SEO Keyword Research and Mapping Standard Operating Procedure

Execution Time: *2-8 hours*
Last Updated / Reviewed: February 21st, 2019
Created For: Company Name

Goal: Finding high-volume keywords that are easy to target (i.e. there aren't many other websites that target them too) and which suit your website's niche, grouping them according to search intent and demand, as well as creating an incipient sitemap based on the aforementioned keyword groups.

Ideal Outcome: Creating a comprehensive keyword strategy your SEO specialist(s) and content marketer(s) will be able to use in the months to come.

Prerequisites or requirements: N/A

Why this is important: Although definitely not *the only* element that ensures excellent Search Engine Optimization, _keyword research is by far the most important SEO task_. A great keyword strategy can give you a competitive advantage against large players in the market, determine what to work on next, who to hire, and how much to invest. You can use your keyword strategy to inform the structure of your site and even define your content marketing calendar.

Where this is done: In your browser, in a keyword research tool, as well as in a spreadsheet that will help you organize all the keywords you find.

When this is done:
1. Before you (re)create your website.
2. It should also be done recurrently, at least once a year, to refresh your website's SEO.
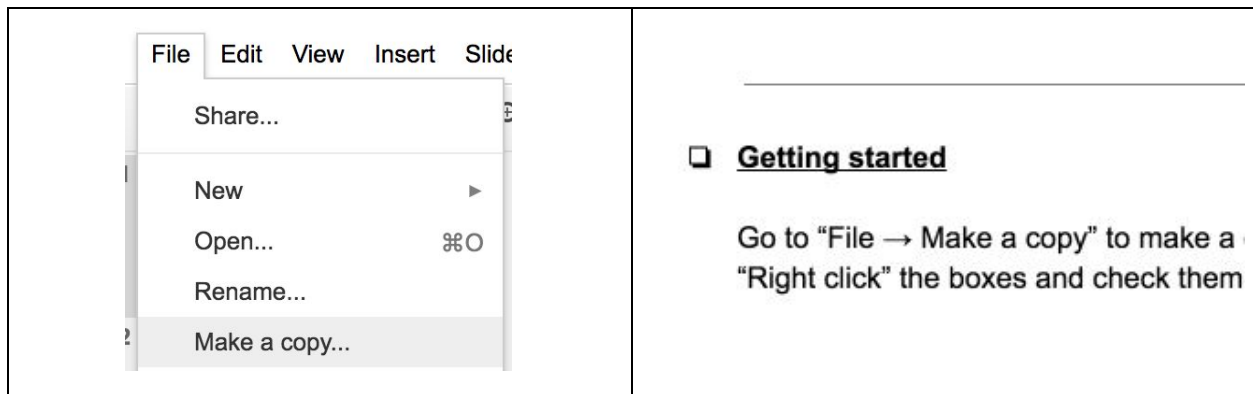3. Before rolling out your SEO or content marketing strategy.

Who does this: The SEO Specialist, but if you haven't hired one, you're on your own :)

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☒ Getting Started

Go to "File → Make a copy" and make a copy of this document. Now that you have a copy, "right click" the boxes and check them off as you go along.

☒ Before Starting

- SEO keywords are the words and word phrases Internet users search when they want to find a business, a piece of information, etc.
- The better you optimize your website with these keywords, the more likely it is that you will land among the first options provided by a Search Engine's Result Page.
- Keep in mind that SEO is <u>not</u> just about the keywords - they are a crucial element in the optimization process, but not an exclusive one.

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- Keyword research can be performed with a lot of tools. Until recently, Google's [Keyword Planner](#) was the top choice among SEO professionals. However, Google recently started to limit the number and quality of their suggestions, especially for users who don't invest money in AdWords campaigns.
- As a result, SEO pros have started using other tools more frequently. Some examples include [KWFinder](#) (free with limited capabilities), [SEMRush](#) (free with limited capabilities, excellent when paid), and other tools. In this SOP, we will use SEMRush, as it's our agency's preferred software.

