental block. However, this can often produce gibberish that has no value.



The screenshot shows the Google AdWords Keyword Planner interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Google AdWords logo and links for Home, Campaigns, Opportunities, Reports, and Tools. The main heading is "Keyword Planner" with the subtext "Where would you like to start?". There are two main sections: "Find new keywords and get search volume data" and "Plan your budget and get forecasts". Each section has a list of actions. The "Find new keywords" section includes: "Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category", "Get search volume data and trends", and "Multiply keyword lists to get new keywords". The "Plan your budget" section includes: "Enter or upload a list of keywords to get forecasts" and "BETA Get forecasts for campaigns or keywords from your account". On the right side, there is a "Before you begin" section with links for "How to use Keyword Planner", "How to see your organic data", and "Building a Display campaign? Try Display Planner". At the bottom, there is a link "Or, continue last session".

Google AdWords Home Campaigns Opportunities Reports Tools

Keyword Planner

Where would you like to start?

Find new keywords and get search volume data

- Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category
- Get search volume data and trends
- Multiply keyword lists to get new keywords

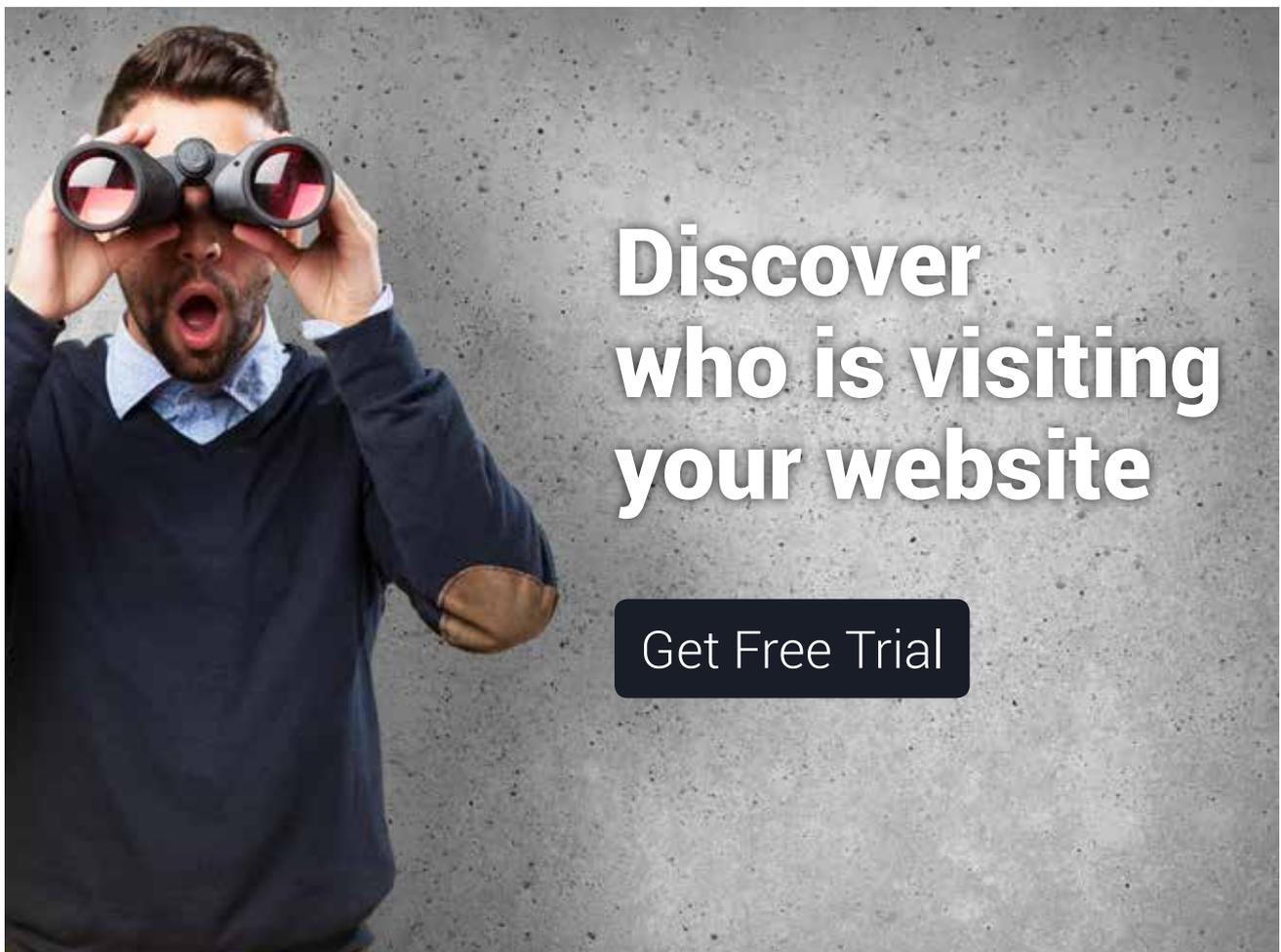
Plan your budget and get forecasts

- Enter or upload a list of keywords to get forecasts
- BETA** Get forecasts for campaigns or keywords from your account

Or, [continue last session](#)

Before you begin

- [How to use Keyword Planner](#)
- [How to see your organic data](#)
- [Building a Display campaign? Try Display Planner](#)



The advertisement features a man in a dark blue sweater and light blue shirt, holding binoculars to his eyes with a surprised expression. The background is a textured grey wall. The text "Discover who is visiting your website" is written in large, white, bold letters. Below this, a dark blue button with white text says "Get Free Trial".

Discover who is visiting your website

Get Free Trial

How to Use the Keyword Planner to Find New Keywords

The first option listed above, which is “search for new keywords using a phrase website or category”, is a great place to start as it guides you through the process of finding new sets of keywords.

▼ Search for new keywords using a phrase, website or category

Enter one or more of the following:

Your product or service

Your landing page

Your product category

Targeting ?

All locations

All languages

Google

Negative keywords

Date range ?

Show avg. monthly searches for: last 12 months

Customize your search ?

