



# SEO WORKSHOP

Transcript

# SEO Workshop

LESSON 1: FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF SEO.....	4
Search Engine Algorithms .....	5
Core Principles .....	5
Ranking Factors.....	5
LESSON2: IMPROVING TECHNICAL SEO .....	7
Google Search Console.....	8
Canonical Links and Structured Data .....	9
Mobile Friendliness and Penalties .....	10
International SEO .....	10
Indexing Issues .....	11
Screaming Frog SEO Spider .....	11
Redirects .....	12
Site Speed .....	12
LESSON 3: IMPROVING ON-PAGE OPTIMIZATION .....	14
Landing Pages .....	15
Keyword Cannibalization .....	15
Keyword Research .....	16
Keyword Stuffing .....	18
Pre-click Optimization .....	19
Post-click Optimization .....	20
On-page Optimization Tools .....	22
LESSON 4: IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC SEO PRACTICES .....	23
Keyword Evaluation.....	24
Competitor Research .....	25
SEO Tracking .....	27

LESSON 5: IMPROVING OFF-PAGE OPTIMIZATION .....	29
Building Backlinks.....	30
Content Marketing for SEO .....	31
Backlink Profile.....	32
Paid Links.....	34
Exact and Partial Match Anchor Text .....	34
Backlink Analysis Tools and Metrics .....	34
Lost Backlinks.....	34
Broken Backlinks .....	35
Quantity and Quality of Backlinks .....	35
Absence of Backlinks.....	35

# **LESSON 1: FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF SEO**

## Search Engine Algorithms

So search engine algorithms. What is a search engine algorithm? Well, as Google puts it, an algorithm is a computer program that looks for clues to give the searcher back exactly what they want and if we think about really search engines are actually looking at hundreds if not thousands and sometimes millions of results and they need to find out what the most useful results are for the user. When we think about the search engine algorithm to start with will just think about Google and Google has a name for its overall algorithm, it's called Hummingbird. And within Hummingbird it has sub-algorithms, so one of the first sub-algorithms that Google had was called PageRank, and PageRank really is to do with how reputable a page is, so if one page links to another page it will pass some reputation and we call that PageRank. So another sub-algorithm is Panda, and Panda's job really is to work out what content is good quality and what content is weak or bad quality, we'll talk a little bit more about Panda as we go through today's module.

Penguin, kind of the opposite to Panda, but rather than looking for bad content it's looking for bad backlinks. So when you build links to your website we call that a back link and Penguin's job is to try and detect which ones are good and which ones are fake and again we'll talk more about Penguin as we go through this module. And lastly, and the most recent out of the sub-algorithms that we can see here, is one called RankBrain and this is Google's way of really trying to understand what the intent is, behind a keyword or a key phrase and it actually uses artificial intelligence and machine learning.

So we've covered some of the sub-algorithms and we know that Hummingbird is the main algorithm.

## Core Principles

So we're now going to look at the core principle for SEO and I mentioned that I've been doing this for ten years and in that time the core principles haven't changed. We have the technical side of SEO, that's making sure your website is search engine friendly. We have the on-page optimization, thus thinking a little bit about who your customers are and creating relevant content for those customers and then we have the off-page optimization. So these are the external factors that build up your website's reputation. So if you get those three things right you're going to have really strong rankings and we're going to explore all of those three areas in detail in this module.

## Ranking Factors

And so let's just have a look at Google's official top three ranking factors. Now, this isn't something that Google normally reveals, its ranking factors, it does occasionally, but we do know that the top three ranking factors are links, content and RankBrain. By links we actually mean backlinks so this is when a website and external website links to yours, that's a backlink, and we believe that this is the top ranking factor. After that we have content, so it's thinking about having relevant content that targets the keywords that you want to rank for. And lastly, as we mentioned briefly earlier, RankBrain is a sub-algorithm of Google's overall algorithm and it's really the artificial intelligence behind Google and it's a lot to do with trying to understand the underlying meaning of any given keyword. But interestingly there is actually over 200 ranking factors so there are a lot of them but fortunately, we can group these into categories so when we looked at technical SEO, on-page SEO, and off-page SEO, all of these 200 ranking factors fit somewhere within those three.

