



THE ART OF

DIGITAL MARKETING

THE **DEFINITIVE GUIDE** TO CREATING STRATEGIC,
TARGETED AND MEASURABLE ONLINE CAMPAIGNS

IAN DODSON

Co-founder and Director of The Digital Marketing Institute

WILEY

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Preface

The Digital Marketing Institute is the global certification standard in digital education for learners, educators, and the industry. Ours is the world's most widely taught digital marketing certification program, and there are more graduates certified by us than by any other industry body. Our mission is to establish a series of global professional standards to which both employers and professionals can subscribe. That is why we founded the Digital Standards Authority, an industry-based working group that defines and validates Digital Marketing Institute courses. The DSA validates our development of internationally recognized and respected standards that support digital marketing education by ensuring consistency in our industry-certified training.

Digital technology has transformed the way we live and work and has impacted every industry from retail to health care. Now more than ever, organizations and their employees face the challenge of developing and maintaining their business operations and customer engagement in a constantly evolving digital space. In a recent survey, only 37 percent of American employers said that they thought that recent college graduates are prepared to stay current on new technologies.¹ The increasing digital skills gap and consequent need for training is unmistakable, and something that we are dedicated to addressing.

Our goal is to empower professionals with the digital skills and knowledge needed to take control of their careers and maximize their potential. We achieve this through our courses, which are designed and developed by industry experts. This means that all of our course content is informed by industry best practices, current trends, and innovative insights that help our students cultivate a competitive edge within an in-demand industry.

The professional diploma in digital marketing, with which this textbook aligns, is our keystone certification. Composed of 10 modules, it provides an introduction to the key digital specialties: everything from mobile and social media marketing to SEO and analytics. We believe in equipping individuals with essential skills that endure, and knowledge that they can easily implement, regardless of their roles, size of their companies, or scope of their industries. We specialize in transferable, flexible learning, which is reflected in the Digital Marketing Institute's online study options. Our course

¹ Hart Research Associates, *Falling Short: College Learning and Career Success*, accessed December 17, 2015, <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015employerstudentsurvey.pdf>.



Figure 0.1 The Digital Marketing Institute's Certification Roadmap

content is available online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and students can access it whether they're at home on their laptops or on mobile devices on their way to work.

We want to make learning simple, accessible, and convenient. That's why we developed this textbook. It's an all-inclusive introductory guide that will teach you everything you need to know to kick start your digital marketing career. You can read it chronologically or prioritize the chapters that interest you most; like our courses, this book was created to allow you to study during your own time and at your own pace, and you can always refer back to it whenever you need to!

The Art of Digital Marketing has been designed to integrate with the professional diploma in digital marketing to produce a comprehensive learning experience. Each chapter relates to a module in the course and the book provides complete coverage of the course syllabus and contains only the most essential points of learning that will best prepare you to pass your exam and gain an internationally recognized and respected digital marketing certification.

Both the professional diploma in digital marketing and *The Art of Digital Marketing* are given their structure from the Digital Marketing Institute's iterative process, which focuses on monitoring, analyzing, and enhancing your digital marketing activities based on their results. That means with the help of this textbook (and by the end of the course, if you are taking it), you will be able to design, develop, and execute a fully optimized digital marketing strategy that incorporates all of the key digital channels.

The professional diploma in digital marketing is at the core of the Digital Marketing Institute's certification road map, which is shown in Figure 0.1.

This provides a framework with which our students can map their personal and professional development. Whether you choose a professional diploma in digital selling, decide to cap your studies with our masters in digital marketing, or simply use this text as an introductory guide, we're there to help you build and expand your career.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Digital Marketing

Have you experimented with digital marketing driven by guilt, pressure, or an overeager boss? Have you found your efforts disjointed—frustrating—hit-or-miss? Given the sheer volume of information available on digital marketing, just finding where to start can be challenging. And even when you get started, how do you proceed in a way that ensures you are not wasting your time, effort, or budget?

This book provides you with a framework for applying your digital marketing skills in a structured and iterative fashion. You have now taken the first step towards digital marketing mastery, and pretty soon you will be able to use these skills to produce measureable results and ultimately, a return on investment. What more could you ask for?

What Makes This Book Different?

Not only is this book a fountain of knowledge, jam-packed with all the information you need to start your digital marketing journey, but our practical approach to learning will help you to grasp the key concepts and provide you with the skills required to excel in the digital industry.

Furthermore, this book follows a structured methodology underpinned by DMI's 3i principles. These principles are the framework required for effective digital marketing and they illustrate the need for a totally different approach to traditional marketing.

This methodology is described throughout the 10 chapters of this book, each of which covers one specific channel in the digital marketing repertoire. At the end of each chapter you will be given a specific action plan, and by working through these plans you can create a comprehensive, structured, and successful digital marketing strategy.

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Start with the Customer and Work Backward

Successful digital campaigns share a range of characteristics, but campaigns that fail all have one thing in common: They don't acknowledge the empowered and informed consumer.

People Power

It is tempting to describe the evolution of the Internet in terms of names such as Facebook, Lycos, Google, eBay, PayPal, Amazon, Apple, Samsung, Netflix, and Yahoo!, as if the whole story of the web is the story of brands, companies, and technologies. The true evolution of the Internet is chronicled by the story of the empowered individual. You and I own the Internet, and the evolution of the Internet is our story.