Keyword filters

Keyword options

Show broadly related ideas

Hide keywords in my account

Hide keywords in my plan

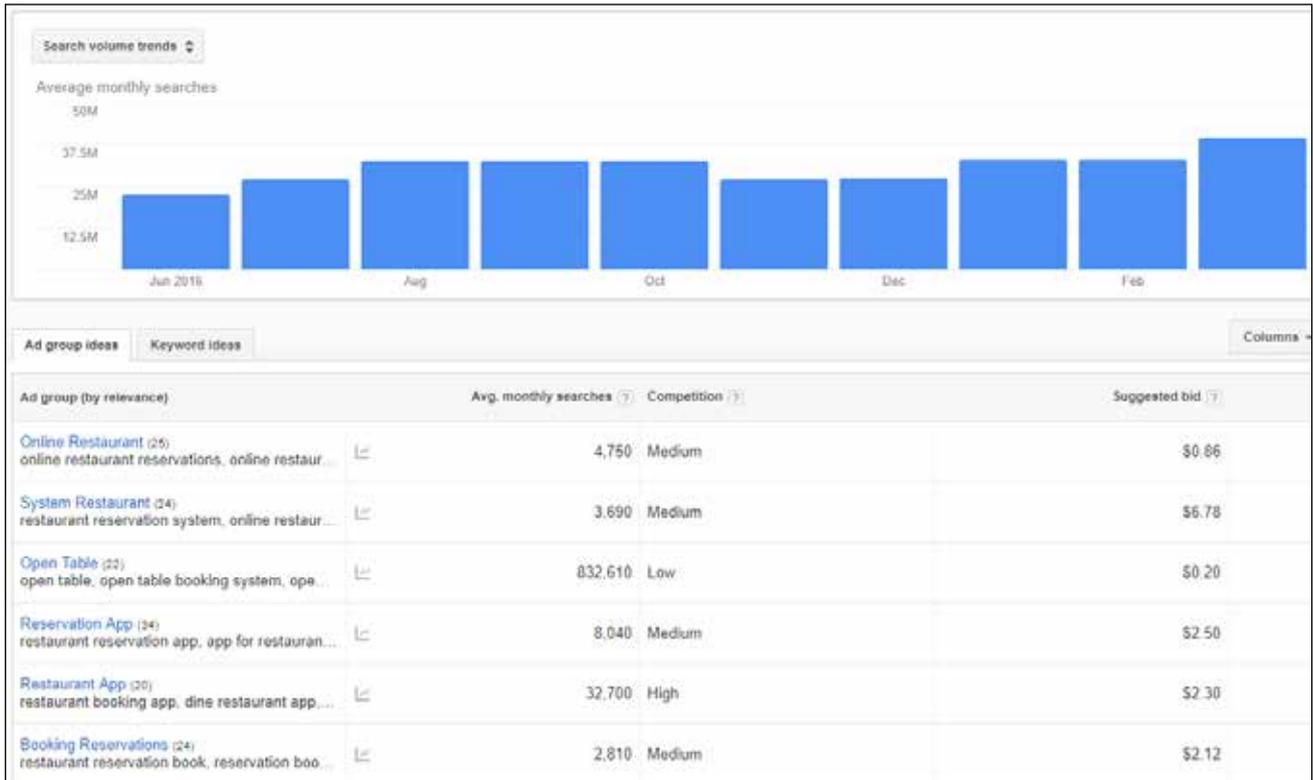
Keywords to include

Get ideas

Once you have filled in the fields and it returns the results, see if you can find any keywords that have minimal competition, a high cost per click* (CPC), and a high search volume. *Note: since organic SEO does not entail buying keywords, we suggest focusing on high CPC words.

Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Competition	Suggested bid
open table	823,000	Low	\$0.20
book a table	90,500	Low	\$0.21
reservation restaurant	1,600	Low	\$0.92
restaurant reservation system	1,300	Medium	\$8.02
online restaurant reservations	720	Medium	\$0.88
restaurant booking	1,600	Medium	\$0.86
restaurant booking app	800	High	\$1.05
dinner reservations	2,900	Low	\$1.01
restaurant reservation app	1,300	High	\$3.29
restaurant reservation book	400	High	\$3.56
wdr dining	2,900	Low	\$1.36
book a restaurant	800	Low	\$0.68
booking restaurant	1,000	Low	\$0.54

It's possible you may find "unicorns" with the Keyword Planner if you are in a niche market, but it's more likely that you will find keyword sets that meet 2 out of 3 target criteria (i.e. low competition, high CPC, and high search volume). Or, you may find keywords with medium competition that may be worth considering. Either way, make a spreadsheet for keyword options that fit all or most of your requirements. Also, don't forget to click on the related ad groups tab to see if you find other ideas.