And another phrase you may have heard of if you're familiar with SEO, and if you're not familiar SEO, these are the kind of phrases that pop up, is black hat and white hat SEO. Now black hat SEO is the

name given to people that intentionally and sometimes unintentionally break Google's guidelines. So Google has a list of guidelines that you can find online and it encourages webmasters to follow those guidelines. If you do break the guidelines you run the risk of getting a search engine penalty and that means that you'll lose a lot of SEO progress that you've built up. White hat SEO is a little bit different, or it's the complete opposite, and it's essentially when you abide by Google's guidelines and that's what we're going to be focusing on today is what you need to do to abide Google's guidelines to make really good SEO progress, but we will also highlight some of the black hat techniques that you'll want to keep an eye on and make sure you're not doing.

Now, in the top three ranking factors, we didn't mention any technical SEO factors and that's because it's not quite as important when it comes to ranking a page but what we will quickly review now are the top three technical SEO ranking factors. So the first one is mobile SEO and that's making sure that your website offers a really good user experience on mobile devices and tablets. The second one is https, so when you go onto a website sometimes you'll notice that some web pages are secure and have https and some don't. In recent years, Google has encouraged webmasters to move to https, they want a more secure web and it's a slight ranking factor at the moment. The third one is site speed, so if you've been on a slow website you probably know it's not the best experience and that also is a ranking factor. We'll talk about site speed in more detail later in the module.

# **LESSON2: IMPROVING TECHNICAL SEO**

## Google Search Console

Now, I have mentioned Google quite a bit today already, but obviously Bing is quite widely used as well, and both Google and Bing have a very similar tool. So, Google calls it Google Search Console and Bing calls it Webmaster Tools. So, you can get access to both of these tools either by asking a colleague, or you may need to ask your web developer to upload a file just to get access that way.

Search Analytics, probably my favorite feature in Google Search Console, and it's really aimed at marketers. What it does is it gives you an insight as to what keywords Google thinks your website is about, and also what landing pages on your site are actually doing the business for SEO.

So, if we have a quick look at this slide, the first thing that you can see is there are a list of keywords, and these are all keywords that you're either ranking for currently and getting traffic, or you're nearly getting traffic for. So, they're really important to pay attention to. And the first metric that we can see for the keyword is clicks, and that really means, as the name implies, that's how many clicks you're currently getting for that key phrase.

The second one is impressions. And every time your listing is shown to the user, so if that's on page one, it means you're getting quite a lot of impressions, if you're on page two, you're going to be getting less impressions. But essentially, that's what an impression is. It's when your listing is being shown to the user. Okay.

So, the third one is click-through rate or CTR, and essentially that's the percentage of clicks to impressions that you get, and naturally if you're ranked higher, you're going to get a higher click-through rate, or you tend to get a higher click-through rate, but there are other things that you can do to improve your click-through rate which we will talk about shortly.

And then, the fourth one is position. So, that's where you're actually positioned in the search engine results. We sometimes call this your keyword ranking. And one thing to note is Google reports this data at a global level. So, if you see a keyword position which is different to what you see locally, what you can do is you can just change the country to actually be the country that you're looking from, and you should find that the rankings sort of tally up a little bit better with what you're expecting.

What we've done up until now with Search Analytics within Google Search Console is we've looked at queries, but if you move onto Pages and Google starts to give you similar data or metrics that we looked at before, but it's looking at it at a page level. And as I mentioned, we know that rankings has a bearing on your click-through rate, but another thing that has a big bearing is how you actually structure your title tag, which is the blue clickable link that you see in Google in the search results, and the little snippet of text which is the meta description that shows under that title tag.

Now, if you write a fairly boring title tag or meta description, you're probably going to get a lower click-through rate. So, let's put that into context. I've actually used a tool here called the SERP Preview Tool, and with the first marker, what we can see is how the title tag and meta description currently looks.