The shift from Yahoo! to Google 10 years ago was not a result of Google's marketing—as users we made the leap because we gained more control over how we searched for information. The e-commerce site eBay allowed us to sell anything to anyone for any price at any time. Facebook allowed us to stay in touch with people all over the world whenever and however we like. All the great leaps forward in digital technologies have been characterized by one thing—they have given you and me more control over our lives.

The Internet is fundamentally different from all other communication channels because we can learn so much about our customers. We can identify their habits, their technologies, and their preferences. The freedom that the web offers has fundamentally altered the company/customer relationship, upending it and putting the empowered customer in the driver's seat.

With these advances in communication and web technology, the walls have fallen not only between a company and its customer but between fellow customers, who can publicly share their experiences—the good, the bad, and the ugly!

Market Research versus Market Reality

The primary challenge for any business, no matter how large or small, is quite simple—how to get its product or service into the hands of the customer.

How the company will achieve this is informed by market research, gut instinct, polls, surveys, and research about existing habits and activities. However, when conducting market research, especially surveys, we need to take one key factor into account—people lie!

The Internet enables us to learn from market reality by looking at what people actually do online. We can use social listening tools to research customers' activities and

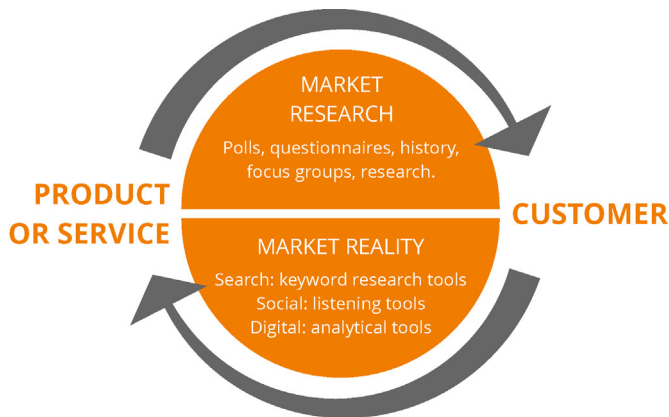


Figure 1.1 Market Research versus Market Reality

preferences based on their online habits and to complement our market research, as shown in Figure 1.1. By accessing this market reality, our product is better targeted and our chances of a successful go-to-market strategy are greater.

Let's Make This Real!

Let's imagine that you run a *crèche*—a nursery school—in New York and you wish to create an online presence for your customers to locate you and engage with you—and with each other. It may be tempting to call this website Crecheworld.com.

However, a simple check using Google's Keyword Planner tool would show that in the past six months the number of unique searches for *crèche* in New York City was dwarfed by searches for *childcare* by a factor of 10! So you may think of your business as a *crèche*, but your customers call it *childcare*.

Even this early in the website planning process we have gone to the customers, looked at what they are actually doing, and changed our product appropriately. Market reality provides a sounder basis than market research for making crucial business decisions such as website naming.

Similar listening tools exist for all digital channels, and in each section of this book you will be introduced to the most effective tools for understanding your customers' actual online activities.

You may ask—does that mean that market research is redundant? Of course not. We have differentiated between these two activities in order to highlight the extent of the shift to consumer control. A smart approach is to combine the best of both of these activities into a single cohesive strategy, using one to validate and support the other.

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What Are the 3i Principles?

The 3i Principles—Initiate, Iterate, and Integrate—form the foundation for all DMI Methodologies and are key to any successful marketing strategy.

Principle 1: Initiate

Our greatest challenge as marketers is shutting up! Digital truly is for dummies, in the sense that every question you may have about budget, resources, strategy, and channels is answered by the consumer—if only we would listen!

The initiate principle of digital marketing states that the customer is the starting and finishing point for all digital activities. The answer to all questions is “let the customer decide.”

Many people are too quick to jump into managing digital channels. They set up blogs, websites, and social media profiles and start publishing nonspecific content about themselves, their companies, and their products. They fail to realize that digital channels are not broadcast channels in the traditional sense of the term.

In fact, they are interaction channels that facilitate a two-way conversation. By taking the time to find out what your customers are doing online, your digital activities will become radically more effective.

Your customers are speaking online. Are you listening?

Principle 2: Iterate

Within minutes of publishing an ad, we can see what the click-through rates, response rates, and conversion rates are. More importantly, the content or design of the ad can be changed a limitless number of times in response to user actions. This ability to publish, track response, and tweak accordingly is the greatest strength of the Internet and produces the second of our 3i principles—*iterate*.

This principle emphasizes the importance of tweaking a digital marketing campaign in response to user interaction. Each digital marketing channel is most effective when you apply an iterative process, and the more iterations of the campaign you apply, the more effective each becomes.

There are some key implications of this iterative process.

To begin with, the first published idea is not necessarily the best. The mythical advertising mogul who devises a killer campaign is a thing of the past. Why? Because

your customers are better at describing what they want than any advertiser is. Remain open to what your customers are doing in their interactions with your campaign and be prepared to change it. Your campaign can, and will, improve over its lifetime.

Next, the length of the iteration depends on the channel. For example, if you send a weekly email newsletter you will review open rates and click-through rates within a day or two of sending your newsletter. You will then apply those insights to your next campaign in terms of what did and did not resonate with customers. So your iterative loop for your specific email marketing campaign will typically be a week long.