Then, you can also use the “multiply keyword list” to find new potential ideas based on your refined list of keywords on your spreadsheet. If the lists you “multiply” produce coherent, viable keywords, you can add them to your spreadsheet as well.

Ideally, your spreadsheet of target keywords should remain active and have new ideas continuously added to it. It can also be used to aid some creative techniques for finding new keyword ideas that outperform competitors with some degree of reliability.

The banner features a man in a suit looking thoughtful against a background of question marks. The text reads:

How to Identify Unknown Web Visitors

[Get Whitepaper](#)

Where to Get Other Ideas for Keywords

Using your current list of keywords, the first place to find inspiration is on Google. Simply query your keywords on Google and scroll to the “Searches related to...” section.

Searches related to beginners guide to seo 2017

[search engine optimization pdf](#)

[seo google](#)

[what is seo and how it works](#)

[seo tutorial](#)

[how to do search engine optimization](#)

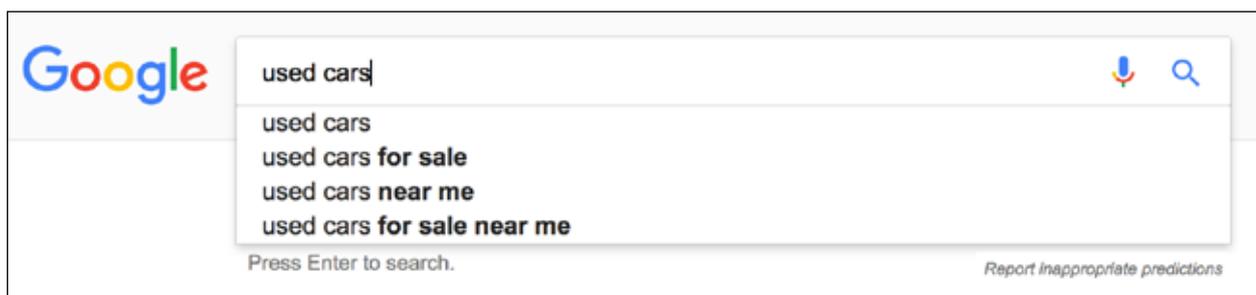
[search engine optimization techniques](#)