And I feel the title tag is actually good. It's the right length, it's got a good use of keywords and that particular PageRanks well. So, I'm not going to think about changing the title tag too much. But in terms of the meta description, we can see that it's truncated, it's cut off because it's too long, and reading it, it's rather dull. It's not that interesting.



So, using this SERP Preview Tool, I've created another meta description that we can see with marker two, and it's a little bit more engaging. We start off by asking a question, and then we start to give some benefits as well. So, "Have a calf strain or want to know what causes them? Get expert advice on the treatment exercises and rehabilitation so you can heal faster". It has a benefit at the end.

So, the chances are, this will actually improve the click-through rate, which will mean the webpage will get more traffic. And that for me, is quite a low hanging fruit. There's a lot of work involved to get these rankings, so we want to make the most of them from the search engine results.

And that kind of brings us to overcoming crawl errors. Well, we're just going to look at three things for now. So, we want to redirect Not Found errors, and ideally we do this before the error is discovered by Google. You might find you're getting a lot of site errors because your web host isn't reliable. It might be very slow so you might want to review upgrading that.

And sometimes, what happens is Google will report a lot of Soft 404 errors. So, when you visit a page and you see that it's a 404 error, what you visually see only gives half the answer. What search engines and browsers are looking is what's called a HTTP header response code.

And if that response code isn't the right code, and in this case it should be a 404, there's a little bit of a confusion as to what the actual page is. So, Soft 404 might be giving a response code of a 200, but really it should be giving a 404. And this is quite a technical thing to fix, not usually that hard, but you might need to ask your web developer or your webmaster to help you with that one.

## **Canonical Links and Structured Data**

So, we're now going to look at link canonical elements, and some of the consequences of incorrect implementation. So, if you haven't set this up correctly it might mean that good pages can be unintentionally deindexed. So, if you've set up a canonical tag that points to the home page, but it's for a page that has nothing to do with the home page, then there's an issue there, and it might mean that even the home page might not get indexed correctly. It can reduce search engine trust. So, canonical tags are aimed at duplicate pages or near-duplicate pages, and if Google thinks that you're doing something which is involving those things, then it can lower your overall trust. And just to bear in mind that when you do add a canonical tag it does parse reputation, so it parses PageRank, link juice, and that's something to bear in mind which usually is a good thing but in the wrong context could be a bad thing as well.

So, let's just have a look at a working example. If we look at marker one, this is the page that we want Google to rank, and if we look at marker two there's kind of like a parameter "cms\_admin" added to the URL. Now, we don't want Google to index this page, so what we've done on marker three we can see that we've added in a link canonical tag that points to the page that we want to have indexed. And this just makes things really clear, that there's no duplicate content issue and users can still visit the two different pages as well.

Structured data. So, structured data is great, it's very visual like you see in the search results, so we can see some stars and some ratings here. The problem is there are some consequences of getting this wrong. So if you do get it wrong and it's not working correctly then it won't be as visual, so you'll probably get less clicks. But if you do try and deceive search engines and maybe you've made up some reviews, that is considered black hat SEO, so that could either get you a search engine penalty or it might make Google a little bit more suspicious about your site so you might get a penalty later on. Google provides a really good Structured Testing Tool, so you can submit your URL, Google will review the code and tell you if you've structured your structured data correctly.

## Mobile Friendliness and Penalties

So, what happens when a webpage isn't mobile friendly? Well, it's not a very good experience for the user, they're probably going to have to zoom on their phone which isn't great. We know that mobile SEO is a ranking factor, so if you haven't got a mobile friendly page you're going to do slightly worse there. And there's a fair chance that the user will just bounce, and they'll go straight back to Google and they'll maybe go on one of your competitors that does have a mobile friendly site. Is your website mobile friendly? Well, again Google provides a really good tool for this, and you can just add in your URL and very quickly Google will tell you if it is mobile friendly.