Principle 3: Integrate

Integration as a principle is crucial to effective digital marketing. It works at three levels:

- 1 *Integrate your efforts across digital channels.*** Integration across digital channels is about using information gleaned through one channel to improve the effectiveness of another digital channel. It can be as simple as sharing information learned through search engine optimization with your email marketing team. Take our *crèche* versus *childcare* example: When including New York parents in an email marketing campaign for a crèche, using keywords like childcare will help to improve your open rates. Thus, sharing insights learned through one channel can drastically improve the effectiveness of another.
- 2 *Integrate your digital and traditional marketing efforts.*** Integration of digital and traditional marketing involves using information gathered from your digital marketing efforts and integrating it into your traditional marketing strategy. For example, when writing the script for a radio ad you should use the same keywords that resonate with customers using search engines. Any opportunity to learn from your customers can be shared across all channels to improve the effectiveness of all of your communications and marketing campaigns.
- 3 *Integrate your reporting sources.*** Companies who engage with digital marketing obtain an abundance of data about their customers. However, it is important to gather data in a way that allows you to make good business decisions. An integrated view of your customers is a good place to start. Luckily, a lot of the work can be done for you by using a tool such as Google Analytics. For example, this tool can provide you with detailed information on the source of the traffic coming to your website. What percentage of your site visitors come from email versus paid search advertising? Which visitors convert more quickly? Where should you be increasing your digital budget and where should you be reducing it? Making business decisions based on the true value of your digital marketing is a crucial step in implementing and justifying your digital marketing strategy.

So let's take the leap together! Let's discover what digital channels can do for us, and—more importantly—for our customers.

Chapter 2

Search Engine Optimization

An Introduction

Whoever controls the door to the Internet, controls the Internet. And now search engines have become the default entry point to the Internet. We start with a simple search by typing a few words into a search engine, often oblivious to exactly what happens behind the scenes. When we search in Google, for example, we are not actually searching the Internet; we are searching Google's index of the Internet, that is, the list of the sites that it has found online. So the challenge for effective search engine optimization (SEO) involves understanding how search engines work and how to play by their rules.

Formal definition of SEO: The process of refining your website using both on-page and off-page practices so that it will be indexed and ranked successfully by search engines.

Informal definition of SEO: Smell nice for Google!

Google is not a cheap date. You have to make some effort: take a shower, wash your hair, shave, and put on a spritz of aftershave and some deodorant. Optimizing a website so that it is found and indexed by search engines requires a considerable amount of grooming and this chapter will show you what to do and how to do it.

The Process

In this chapter you will explore the four key stages of the SEO process, as shown in Figure 2.1.

- 1 Goals.** From the outset, it's important to be aware of the benefits of SEO. They will serve as key drivers as you navigate the development of your SEO strategy. You must decide upon and set up clear, realistic goals and targets for your SEO campaign. The benefits of

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Figure 2.1 Four-Stage SEO Process

spending time developing goals far outweigh the risks of walking the plank blindfolded into the competitive world of search marketing. Just one error could result in a six-month search engine penalization—with SEO, ignorance certainly is not bliss!

- 2** *On-page optimization.* This deals with the granular, technical optimization of the various elements on your website. It involves ensuring search engines can easily read, understand, crawl through, and navigate the pages of your site to index it correctly.
- 3** *Off-page optimization.* This refers to techniques used to influence website position in organic search results that cannot be managed by on-page optimization of your site. It's a long-term, iterative process focused on gaining website authority, as determined by what other websites say about you. To put it simply, it's about building a digital footprint and earning online credibility.
- 4** *Analyze.* This stage is very much a cyclical process. You're now looking at the data coming back, analyzing it, and deciding upon the adjustments needed going forward. This will help you tweak your goals accordingly as you implement additional goals and changes.

Key Terms and Concepts

This chapter covers the key concepts and terminology used within the field of SEO that will equip you with the technical know-how, understanding, and insight to build and maintain an effective SEO strategy. Upon completion of this chapter you will:

- Understand the meaning of SEO.
- Understand organic search listings.
- Understand pay-per-click (PPC) listings.
- Understand the mechanics of SEO.
- Recognize and utilize the three main drivers of SEO.
- Understand on-page and off-page optimization.

Search engine optimization is the process of refining your website, using both on-page and off-page practices, so that it will be indexed and ranked successfully by search engines. With SEO, the best and most cost-effective way to increase your website traffic is to have a high position in organic search listings. Organic search listings refer to the websites that appear in search results based on their relevance to the search term the user has typed.

Search Engine Result Pages: Positioning

Have you ever tried searching for your fantastic new website, only to find it has been lost in the depths of cyberspace and is trailing behind hundreds of other sites? This all comes down to search engine results page (SERP) positioning! After reading this section you will know how to save your site from social Siberia by:

- Identifying and understanding the features of a SERP.
- Appreciating the importance of a SERP.
- Implementing your knowledge to achieve a high SERP listing.

A SERP is the web page that a search engine, such as Google or Yahoo!, returns that lists the results of a user's search. A SERP is divided into core sections. At the top you'll always find paid listings. As you can see in Figure 2.2, these are marked with yellow flags that clearly highlight these entries as ads.

But what about the listings that lie beneath the advertising? These are organic search results, or the listings that are featured on a SERP because of their relevance to the search terms that a user has entered into a search engine.