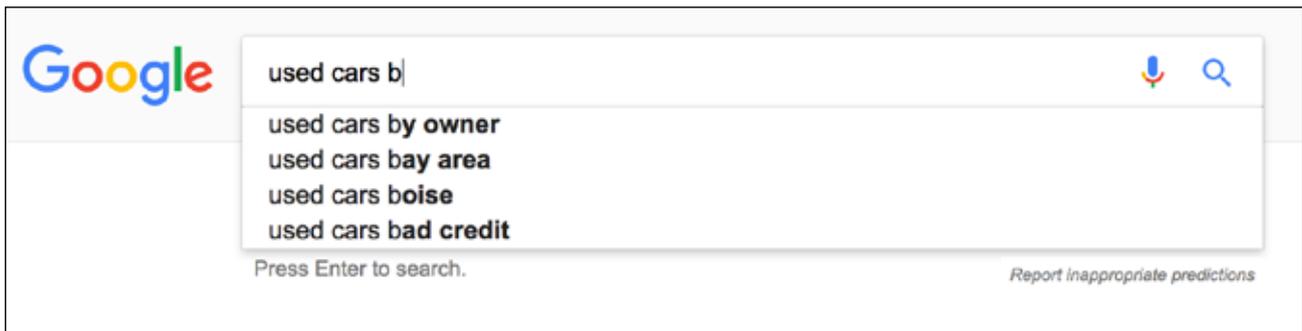
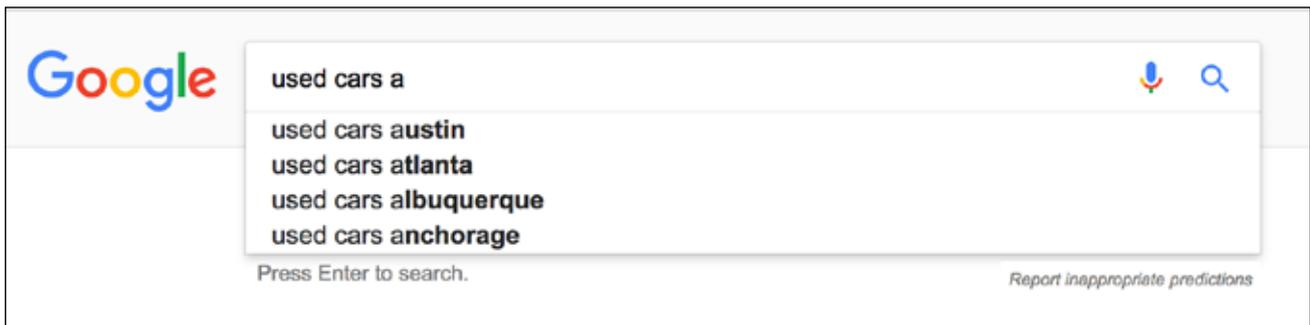
[how to do seo for website step by step](#)

[seo for dummies](#)

This section can be a gold mine of new ideas to add to your keyword spreadsheet. You can also repeat the process with other keyword phrases from your spreadsheet, and even query the results you get here. This can be a bit of a rabbit hole but it will continue to feed you with new related concepts to populate your potential keywords document.

Also, Google’s auto-fill recommendations are worth investigating. You may want to try adding in new letters and letting Google autocomplete a phrase to help you explore other keyword options.