☒ Environment Setup

1. Sign up for [SEMRush](#) or if you're from Avalanche, log in to our account.

2. Make sure you have Excel, access to [Google Sheets](#) or any other similar tool.

3. Arm yourself with patience. This is not a difficult process, but it can be quite time-consuming. Yet, the more time you invest in it, the better your results.

☒ Run an In-Depth Keyword Research

For the purpose of this SOP, we used a fictional wedding venue in New Hampshire that is just building their website and wants to make sure couples will find them when searching Google for venues in the area.

Consequently, the entire SOP is created around the same idea, just to give you an example of what a keyword research and mapping process should look like. Of course, all of the steps described hereon will be adjusted to suit your particular business needs.

1. Go to SEMRush's Keyword Magic Tool.

2. Think of what your future clients would search for to find your business. For the purpose of the examples in this SOP, we will imagine we are looking for a wedding venue in New Hampshire and start from there.

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3. Set your business' location using the box in the middle of the page (this is set by default to "United States", but you can change it by clicking on it and entering your own desired location) .
   a. Our suggestion is this: use a broader location (country) in the beginning - you can narrow it down by using a specific search term (e.g. "wedding venue New Hampshire", the primary keyword we used in the example). Doing this will help you find more keywords (both general and location-specific).
   b. If you are doing keyword research for a local business, later you can determine local search volume of the selected keywords by adding all keywords to a new project under the target locations. More on that below.

4. Enter your search term in the box saying "Enter keyword". Click on "Search" button or hit the "Enter" button on your keyboard.
   a. A list of keywords will appear on the page. Next to each of them, you will see the number of average monthly searches as well as the keyword difficulty index of ranking for that particular keyword ("KD" column).

5. Choose the sorting criteria for the list of keywords displayed:
   a. "By num of keywords": This is the default (and actually recommended) sorting criterion; it will sort groups of keywords by the number of keywords in the group.

    b. "By volume": Select this sorting criterion to sort groups by total volume of keywords in groups.

    c. "CPC" are sorting criteria you will only use if you proceed with a paid advertising campaign online (e.g. Google's PPC program). So you will most likely not need to use these options for keyword research and mapping.

    d. "KD" will sort the list of keywords according to the difficulty of each keyword.

6. Tick each of the keywords you find suitable for your website. Pay attention to the search intent (what you think the users wanted to know when they searched that particular term), the search demand (the average monthly searches), and the difficulty of the keyword.

    a. At this point, you shouldn't worry too much about selecting very broad or very different topics—the idea is to create a very comprehensive list of relevant keywords.

7. Add the ticked keywords to your list. You can do this by clicking on the green "Add to Keyword Analyzer" button at the top right of the keyword table. If this is a new project, you will have to create a new list (e.g. "New Hampshire Wedding Keyword Research"). If you have been working on this project before, you will simply have to select the list you want for these keywords.

8. Once you are done with selecting keywords from the first list, make sure to always go in-depth with your research. Do this by taking each of the keywords in the list and searching for it instead of the primary keyword you used. Use the suggestions tabs to get new ideas for other words people use to search for your primary keyword.

By num of keywords	By volume	
All keywords	210	
> portsmouth	70	👁
> seacoast	70	👁
> cheap	40	👁
> forest	20	👁
> mountain	10	👁
mansion	0	👁
jaffrey	0	👁

9. Repeat the same keyword research process with the "Questions" tab. This will pull a list of question-based search terms. With this feature, you might have to work with a broader keyword ("wedding venue" instead of "wedding venue in New Hampshire", for example).The keyword phrases you will select will most likely be excellent ideas for blog topics, so you should add the suitable ones to your list as well.

10. Remember, patience and customer empathy is key in this process. Ideally, you should be searching for keywords and creating a comprehensive list. You want as many of them as you can find! If your competition is not doing this, you will have a tangible competitive advantage if you create a great keyword strategy.