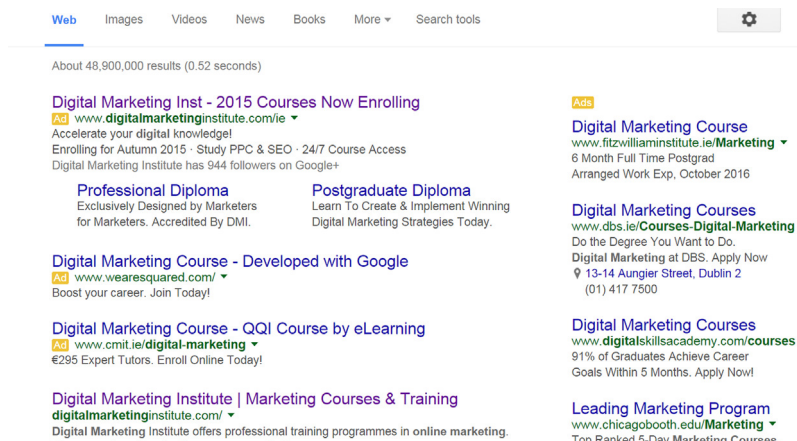


Figure 2.2 Google Search Engine Results Page

Source: Google and the Google logo are registered trademarks of Google Inc.; used with permission.

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It's often said that the best place to hide a dead body is on the second page of search engine results, which is why it is essential to ensure your listing is as high as possible on the first SERP. Ninety-one percent of searchers will not click past the first results page, so it's time to adopt a competitive mind-set and strive to achieve a top-three organic listing. Your overall goal is to reach the number-one position!

Organic versus Paid Listings

Listings that are displayed on the first page of search engine results yield the highest search traffic—the higher the listing, the more clicks it will receive. Generally, paid listings will garner a 30 percent click-through rate (CTR), with organic listings making up the remaining 70 percent. While these statistics can vary depending on the market, generally this rule of thumb is widely applicable. It is important to note that as listing positions get lower, click-throughs drastically decrease. Approximately 67 percent of click-throughs on page one of a SERP occur in the first five results. A low listing will ultimately affect your overall conversion rate, so once again, it's important to strive for the top three positions.

Customers can seek information using a variety of different search practices, which is why focusing solely on text-based searches can hinder your SERP positioning and customer reach. Let's build on what we've just learned and take a look at the different ways you can optimize your SERP listings.

Location-Based Search

Search engines take into account the location of the person searching to deliver the most applicable search results. For example, with Google's My Business you can submit your business for display on a location-based search, so when John Smith searches for Italian restaurants in Tokyo, your chances of appearing in his SERP are increased. Be sure to complete all elements of the form by providing a category, description, pictures, videos, and so on to catch user attention. Google operates a five-star rating scheme, so customers should be encouraged to review and rate your business.

While listings with higher review scores and additional material, like those in Figure 2.3, won't necessarily increase SERP positioning, they most certainly will yield a higher CTR than those without these characteristics.

Knowledge Graph Listing

Google's Knowledge Graph tries to understand searchers' intent while anticipating their end goals. It tries to help people discover key information about a particular business that they may not have been able to discover through an organic listing.

For example, if a user searches for information on restaurants in New York City, Knowledge Graph will display both a variety of images at the top of the SERP and a

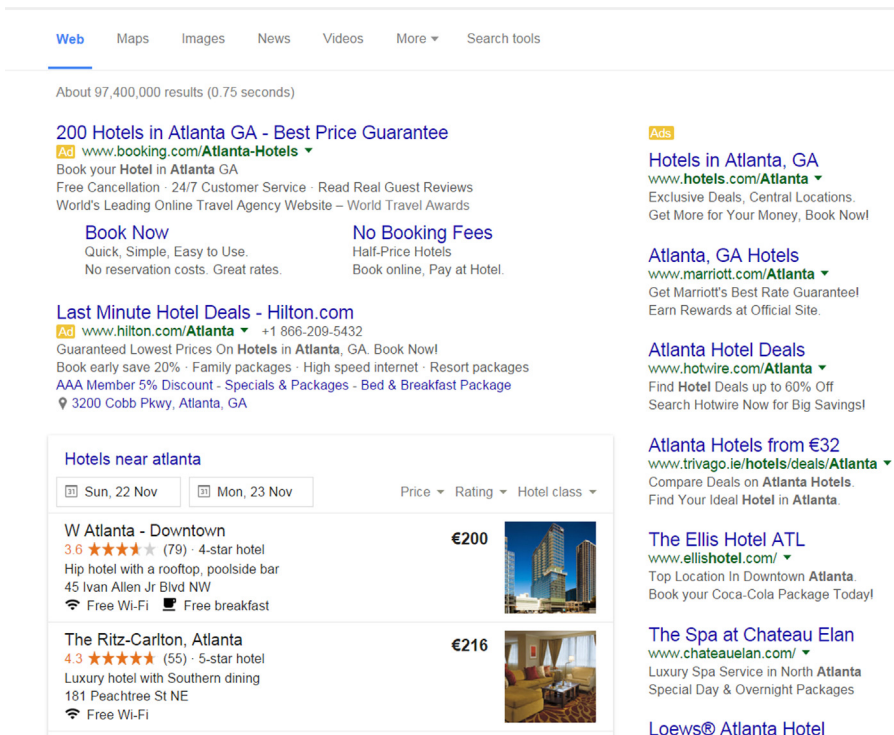


Figure 2.3 Location Based Search

Source: Google and the Google logo are registered trademarks of Google Inc.; used with permission.

panel on the right with a list of key information, a company description, reviews, related searches, and so on. It feeds on information from related websites, popular searches, Google local listings, and other sources.