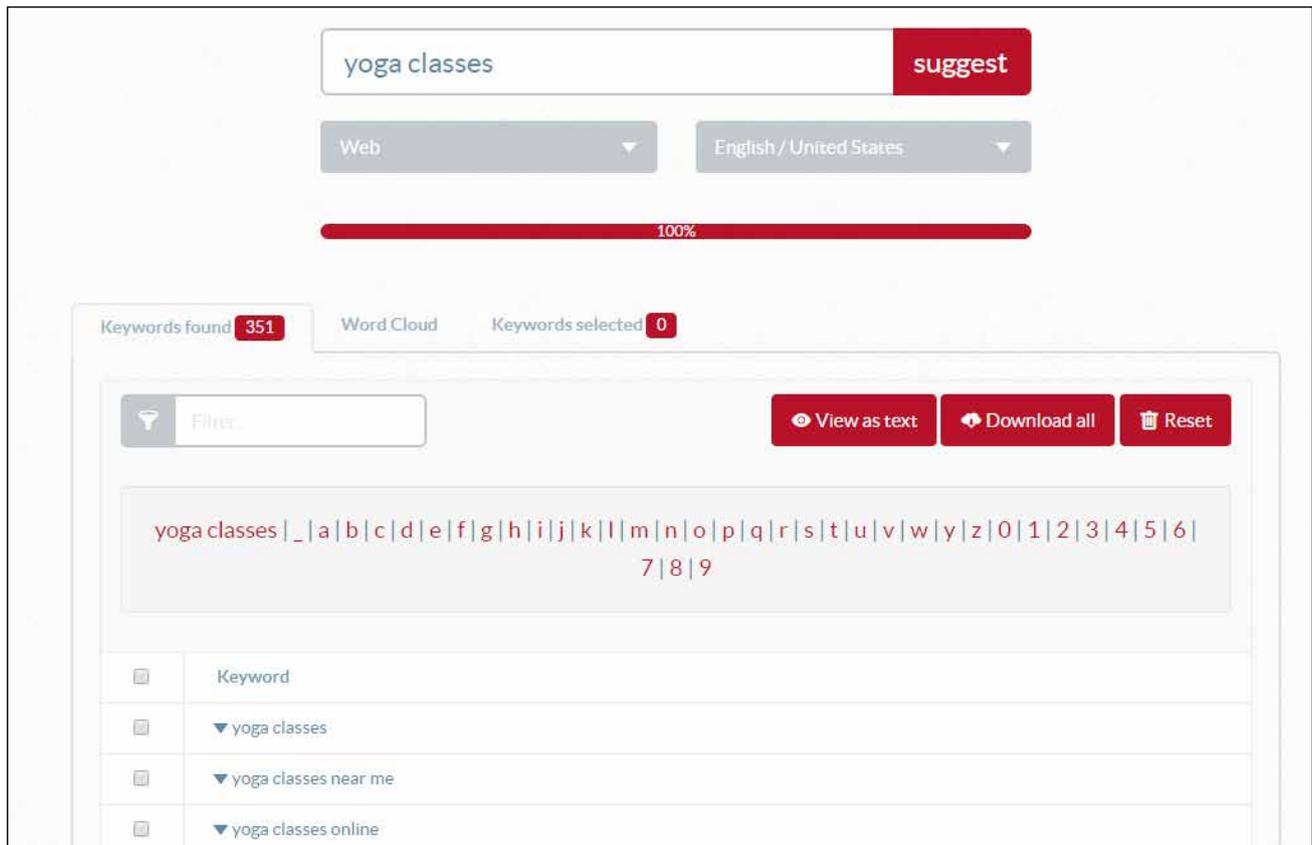




Clearly, exploring auto-populating phrases can be cumbersome when going through individual keywords on your list. However, thankfully, there are free tools out there that can help substantially improve this process:

1. Ubersuggest.com is a tool that will automatically go through this auto-populating query process and provide a downloadable list of new long tail keywords. This site operates off of a "freemium" model, so you will have to play around and decide if and when paying for advanced features will be worth it for you.