This particular tool, the mobile friendly test, checks one URL at a time. If you want to check all your URLs in one go, then I'd recommend using the Google Search Console Mobile Usability feature for this. It will save you quite a lot of time and it groups up all the common problems that you have, so you can tackle them in one go. Is your website AMP enabled? So, AMP stands for accelerated mobile pages, and it's kind of relatively new, it's something that Google started testing in Google News, so a lot of publishers started to use it. And essentially what happens is it's optimized for mobiles, so rather than leaving Google you're actually getting the page elements loaded a lot quicker within it, and that will really help with the user experience for mobile. So, Google will tell you whether your website is optimized for AMP, and if it isn't, have a word with your web developer, and if you are planning on having a new web design any time soon then it's probably a really good time to make sure that it is optimized for AMP.

Just a quick one on penalties. So there are... when you get a search engine penalty, it will really depend how much it will affect you. It could affect you in a very minor way and almost you wouldn't even notice, and it could affect you that you get completely taken out of Google. We'll talk more about penalties as we go through this module, but for now we'll just look at the two different types. We've got a manual penalty which Google will report in Google Search Console if you have one, and hopefully you don't have one. And that's when someone has manually reviewed your website and found something... from Google, and found something that shouldn't be, your breaking Google's guidelines. And that probably happens 1% or less of the time, the majority of the time it's actually an algorithmic penalty. So, maybe someone's told you that you need to get as many backlinks as possible, and in doing so you've actually got some fake backlinks that Google considers black hat SEO.

Now, what would then happen is the Penguin Algorithm would actually automatically give you a penalty. They're harder to detect but you can normally detect them by a rankings drop, and we'll talk a little bit more later in the module how you can detect that further.

## International SEO

We'll now look at international SEO, and this is quite a big topic in itself. So, if this is something that's relevant to you then do pay attention, but it might require some additional reading. So, when you use Google, Google will try and work out what your primary country is. If you have a website and you offer web design services, it's quite likely that if you're from America people from America are more likely to want to buy from you, if you're from Australia they're more likely to want to buy from Australians. So, Google will look at things like where your website is hosted, whether you've got a country-specific part to your domain extension like a .co.uk, and it's quite good at working out what your primary country is. But if Google has got that wrong, you might be getting traffic from the wrong areas. You may be getting more UK traffic when in fact you want USA traffic, so that's something to look out for. Equally, after Google works out what your primary country is, it then treats all other countries as being equal. But if you're very strong, let's say in Canada, UK, and Australia, but you're

primarily in the US, then you can actually tell Google that you are strong in these secondary countries, and that's something that we'll look at in a moment, but there are some technical things you need to get right to be able to do that.

## **Indexing Issues**

So, what can go wrong with indexing issues? Well, an obvious one is the content won't be indexed. So, if Google really doesn't like the content or actually can't find the content, then it won't index it. Or, if Google has found the content but thinks it's quite weak or maybe it's duplicate, it actually has a secondary index, and we sometimes call this a supplemental index, and that's an index that it rarely uses. So, you really don't want to be in that secondary index and we'll talk about some of the things that you can do to avoid that in this module.

Okay. So, just to recap on indexing issues and how to minimize problems. Well, we want to avoid site and URL errors wherever possible. Redirects are quite good for that. We want to minimize duplicate content and weak content because we want Google to be really interested in the content, and our users to be interested in the content. And we want to avoid blocking useful content and resources, which we're going to look at in more detail in a moment.

So, some consequences of blocking resources. Now, essentially if what Googlebot wants to see, and Googlebot is the name of Google's crawler, it wants to see the exact same content that a user sees. And if you block resources like JavaScript or images or something like that, then what they're actually seeing will be slightly different to what the user sees. So, we really need to try and minimize doing this. And also, if we are blocking some useful content, there's a chance we might be losing search engine trust. And the one thing that we want to do, as you would expect, is to build search engine trust. So, we need to be quite careful with what we're blocking.