Data Highlighter

Data Highlighter is a Google Search Console (GSC) tool that is very valuable when it comes to refining your SERP listing. With your mouse, you simply highlight the various data fields (title, description, image, etc.) on your page. This in turn allows Google to display your website data in new, more attractive ways both in SERPs and on the Knowledge Graph. While you cannot stipulate what data will display in a SERP, through Google Search Console, you can demote links to your site that decrease its chances of being listed.

Search Behavior

By now you should have a strong grasp of the key terminology, mechanics, and practices associated with SEO and SERP positioning. So, let's combine this knowledge

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and use it to understand more about our customers and to analyze their online search behavior. By the end of this section, you will:

- Know who the three key players in search marketing are and what their impact on your SEO strategy is.
- Understand search behavior and DMI's 5P Customer Search Insights Model.
- Know what key snippets of information can be obtained from each of the 5Ps.
- Be able to leverage the value of the 5Ps in your SEO strategy.
- Appreciate the importance of relevancy for customer acquisition.

What is online search behavior? Every time users search, they reveal a certain amount of information about themselves. When this information is gathered, it can be classified into different search behavior categories to analyze customer needs. From this categorization, you can develop an effective SEO content strategy. In search engine optimization there are three key players:

- 1 *The searcher.* The goal is to have people searching for *your* product or service. More specifically, you want searchers to look for the keywords you are using. You want to understand a person's every search behavior in order to target a searcher appropriately.
- 2 *The website owner.* Your goal as the website owner should be to align the optimization of your website with customer search behavior findings. The competitive intention here is to outrank, outperform, and outbid your competitors.
- 3 *The search engine.* Ultimately, your goal is to ensure search engines have indexed your website, so they can understand what your site is about. This is crucial. If a search engine can't understand your site, it won't display it.

Each of these players is viewed as a stepping-stone on the route to reaching and engaging with customers. You must successfully address each component to reach your end goal, whether that is a click-through to your site, a contact inquiry, a sale, or something else.

Understanding your customers is the cornerstone of every successful business, which is why search marketing is such an important medium for gathering customer insight. With every search, users leave small crumbs of personal information behind. So by using DMI's 5P Customer Search Insights Model, you get a greater understanding of customers than you ever imagined! Let's take a look at the 5Ps:

- 1 *Person.* Information about the searcher can include age, sex, religion, language, and socioeconomic group.
- 2 *Place.* You can discover the country or city a customer is in and whether the location is classified as urban or rural.
- 3 *Product.* You can learn which particular topic, interest, or subject area of a product searchers are researching and the need or the pain being addressed.
- 4 *Priority.* The search query provides an indication of customers' purchasing time frames; that is, how urgently they need the product or service and the window for engagement.
- 5 *Purchase.* Most importantly, you can find out how and where users want to buy and what stage they are at in the consumer purchase model.

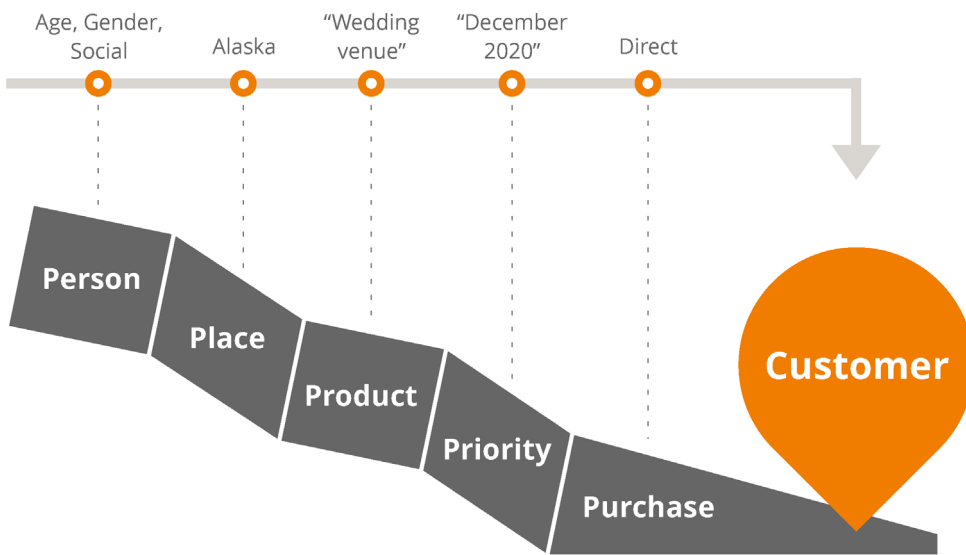


Figure 2.4 The 5P Model

To expand upon this, let's look at Figure 2.4 and apply the 5P model to the search query *Alaska romantic wedding venue December 2020*.