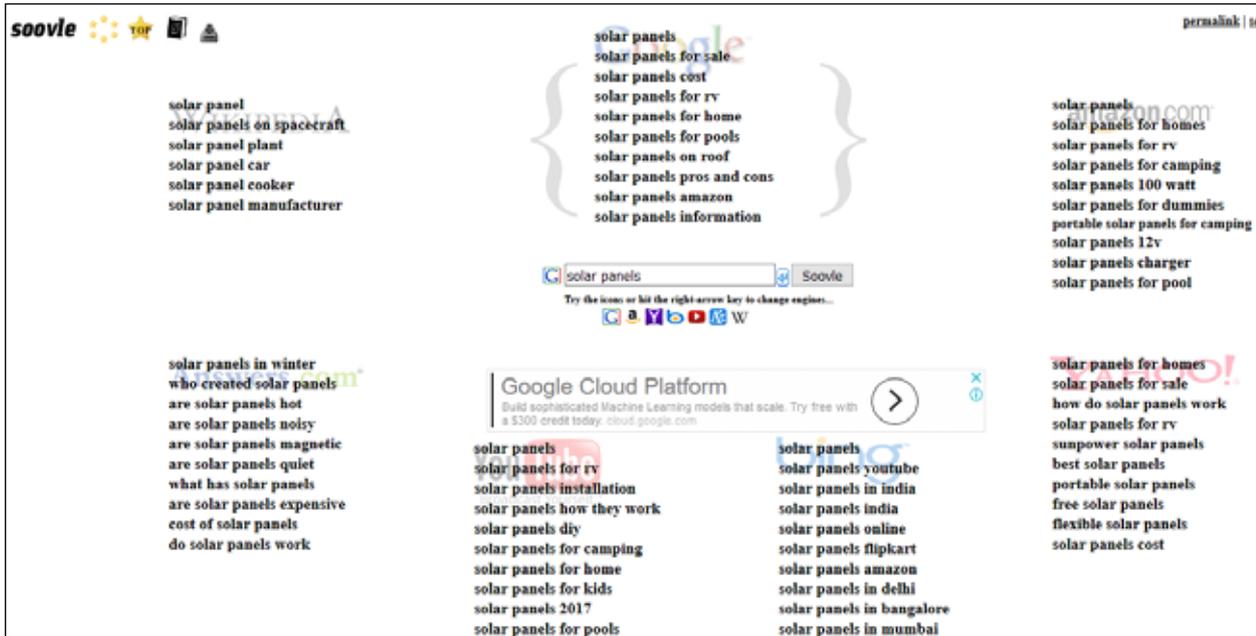


Ubersuggest operates by putting the most common searches first and then allows you to navigate suggested searches by the letter afterwards. Again, the premium model of this tool makes it more user-friendly and it may be worth the money if you can budget for it.

Another tool that fuels keyword ideas is Soovle. Soovle helps you analyze search traffic across various engines for related keywords and it helps with suggesting more long tail keywords.

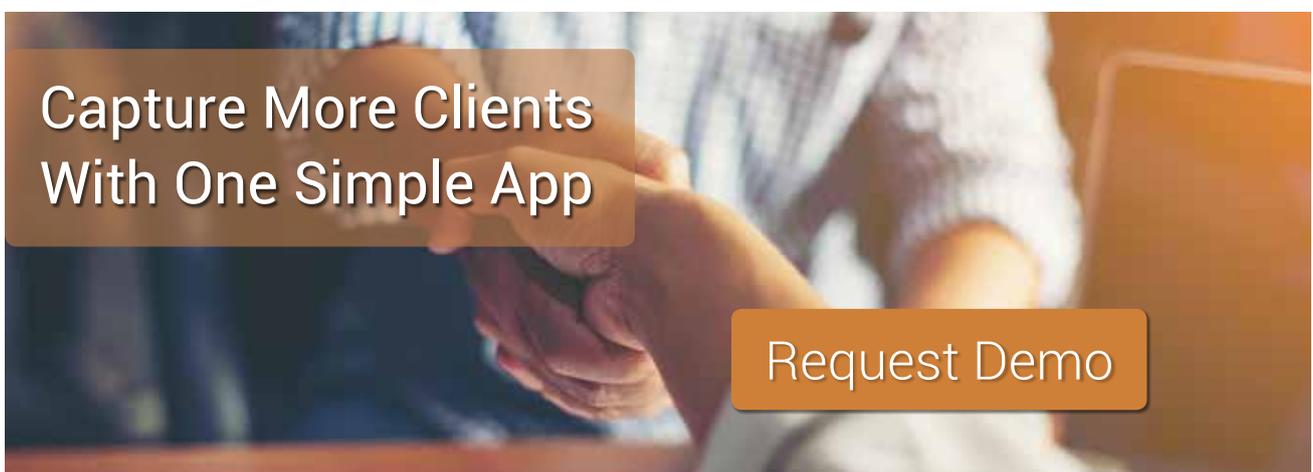
Capture More Clients
With One Simple App

Request Demo



All of these tools mentioned can work in concert with one another. It is easy to use Soovle to get new rv ideas to add into Ubersuggest and then go back to the keyword planner. It really depends on how far you want to go into this.

Once you go through this outlined process and find 5 long tail keywords to target, you can start to create content, optimize page factors, get quality backlinks, and promote your site any way you can. You will have to scale up this process and repeat it, but at the same time, you don't want to get bogged down searching for keywords that never get used. Often, it's better to start small, get something out there, and see what works. Then you can make adjustments and repeat the process.





How to Create Great Content

Well, this should be easy, right? There are legions of posts and articles talking about the need to create great content. It was once seen as the key to SEO: simply produce great content and the Google gods will reward you with an unending bounty of high rankings for keywords that generate high traffic. Unfortunately, things really don't work that way at all.

Obviously, "great" is a completely subjective designation that is not very scientific at all. Algorithms have a hard time parsing the entire internet and deciding which content is great and which isn't; most of the time these algorithms will be based off of logic and mathematics, the roots of science if you will.