## **Screaming Frog SEO Spider**

Screaming Frog SEO Spider, it's a really nice tool, I think, you know, anyone who's a technical SEO or an experienced SEO will have used this tool, and it has a freemium model. So, you can crawl up to 500 URLs and you can get limited features for free, or you can actually pay for the premium package and that will give you all your URLs and more advanced features. But it's really, really good at diagnosing technical issues and it finds URL errors in real time. So Google Search Console, there tends to be a bit of a lag. If you've released a brand new website, it might take a day, or two days, or even three days for some of these errors to be reported. Whereas Screaming Frog SEO Spider, you'll hopefully be able to catch them a lot quicker. It can be quite good for getting a full list of crawlable URLs. That can be quite useful, and it's very good for reviewing on-page SEO elements.

So, when and why should you use this tool? Well, when you're brand new to a website, it's really good for a first-time assessment. It also helps you gauge how much content you're actually dealing with, how many pages are you dealing with. And it can be quite good just to see how well-optimized title tags, meta descriptions actually are on the site. Has there been previous SEO work done, or maybe there hasn't been work that's been done. And if you don't use this tool, you might find that you're actually losing a little bit of search engine trust because you might have more errors that are being thrown up on the site. Also, it can mean that you'll just miss out on finding unoptimized title tags and descriptions and that sort of thing.

## Redirects

In terms of redirects now, we've talked a little bit about search engine trust, we've talked a little bit about URL errors, and when we looked at that sports injury clinic example, they had I think 18,000 URL errors and they were actually getting a lot of links from external websites which would go into Not Found pages. What they should have done was put redirects in place.

Now, if you need to do this, for a large proportion of people they'll just get someone else to do it. So, it could be a web developer, it could be your Webamp person, it's just asking them to put the redirects in place. It might be that you've got an inbuilt tool within your CMS so, we actually use WordPress and there is a free redirects plugin. And as part of the Yoast SEO plugin, we use the premium one, which has a redirect feature as well. And if you're quite technical, you might like to use the .htaccess file. So, this is found on open source websites, and it's really good for bulk redirects. But at the same time, you kind of need to know what you're doing because it's quite a technical file and if you get a line of code wrong you can actually bring the website down.

## Site Speed

So, we're going to move on to site speed and we're actually going to look at a tool called Pingdom. Pingdom is a tool which will give you an idea how fast or slow your website is. And as you'll remember, this is actually a ranking factor, and it will have an impact on your user's experience and it will probably have an impact on your site's conversion. You've got a slow site, probably going to convert worse than a fast site. So, if we enter in a URL, and in this example, I've entered in Apple, now for marker one we can see the performance grade and it's got 77%. So, that's an overall indication of how the website's rating for site speed. But as the name suggests, site speed, I would a better metric is actually the load time, how quickly that page is loading. So, marker two shows that Apple's is loading in under a second and anything under two seconds is considered pretty quick. Marker three is the page size, so this is all the files when you add them together how big is the actual page size, and we can see 1.3 megabytes. The lower the better. And again, probably 2 megabytes is quite normal. So, Apple's is looking quite good from a size perspective. And then, Requests is how often requests are being made to your web server when the page is loading. So, if you've got ten CSS files, that's ten separate requests, and it would be better just to have one CSS file to minimize requests, and that would actually speed up web load time.

In terms of some common issues that hold a website back, what we're actually looking at now is still Pingdom, and this is the performance grade view. So, we can see that for Apple, it looks like they weren't leveraging browser caching, they haven't combined all external JavaScript, and these are some quite common issues that people face that is holding their website back a little bit. But as I said, what's more important is the actual page load time and you're not expected to get everything right. But you can review what things you can improve using a tool like Pingdom.

So, ways to improve site speed. Well, we've mentioned upgrade your web host before, but that is an option. All web hosts are going to be slightly different in terms of how powerful they are. Rather than upgrade your web host, you might want to upgrade your package within your web host because they might have a faster solution that costs a little bit more. You might want to reduce file sizes. So, you don't have to use Photoshop but when you do use Photoshop for image editing you can save a file regularly or you can save it for the web which will reduce the actual size and make it more web-friendly. And that's what we want to try and do, is to get in the habit of making images good quality but on the low-end file size where possible. If you can, you want to add compression and caching, so we want to compress texts and we want to cache the page and that will make things faster.