- 1 **Person.** Here, you could make an educated guess as to the age and gender of the user. But to be certain, this data can be obtained using an important tool you'll become very familiar with, known as Google Analytics (GA). GA gives highly detailed information (in this case demographic data), and can provide key person information.
- 2 **Place.** From the search query we can see the searcher's targeted place is Alaska. But by using GA you can also see where this person is located.
- 3 **Priority.** The priority is very much December 2020 and the searcher's purchasing time frame and urgency have also been identified.
- 4 **Product.** The product the user is looking for is a wedding venue.
- 5 **Purchase.** The purchase in this case is going to be direct. It's not something that the user will book online.

Ultimately, the key to all this can be summed up in one word: relevancy. The most relevant search results will always be displayed to users, so make sure to focus the three key players of SEO towards each of the 5Ps to ensure that your website is a strong contender against competitors.

Customer search behavior is something you must take into account in all aspects of online optimization. It should influence your decisions on every detail, from choosing keywords to creating content for your site. You need to understand who your customers are, what their online habits are, and how to solve their consumer pain in order to convert them from website visitors into loyal customers. With a better understanding of your customer's online habits and behaviors, let's now use this information to inform

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stage 1 of the SEO iterative process—what your goals and outcomes for the search engine optimization of your site should be.

Stage 1: Goals

As with all aspects of digital marketing, the importance of defining and setting tangible, measurable goals cannot be emphasized enough. Goals will help you create plans, direct your day-to-day tasks, and, of course, motivate you to rise above your competitors.

Let's start with stage one of the SEO process, which is highlighted in Figure 2.5. Get ready to be an expert in:

- Analyzing the underlying needs of your business
- Converting these needs into well-defined goals
- Assigning key performance indicators (KPIs) to these goals—to assess if you're on the right track to achieving them



Figure 2.5 Focus on the first stage in the SEO process

While addressing consumer pain is important, you can't forget to address your own. If you assess the needs of your business, it will create a beneficial ripple effect on the three key players of SEO: the searcher, the search engine, and you, the website owner. You need to identify the business pain, view this pain as a goal, create a strategy to achieve the goal, and assign KPIs to the strategy to monitor your progress in solving the pain. It's very much a cyclical process. Let's use the example of a sports footwear retailer:

Business pain: A decline in online orders

Goal: Conversions

Strategy: Increase website visitors through on-page optimization (keywords, blog, etc.)

KPIs: Sales, online inquiries

In this example, the searcher benefits through an enhanced user experience and relevant content, the search engine benefits through being able to easily understand and index your site, and you, the website owner, benefits through achieving your goals.

Goals vary depending on the nature of the business. Types of goals include engagement, visibility, and the most common goal, conversions. Every business is different in regards to what it classifies as a conversion. On one web page a user watching a video might be considered a conversion. On another it could be an online inquiry. After you've decided what your goals are, you can track your progress towards achieving your goals by creating KPIs. You can define and monitor goals and KPIs, then analyze this data to adjust your strategy using the GA reporting tool. We'll show you how to do this later.

Following are some examples of some typical goals and KPIs.

Types of Goals	Types of KPIs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engagement• Conversions• Visibility• Reputation• Credibility and status• Market leadership• Competitive advantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organic traffic• Visitor numbers• Click-through rates• Downloads• Online inquiries• Sales• Website engagement and the like

Staying motivated in achieving your goals will be difficult if you're oblivious to the benefits from your efforts. The ultimate goal of SEO is to achieve that number-one ranking on SERPs for your website. But what are the benefits?

- *Increased organic CTRs.* Organic CTR is the percentage of clicks your website listing generates, based on the number of organic impressions served. Organic impressions are the number of times a page from your website displays in SERPs and is viewed by a user, not including paid listings. A number-one position will increase your organic CTR, which in turn reduces your advertising spend and ultimately leads to conversions.
- *Increased engagement.* You want users to engage with your brand at different stages of the buying process, visit your website, and stay there! Like a dog to a bone, a number-one ranking will lure searchers to your site. Increased engagement means users exploring and spending longer periods of time on your site.
- *Enhanced reputation.* Top listings yield both online and professional credibility, status, and reputation.
- *Market leadership and competitive advantage.* Outshining your competitors is vital, so strive for a number-one listing to avail yourself of this advantage.
- *Increased conversions.* Whatever you consider a conversion, this is what it's all about. They've clicked on to your site, spent time navigating it, and had a pleasant browsing experience. Great! But now it's about transforming these factors into conversions. A high search-engine listing will do this for you.

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Take some time now to assess to the needs of your business, and from this devise your own goals and the corresponding KPIs. You should be referring back to your goals and updating them as you progress through each stage of the SEO process. Goal setting is another ongoing process that will continually change, depending on the successes or failures of the strategies you implement. Just keep reminding yourself of the benefits of your hard work and the results will speak for themselves.

Stage 2: On-Page Optimization

With your goals in place and their accompanying KPIs assigned, the time has come to move to the second stage of the SEO process: On-page optimization, which is highlighted in Figure 2.6. At the start of this chapter, we briefly discussed the mechanics of this process. Now we can explore it further.

Keyword Research

Keyword research is often the first step in this process. Keywords have a very strong impact on the other elements of on-page optimization, so the level of research you conduct will determine if your site is a zero or a hero in terms of search volume!

After just a little more reading you will:

- Understand the terms keyword, long-tail keyword, and keyword research.
- Know how to conduct both online and offline keyword research.