Since SEO is both an art and a science, we need to measure content

by something more discernable than “great.” After all content quality is subjective, but there are some generally accepted rules about what tends to generate more shares, links, and overall engagement. A great way to start is to do a lot of research. You’ll want to know what you are talking about before you write.

While researching a topic is very important, recycling info from other posts and slapping it all together is not good enough. You will need to learn as much as you can, and then introduce something new.

Engaging Content Ideas

Doing primary research is a great idea if you have access to a pool of customers you can survey. Or, you can reach out to industry experts and see if you can get some insight. In short, think like a researcher or reporter. Scour for sources, vet them and create something authoritative and valuable.

You will also want to make your content both interesting and beautiful. The best researched papers are rarely read by anyone outside of hardcore readers interested in your topic and old fashioned nerds. Depending upon your field, producing in depth papers can be a snooze fest or wildly interesting. Try your best to slide towards the latter by breaking up chunks of text, highlighting interesting bullet points (such as quotes), using images and other multimedia sprinkled throughout, and writing in an informal and natural style if appropriate. Content is also more “sharable” and “catchy” when organized around themes and calls-to-action. For example, adding a Tweet function can help engage readers while simultaneously promoting your company’s Twitter handle.

Also, it is important to not overdo the use of memes, informal writing or “bro speak” of any kind. Some brands have taken to writing their posts in a style that is intended to be cool and natural only to come off with a pathetic whiff that makes the readers cringe and bounce off of content immediately. Therefore, if your customers are not teenagers, there is no reason to communicate like one. Your tone needs to feel relatable to your target audience.

Social Media and SEO

So, let’s talk about sharable content for a bit. Content shares can be measured, and they are something an algorithm can evaluate as one of its variables for ranking search queries. So, do social shares matter for Google rankings? Yes. No. Kind of...

Social shares are widely considered to be a factor in the algorithm, but they are not considered to be a very strong factor. In fact, the social network seen as the most important to Google is Google+. So, hooray for the 6 people still using this (Larry Page, Sergey Brin and their dogs).

Social media in and of itself is not a super important factor for SEO rankings. However, social media is a great way to attract people to your page for which you want to rank. Attracting site traffic is great for obvious reasons, but the effect on SEO is not as straight forward as you would think.

In essence, social media makes your page discoverable and can help you point to how truly “great” your content is. The more something is shared, the more we can say it is “great” from an SEO/digital marketing perspective.

However, the real benefit of social media is that we can measure responses to our content and use it to help build backlinks. The number of quality backlinks a web page has is one of the most important factors for SEO rankings. Therefore, the “greatness” of our content (from a social media perspective) is important...in an indirect way.

How to Get Content Shared on Social Media

Let’s start off with the disclaimer that this is a complex and broad endeavor that will require further study and effort on your behalf if you are not already social media savvy. It is also worth mentioning that B2B and B2C marketing strategies can be very different. For B2B, the basics should start with following leaders in your industry, commenting on their posts and being overall active, engaging and authentic with your followers.

When it comes to writing content, creating lists with multimedia elements tends to resonate with audiences. In fact, people love lists. Even BuzzFeed is now a legitimate media company based solely off of cutesy lists aimed at millennials. There is a lesson to be learned there.

Lists appeal to people as we are strapped for time and have little attention to spare. With so much free content competing for our dwindling interest and capacity for more, lists allow you to skim and see if anything is interesting. You don’t have to dive deeper unless your attention is caught.

In the same vein, multi-media is important. Gifs, pictures, graphs, video and audio files should have a place in your content. They not only improve on-page SEO directly, they increase the probability of social media shares.

On-Page SEO Tips and Tricks

On-page SEO entails a number of factors but there are a few that matter more. If you are new to SEO, it's more important to understand the process and make an impact quickly, so we will focus on factors that are less obscure.

One of the most important factors for on-page SEO is to use keywords we identified earlier to drive a higher SEO rankings. There are also a few other ways your keywords can help you get the greatest bang for your buck:

- The keyword(s) should be featured in the URL, preferably closer to the beginning but the URL should be kept short
- The keyword(s) should appear within the first 100 words on the page
- They should appear in H1, H2, H3...etc. header tags
- <alt> tags should include keywords for images to ensure disability compliance
- Meta tags should also include target keywords to help with relevancy

Aside from the use of keywords, other best practices include:

- Using original quality content for web pages
- Ensuring load speeds are fast
- Linking to internal pages as necessary
- Interlinking to posts (provide a table of contents with links if possible)
- Coding the site for web bots to easily read
- Avoiding unnatural overuse of keywords or “keyword stuffing”, which can result in penalties

The Key to SEO in 2017 is Backlinking

It used to be said that “content is king” with SEO. In 2017, the new king is backlinking. Backlinks are when a site links out of their domain to another site. It is effectively the highest compliment a site can provide (assuming its not to show an example of what NOT to do) as a backlink prompts your readers to leave your site and go somewhere else.