And as we mentioned before, we want to minimize requests. So, multiple CSS files, if you can just have one is better. Maybe you're actually requesting elements of the page that the page never actually uses. That's happened to me before. So, we're trying to just look at ways of minimizing the requests. And when you use the waterfall diagram from Pingdom, it actually shows you what all the requests are. So, you can ask yourself, are these necessary, could I minimize them?

# **LESSON 3: IMPROVING ON- PAGE OPTIMIZATION**

## Landing Pages

So, let's just have a look at what a landing page is. So, this is the definition by Neil Patel, who's actually got a really good SEO blog. And he says, "A landing page is any webpage where you send visitors in order to initiate a conversation and close a deal. Effective landing pages are often webpages with a single focus". And that's really key, the single focus, and we'll talk more about that single focus in a moment.

So, let's just have a look at these two examples and let's ask the question, "Do all webpages need to be optimized?" So, in marker one, we can see it's the terms and conditions page, and marker two, we can actually see it's for a sprained ankle page. Now, it doesn't really make sense to optimize the terms and conditions page. There aren't keywords there that we need to be ranking for. So, we won't optimize that page, and there will be, you know, probably quite a few pages on your site that you choose not to optimize. So, when we talk about landing pages, even though it actually could be any page on your site, that is the entry point for SEO traffic. That's the sort of the stripped definition. When we refer to SEO landing pages, it's actually pages that we're actively targeting for keywords and that we're actively targeting for traffic.

So, what makes up a successful landing page? Well, as Neil Patel says, it should have a single focus. So, we need to focus on one topic and at times, that actually means focusing on a specific subtopic, not just a topic in itself, which we'll come onto in a moment. We also need to satisfy the searcher intent. So, when you go on Google or another search engine, there's some intent behind what you're searching for and you want to be satisfied that you get what you're looking for. So, we need to bear that in mind. We need to optimize keywords, so we need to think about where we're placing these keywords on the page. And there's usually some call-to-action as well. It may be "leave a comment" on a blog post. It may be to buy something. It may be to download a PDF.

Okay, so we're going to look at some of the consequences of working keywords into the wrong landing page. Well, I guess the first thing is it's going to be a bad user experience, which will probably mean the users will bounce. So, they will probably go back to Google, if that's where they've come from. The second thing is that search engines will probably realize that it's a bad fit for the page itself in terms of what keywords you're targeting. So, you probably won't perform as well on search engines.

And the last one is that if you are working in the wrong keywords to a page, you're actually missing out on working the right keywords into that page. So, that's just something to consider.

## Keyword Cannibalization

Keyword cannibalization, now, doesn't sound a very nice phrase, but it is something that users, you know, it's not something you should worry about, but it is something that often beginners don't quite get right.

And let's have a look at Rand Fishkin's definition. Now, Rand Fishkin is the founder of moz.com, one of the leading SEO websites, and he says that, "Keyword cannibalization starts when a website's information architecture calls for the targeting of a single term or phrase on multiple pages of the site". And I think the idea there is, you know, if you're quite new to SEO, the more times you mention a phrase on a page, you know, surely Google will pick one of them. It's increasing your chances. And I can see that logic, but it really doesn't help things. And let's just kind of have a look visually why that's the case.



So, we can see here we've got an image which is Googlebot, so Google's crawler, and it's found four pages on a website and it's really struggling to try and work out which page is actually about snowboards. So, in this case, what's probably happened is "snowboards" has been optimized in the title tag. It's in the heading. It's in the content. There's internal links pointing to all those four pages with the anchor text "snowboards", and it's really confusing. It means the search engine is going to struggle to pick the right page. It could be considered keyword stuffing, which isn't good, and it really limits the number of keywords that you can actually target. Because, in this example, there's four pages and we could target different phrases on each of those pages. But if we're trying to cram the same keyword into all those pages, then we're going to actually struggle, you know, to achieve that.