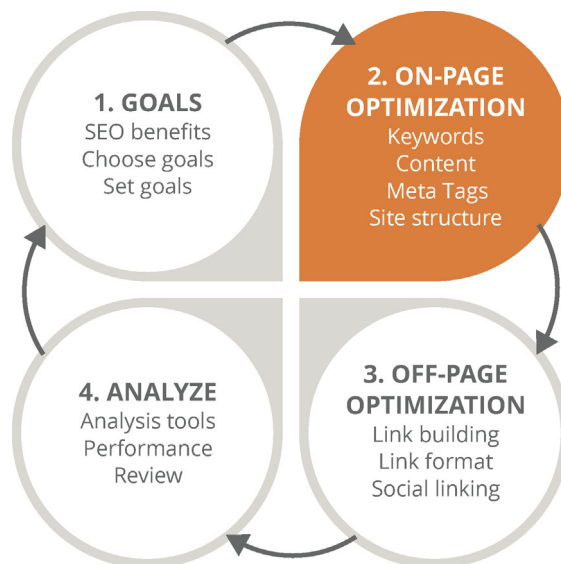


Figure 2.6 Focus on the second stage in the SEO process

- Be aware of the importance of keyword-rich content and the need for high-quality content.
- Be able to identify keyword research tools, the actions they perform, and the data they provide.

Key Terms

So, what exactly is a *keyword*? It's a significant word or phrase that relates to the content on your website. For example, if you're a freelance photographer, relevant keywords for your site could be *photographer* or *affordable wedding photographer*. Keywords are vital in ensuring your site displays in SERPs. They should be subtly incorporated into the content and meta data of your web pages in a way that reads naturally.

A *search term* is a commonly used phrase that users type into search engines to find you. Traditionally users typed in two to four words, but with ever-increasing digital literacy rates, much longer search terms are now being used. You must be able to know what customers are searching for and choose your keywords based on that. While generic search terms such as *hotels in Paris* will give tons of search results, they lack relevance.

Users now understand that the more specific their search terms, the more accurate and relevant their search results will be. This is where *long-tail keywords* come in. These are three- or four-word keyword phrases with low-volume search queries that are worth ranking highly. Why? Because searchers using long-tail keywords are usually closer to the point of purchase. Although long-tail keywords are quite specific, they have lower competition and bring much higher qualified traffic to your website.

Having covered the terminology, it's now time to do your homework and discover the keywords that people use when searching for information on the product or service you provide. This is known as *keyword research*. It means finding the search terms your customers most frequently use. There are two types of keyword research—online and offline. Typically, digital marketers will focus solely on online methods of keyword research, disregarding the abundance of excellent keywords that can be derived from offline research. But why should you bother with keyword research at all? Besides the fact that it will increase your ranking and impressions, it also helps search engines better recognize the intent behind users' search terms and bring them the most relevant results—which keeps all three key players happy.

Let's take a look at some key tools and practices that will assist you in your keyword research efforts.

Offline Keyword Research

Brainstorming. You really can't beat sitting down with your team to brainstorm keyword ideas. The best people to report on the common jargon being used in your industry are your colleagues. They are the people who interact with your customers, hearing and seeing the words and phrases they use when referring to your products and services. Something as simple as noting down common customer queries can be a huge bonus for keyword

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research. Using keywords composed of industry jargon can be tricky, so be very careful. Let's use the example of an IT solutions company. The standard, industry-accepted term for the service provided is *managed IT solutions*, and as such, the company will want to display in SERPs with this keyword. The problem here is that customers don't use this term, and search for *outsourced IT services* instead. The lesson here is that you should always select the keywords and search terms that your customers are actually using.

Marketing collateral. Open the office storeroom and gather your company's leaflets, brochures, posters, and the like. The content here can be particularly useful for generating low search volume keywords that are worth including. In addition, going one step further and sourcing competitor marketing material is an excellent competitor keyword research method.

Customer surveys. Qualitative research-based customer surveys are another method of establishing the phraseology and colloquial jargon your customer base is using.

Listening to customers. Substantial amounts of keyword data can be obtained by simply listening to your customers. Brief everyone in your company on the importance of listening to the words your customers are using. Collating these words into a list will save a lot of time and money when conducting your keyword research.

Online Keyword Research

In this stage of the process, generally we're talking about the use of key tools that allow you to perform filtered keyword research using the following criteria: custom date ranges, query volume, historical trends, levels of data, and related phrases by city or country. With such a wide variety of online keyword research tools available for free or for a fee, the web is your oyster! Researching and testing the countless tools available that work best for you is time well spent. To kick-start your efforts, the top four highly regarded research tools in the industry follow:

- 1 *Google Autocomplete.* This tool is probably the easiest online keyword research tool to use, and definitely the place to start. It's particularly good for long-tail keyword research; you simply begin typing into the Google search box. Once you start, you'll see that it will try to finish your sentence automatically, based on the most popular search terms entered. As you now know, Google scans your browser history to deliver the most relevant search results. If you're using Google Autocorrect for keyword research, make sure to clear your search history, cache, cookies, and temporary files—clear it all! That way it won't consider your previous searches when suggesting search terms, thus providing fresh data.
- 2 *Google AdWords Keyword Planner.* This is a tool built into the Google AdWords platform. Under the Tools section, you'll find Keyword Planner. The research and analytical functionalities are endless! After you've entered a particular keyword or search term and chosen the location you're targeting, click on Get Ideas. The Keyword Planner will return a report detailing the top listings containing that keyword or search term, plus other suggested keywords. In the listing you will notice two tabs, one for ad group ideas and another for keyword ideas. At this stage of the process focus on the latter. The ad group ideas tab concerns PPC ad campaigns and right now we're focusing on how to use this tool for organic optimization.