Ostensibly, a site would only include a link as a reference to back up its claim, and it would only do this for a site that could really be trusted. Perhaps this is why Google even developed a system to award points based off of how many links a site gets and awards them based upon the number of them. This is referred to as Page Authority and Domain Authority (PA & DA).

Nevertheless, Google's "point system" is a bit more complicated than rewarding the site with the most backlinks. Higher authority pages and domains provide a greater boost your page than lower authority ones. What's more, "spammy" sites can actually knock your authority down and require you to disavow the link to eliminate penalties of having them link to your site.

Searching out relevant sites and getting links to your content is the penultimate step in getting your page to rank higher. You will want to use your MOZ bar or another tool of your choosing to review the authority of domains and pages in your industry to target.

Next, you will need to give these target site owners a reason to link to your site. In case you are wondering, bribery is frowned upon by Google. However, indirect bribery works in almost every facet of life (politics, marriages, child rearing...etc.) and SEO is no exception. Find bloggers who are popular in your field and send them free samples or give them your software for free. Just don't ask for a link directly, quid-pro-quo is a no-no.

You will also want to look for anyone who uses outdated, inferior, ugly, or just plain bad content on their pages about the same subject for which you have created wonderful content. Send them a gentle email saying that you noticed they are interested in your subject and that you wrote some content that they might find interesting. Again, you do not want to come out and ask for a link.

There are so many other ways you could find other sources that can present you with link building opportunities. I suggest taking a look through the following list of ideas from this [post](#) to find other options if you are struggling.

Promotion of Content Marketing for SEO

The final step, if there is such a thing when it comes to SEO, is to promote your newly optimized, backlinked content to attract more customers. You will want to research channels that are most appropriate for your market and use the medium that reaches this audience most effectively and efficiently.

You don't want to use LinkedIn to market a product for teens, nor use Pinterest to promote a corporate law firm. You want to target people in an environment who will share your material with others who will also find it interesting.

A factor in SEO is bounce rate and how much time on average someone spends on your website. If you promote good content in the wrong place, you may get a ton of people clicking your link and then leaving immediately when they discover it isn't what they wanted. This can happen if you are reaching the wrong market or if the site has a poor user experience.



Rinse and Repeat

Once you have worked through these beginner SEO strategies, it is important to keep an eye on Google Analytics and note what works and what doesn't. Over the next few months, you should evaluate your efforts. Have you seen a rise in page views for your newly optimized pages? Has your ranking increased for your keywords?

If you have access to advanced tracking software, you can figure out what which SEO techniques and which marketing touch points have helped you convert prospects into customers. A marketing CRM with lead tracking capabilities can help you analyze and optimize all of these efforts. By that time, you may also be ready for more advanced SEO strategies and marketing tactics.

To learn more about how web visitor tracking software improves marketing efforts, [contact us](#) for a free trial or demo.

For more great content about marketing trends and strategies, [subscribe to Mirabel's Marketing Blog](#).



Capture More Clients
With One Simple App

Request Demo



List of Best Free SEO Tools

[Google Ad Words Keyword Planner](#) – This general SEO tool is where you will spend considerable time.

[Google Analytics](#) – This portal measures web traffic and activity on your site. While it's not known to be user-friendly nor intuitive, it's very powerful and free.

[Moz Bar](#) – This tool will help guide you in discovering which SERPs are worth targeting.

[SEO Quake](#) – Similar to the Moz bar, SEO Quake provides info on backlinks. When used with Moz Bar and other tools, you can get a clear idea of a page and domain's true strength. Since no one tool is 100% accurate, it's best to cross reference this with other tools to see if you can find a trend.

[Check My Links](#) – This app helps ensure your web links are still active. By spotting and fixing dead links, your site authority and score will not drop. This tool can be used to check backlinks too.

[Keywords Everywhere](#) – This tool will help you find keyword ideas. Makes sense, right?