So, let's have a look at what a better scenario, a better situation would be. In this example, Googlebot's much happier because it's very clear what the Snowboard's page is. And, in fact, those three other pages were actually subtopics or subpages within Snowboards. So, we've got "women's snowboards", we've got "kids' snowboards", and we've got "discount snowboards". So, we're increasing the number of phrases we're targeting on those different pages. And it's really, really clear, because we're internally linking to the Snowboards page. The heading is about snowboards on that main page. And not only is this useful for Google, it's obviously going to provide a better experience for the user as well.

## **Keyword Research**

So, now we're going to move on to keyword research and we're going to look at some tools that you can use. So, logically, we'll start with the tool that Google provides, and that's the Google Keyword Planner.

And, what you can see... and, to use the Google Keyword Planner, you actually need a Google Ads account. So, I know this is covered in more detail in the page search, but we do use this tool a lot for SEO as well, primarily as a keyword research tool. We can see that you can enter in a key phrase or a topic, or enter in a landing page. So, when you enter in a landing page, it could be your own landing page, it could be a competitor's landing page, and you'll get ideas of keywords around that landing page. And you can target globally, so you can get keyword search volumes for the entire world or you can get them at a country-level or you can even get them at a city level.

And for SEO, we tend to focus more at country-level. So, at this stage, we are looking at United States. And there are some keyword options as well that you can experiment and check out. So, in terms of using it for keyword research where you don't have an active Google Ads account. Unfortunately, in 2016, what Google did is they took away the free information for this exact search volume. So, that's one thing to bear in mind, but we will look at how you can overcome that without an active Google Ads account in a moment.

So, this is a screenshot where we are actually using an active Google Ads account and we can see, of course, the search volumes of that. So, we can see for digital marketing, there's 22,200 searches per month in the United States. The other thing that you might want to check out is when you do look at a key phrase, you can click on the graph item, and what that does is it will give you an idea of the seasonality of a key phrase. So, I mentioned there were alternative ways of getting search volumes without using an active Google Ads account, and all of these four tools offer just that. So, we've got KWFinder, we've got keywordtool.io, we've got SEOmonitor, and we've got SEMrush. Unfortunately, these are premium tools, so you do have to pay a fee in order to get search volumes from them. All of these tools actually offer additional services, but the most economical one just for getting search volumes, we're going to have a look at now, and this is KWFinder. And, in fact, the results that it brings back when you type in a search phrase are actually the same as what you would get from



Google Keyword Planner, and we can see that the search volume is there as well. The other thing that this tool does is it gives you an idea of how difficult that keyword is to rank for. And this is really useful as we're going to explore in the strategic section.

So, still thinking about keyword research, what I now want you guys to think about is a little bit about what the underlying intent is for a key phrase. So, for beds, it's quite general. It's quite generic. Someone might want an airbed, but the chances are they're probably wanting to have a more conventional bed. Equally, if someone has typed in airbed, we know they want airbeds. But if someone has typed in Intex double-high twin airbed, they've pretty much decided what they want and the chances are that's going to convert very highly, even if the search volume is going to be less than compared to a more generic phrase.

So, let's just kind of have a look at this in terms of category pages. We've got airbeds. A subcategory of airbeds is double airbed. A subcategory of that is double airbed with pump. And then at a product level, we've got Intex double-high twin airbed with pump. So, we can see that the specificity is getting more specific as we go lower. The search volume is probably getting lower, but it's going to convert that much better. And our goal as SEOs is when we are targeting a phrase, we need to do it at the right level. So, it wouldn't make sense for me to target double airbed with a pump on the airbeds page, because the person that's looking for double airbed with a pump, they really just want to see airbeds with pumps.