⬚ Map Your Keywords

1. Once you have created a comprehensive list of keywords, export them. You can do this by clicking on the "Go to Keyword Analyzer" button at the top of the page, then clicking the button "Export to XLSX." If your project is targeting local search

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volume only, you'll need to set up a project in SEMRush and pick your targeted locations. Then, instead of exporting from the Keyword Analyzer, you'll export from the project position tracker. First you'll need to send your target keywords to the project by selecting "Send to other tools" (see below).

2. Pull the XLSX file into Google Sheets (or any other spreadsheet tool you are using).

3. Center all the text, then enlarge your cells so that you can see all the important data in it.

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4. Add a filter to your columns and sort the entries by "Search Volume".

5. Remove columns that are not of interest to you right now (e.g. the CPC column).

6. Group keywords according to search intent, by moving them in separate, smaller lists - we will call them "buckets":
   a. For example, "wedding venue in nh" and "nh wedding venues" both have the same search intent (users want to find the venues available in the named area, so this is a location-intended search focused specifically on New Hampshire).
   b. However, "new england wedding venue" broadens the search (so the intention behind it is not to find wedding venues in *just* New Hampshire, but in the entire New England area).

7. Re-name each of these buckets according to the site page you think they would work on.
   a. In our example, the New Hampshire wedding venue-related keywords were placed under "/wedding-venue" (which would work as a homepage).
   b. However, the New England wedding venue-related keywords were placed under "/new-england-wedding-venues"(this could be a completely different page - maybe even one that would link to the competitors).

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8. You might find that some keywords don't fit into any category. Pull these in an "Outlier" bucket. You can use it for blog topic ideas, or you can continue your keyword research by re-entering each of them into the Keyword Magic Tool and starting the same process all over again. Yes, *again*. :)

9. To make it easier, use different background colors for each of the buckets you create in your spreadsheet.

10. Once you are done organizing all keywords in different buckets, remove all empty columns and pull the buckets together in the same columns. Make sure they are delimited (you can simply leave a few empty rows between the buckets).

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Homepage						
/wedding-venue	Volume	Difficulty		/cheap-wedding-venue	Volume	Difficulty
wedding venue in nh	1000	29		cheap wedding venues in nh	210	25
wedding venues in nh	880	29		wedding venues in nh on a budget	170	25
nh wedding venues	590	30		inexpensive wedding venues in nh	140	22
new hampshire wedding venues	479	33		how much does wedding venue cost	140	43
wedding venues nh	390	29		affordable wedding venues in nh	70	29
wedding venue nh	390	33		nh wedding venues inexpensive	20	22
wedding venues in new hampshir	260	29		how much wedding venue cost	10	43
wedding venues new hampshire	260	33				
wedding venue in new hampshire	260	29		/barn-wedding-venue	Volume	Difficulty
nh wedding	170	36		barn wedding venues nh	260	32
new hampshire wedding	168	37		barn weddings in nh	110	32
weddings in nh	90	36		wedding venues in nh barns	30	31
new hampshire weddings	70	35				
best wedding venues in nh	40	37		/what-to-ask-your-wedding-venue-before-getting-married	Volume	Difficulty
weddings in new hampshire	38	30		what to ask wedding venue	170	34
				how to choose wedding venue	20	49
				how to pick wedding venue	10	49
				what wedding venue is right for me quiz	10	36
				which wedding venue	10	47
				how to find wedding venue	10	50
/portsmouth-wedding-venues	Volume	Difficulty				
portsmouth nh wedding venues	320	27		/rustic-wedding-venues-new-hampshire	Volume	Difficulty
wedding venue portsmouth nh	140	32		rustic wedding venues in nh	140	33

11. These buckets will constitute the foundation of your website. You may not be able to include all of them, but they will give you a very good idea of what your site needs to look like and what keywords to use when optimizing each of its pages.

☒ Use Your Keyword Map to Make Business Decisions

Once you are done with your keyword research and mapping, you can stop there and move on to actually using these on your website. However, if you want to push things even further and reap all the benefits of your hard work, you could use your keyword buckets to make business calculations (and make decisions based on them).