The listing will reveal copious amounts of information. For this SEO exercise, however, the only two data elements worth focusing on in Figure 2.7 are *search term* and *average*

The screenshot shows the Google AdWords Keyword Planner interface. It is divided into two main sections: 'Search terms' and 'Keyword (by relevance)'. Both sections have columns for 'Search terms', 'Avg. monthly searches', 'Competition', 'Suggested bid', 'Ad impr. share', and 'Add to plan'. The 'Search terms' section shows one result: 'digital marketing courses' with 8,100 searches, High competition, and a suggested bid of €7.43. The 'Keyword (by relevance)' section shows six results, including 'digital marketing course', 'online digital marketing courses', 'digital marketing courses online', 'digital marketing course online', 'free digital marketing courses', and 'digital marketing training courses', each with varying search volumes and competition levels.

Search terms	Avg. monthly searches	Competition	Suggested bid	Ad impr. share	Add to plan
digital marketing courses	8,100	High	€7.43	5%	»

Keyword (by relevance)	Avg. monthly searches	Competition	Suggested bid	Ad impr. share	Add to plan
digital marketing course	8,100	High	€4.52	1%	»
online digital marketing courses	880	High	€7.85	5%	»
digital marketing courses online	590	High	€8.97	4%	»
digital marketing course online	480	High	€4.95	1%	»
free digital marketing courses	480	High	€3.07	4%	»
digital marketing training courses	260	High	€8.13	2%	»

Figure 2.7 Keyword Ideas in Google AdWords Keyword Planner

Source: Google and the Google logo are registered trademarks of Google Inc.; used with permission.

monthly searches. Start by looking at the search term and its corresponding search volume. Base your keyword selection on relatively high search volumes that are actually applicable. You want keywords with low enough competition so that you can get that all-important page-one listing. Again, don't disregard long-tail keywords. They use search terms with less competition and bring more relevant traffic to your website.

- 3 **Google Trends.** As with all aspects of digital marketing, popular keywords are ever changing, so it's important to keep informed and stay ahead of the curve. Google Trends is a great tool for analyzing the rise and fall of keyword trends. It's important to be aware of trending terminology and phrases so you're not targeting outdated keywords. This tool can also show how search terms are trending against each other and if there are any new trends you should be considering.
- 4 **SEMrush.** SEMrush is used widely by search marketers in the industry. It's an excellent tool for analyzing your competitors, the keywords they're targeting, and what type of estimated traffic volumes they're getting. Outperforming your competitors is one of your primary SEO goals, and to do that you need to assess their performance in comparison to your own.

Once you have chosen a solid list of keywords that allow you to rank highly in SERPs, it's time to incorporate those keywords into your website. Search engines encourage the use of keywords so they can display the most relevant websites on the first page of a user's search.

A Word of Warning

So by repeating a relevant keyword 50 times on one page, your website will rank number one, right? Wrong! Back in the day, search marketers thought it clever to try cheating search engine algorithms through a variety of disallowed keyword practices, such as keyword stuffing. This involved overuse of the top ranking keywords in their website content in order to rank highly. The Google gods are now smarter than ever and these kinds of forbidden SEO activities won't be tolerated. Websites found to be

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violating the rules will be severely penalized and could be removed from SERPs entirely. Nowadays, search marketers are wiser and times have changed. Keyword density, or how many times a keyword or phrase appears on a web page, is one aspect of SEO that is no longer important. Keywords should only be used to accompany high-quality, relevant content.

When the research is done and the optimum keywords have been selected, you must then decide where to place them. You should include your target keyword in the title tag, in the metadescription, and in the body copy of the web page (these mechanics will be covered in the next section).

Again, keywords should be used in combination with suitable content. When writing for your site, always focus on both the end user and the search engine. The content should be relevant, with keywords inserted into sentences naturally, so users don't realize they are reading SEO-optimized content. Most importantly, never compromise the quality of your content for keyword optimization. The penalties certainly aren't worth the risk.

The On-Page Optimization Process

By now, you should have carefully conducted your keyword research and chosen your optimal keywords based on this research. The next step is to incorporate these keywords into the on-page optimization of your site.

Your aim is to achieve a high first-page ranking and push your competitors into the barren wastelands of page two and beyond! Upon completion of this section, you will:

- Know the optimal content structure and hierarchy for on-page SEO.
- Recognize and appreciate the importance of each on-page mechanic.
- Learn how to conduct on-page optimization.
- Know about the key on-page SEO tools.
- Know how to create multiregional and multilingual versions of your website.

Style and Structure

With on-page optimization, the first thing you must be conscious of is the structure of your site. You should make sure there is a hierarchy among web pages and that the structure flows throughout your website, as shown in Figure 2.8. Think of it as a parent and child relationship. Every website should have a menu navigation bar, with the menu bar links acting as the parents. The subpages flowing from these parent pages are their children, and if these subpages have further subpages, they are *the children's* children.

The example here details the hierarchal structure of a typical e-commerce website. As you can see, the Women's page is a child of the Home page but also a parent of the Clothing, Shoes, and Accessories pages. Got that? The number of levels your site has depends on the nature of your business. If your content is buried too deep it can be