From the total monthly volume of visitors on your website to a very broad idea of the revenue your business could generate, there's a lot you can do with each of the buckets you have just created. Here are some of the steps to take if you want to learn more about your potential market and the user intent you should focus on the most:

1. First, create a row for "Total Monthly Volume". Select the cell where you want your total monthly searches to be displayed, go to the "Functions" feature of

Google Sheets, select "SUM", then select the cells you want to add up. The spreadsheet tool will automatically display the sum.

2. Secondly, create a row for "Expected CTR of #1 Result" (where "CTR" means "Click-Through-Ratio"). This is usually between 35% and 40%, but for the purpose of this example, we will use 40% ("0.4" in the spreadsheet).

3. Third, create a row for "TAM" (Total Addressable Market). This is the "Total Monthly Volume" of the bucket or category, multiplied by "Expected CTR of #1 Result". To calculate, type "=", followed by the cell representing the "Total Monthly Volume" (B18, in our case), then "*", then the cell representing the "TAM" (B19, in our case). In our example, the equation will look similar to this: "=B18*B19".

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4. Enter another row, for "Expected Conversion Rate". If you already know the conversion rate of your pages, use it for this row as a first approximation. If you don't know the conversion rate, you can use a rough estimate of the expected conversion rate. In this example, we used a 1% ("0.01" in the spreadsheet) - but keep in mind this will vary a lot from one business to the other.

5. Add another row for "Total Monthly Conversions" and use the same principle as you did when you calculated the "Total Monthly Volume" (multiply "TAM" by the "Expected Conversion Rate").

6. Enter another row for "Top Line Revenue" (gross revenue you would make with each conversion) and another one for "Bottom Line Revenue" (net revenue you would make with each conversion). These numbers vary a lot from one business to another, but for the purpose of our example, we used $10,000 for Top Line and $5,000 for Bottom Line.

7. Create two new rows, one for the "Monthly Top Line" and one for the "Monthly Bottom Line" and calculate them by multiplying "Monthly Conversions" with the "Top Line Revenue", respectively with the "Bottom Line Revenue".

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	A	B	C	D	E	F
9	wedding venues in new hampshir	260	29			
10	wedding venues new hampshire	260	33			
11	wedding venue in new hampshire	260	29			
12	nh wedding	170	36			
13	new hampshire wedding	168	37			
14	weddings in nh	90	36			
15	new hampshire weddings	70	35			
16	best wedding venues in nh	40	37			
17	weddings in new hampshire	38	30			
18	Total Monthly Volume:	5085				
19	Expected CTR of #1 Result:	0.4				
20	TAM	2034				
21	Expected Conversion Rate	0.01				
22	Monthly Conversions	20.34				
23	Top Line Revenue	10000				
24	Bottom Line Revenue	5000				
25	Monthly Top Line					
26	Monthly Bottom Line					
27						
28						
29						
30						
31						
32	/portsmouth-wedding-venues	Volume	Difficulty			
33	portsmouth nh wedding venues	320	27			

8. Keep in mind: these calculations depend on a lot of variables (for starters, the average monthly searches, which could be off - or your conversion rate, which may vary a lot from one business to another, and one location to another). So, this is just back-of-the-envelope valuation - but it can at least give you an idea on what you could do with a properly optimized website.

☒ You're (never) Done!

We said this from the start: doing keyword research and mapping them is *not* a difficult task. But it definitely *is* time-consuming. Be thorough and unforgiving. Do it until your eyes bleed, until your friends don't recognize you anymore, until your kids have gone off to college and you didn't even notice.

It's a never-ending process, to be honest - precisely because there will always be opportunities in search. Searcher intents change. Trends change. Keywords change as well. Thus, your SEO strategy should adapt to the new waves, too - and this is why it is crucial that you go through the same research and mapping process again, on a recurrent basis, with the same amount of relentlessness and determination.

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