So, what we're going to do now is we're going to do a little exercise. So, let's imagine that you're doing keyword research for a twin air mattress, so for a specific landing page. And I'm just going to suggest that what you do is to try and find 6 to 12 keywords that you think are a good fit for that page. Now, we can see from marker one, double airbeds has got a search volume of 110 searches. Now, from a British person's perspective, that's unusual, because we tend to say double airbeds rather than twin air mattress. But from a United States perspective, you know, it's more twin air mattresses is what people say. So, do notice these nuances when it comes to international SEO keyword research. So, in this case, double airbeds probably isn't the best keyword for this phrase, but we can see there's a lot of search volume for twin air mattress. Marker two is pointing to twin bed, which is probably a little bit too generic. In fact, it's not really very relevant for an airbed page. So, we would just dismiss that keyword. For marker three, we're looking at twin air mattress with pump and double-high air mattress.

Now, I suspect these would be better fit for another landing page, so we'll move those away from our research for this specific page. And I've highlighted marker four because I can see there's some good search volume there. And I have a suspicion that it might be less competitive than, you know, phrases like twin air mattress, but interesting enough because there's good search volume. So, we will look at that phrase in a moment in more detail.

So, let's just have a little look at the search engine results page. Now, I've typed in twin air mattress and what I can see is, for the listings one, four, and five, these were actually category pages. These are the types of pages that I would expect would offer the best user experience for that phrase. But results two and three are actually product pages. So, you know, still good pages for that phrase, but maybe not the best user experience compared to category pages. So, I guess the question is, "Why has Google done that?" Well, one reason might be that it wants diversity in its search results. And another reason, which I think is quite likely here, is because Amazon and Walmart have got such big domain authorities, it means that they can kind of... that can compensate for maybe not having the best user experience page that could exist.

The other thing that I want you guys to take a note of when we look at this slide is all the top players are actively targeting the most obvious key phrases. So, generally, around twin air mattress, but when we have a look at twin blow-up mattress, no one on that first page of Google was mentioning that phrase in the title tag. So, that kind of gives me a little bit of an indication that if I was a smaller player, then maybe I would go more for that phrase, because it's probably going to be a little bit less competitive.

Okay, so what we've done is we've brainstormed between 6 and 12 keywords for a page, but what we then want to do is you actually want to prioritize those keywords. So we want to know what is the most important key phrase, what's the next most important and so on. And the reason that we do this is when we optimize a page, like a title tag element, for example, it's really difficult to optimize for 6 or 10 or 12 keywords, because there's a limited amount of space. But we can certainly optimize for maybe 3 or 4 keywords. So the goal at this step is to actually prioritize those brainstormed keywords. And what I'm imagining now is that we're actually quite a big brand. So we're a brand which sells air mattresses that has a good domain reputation and because of that, what we're going for, really, are keywords that are relevant and keywords that have a good search volume as well. So, in this case, we can see that marker one points to P1, that's a top priority and it's for twin mattress, great search volume that's going to be our main focus keyword that we're going to be targeting.

The next level are what we're going to call our secondary keyword or our P2 priority keywords. And again it's largely in this case volume driven. And then we can see for the remaining three we've called those P3 keywords. And you might find you have two or maybe six at that P3 level. In this example, we've actually just got six in total for our P ones, twos, and threes. So that's maybe how we would do it if we were a big brand. Now if we were actually a smaller brand and we thought realistically because we haven't got so much domain reputation, we're going to find twin air mattress a bit difficult to rank for, so we might take a slightly different approach. And earlier when we looked at twin-sized blow-up mattress, we could see that it was actually being targeted a lot less than the P1 keyword on the previous slide. So, in this case, we haven't gone specifically for the higher search volume phrases. We've gone more for what we think is within our reach for a smaller brand.

And that might be something that you want to consider depending on your website. Because essentially for SEO, we should be thinking about the short to medium term we need to make progress in three months, six months. We don't want to wait a year or two years to make any progress. So that's why this approach might work quite well in certain circumstances.

## **Keyword Stuffing**

Well, keyword stuffing is repeating keywords too often in key on-page SEO elements, which often makes for a bad user experience and can hurt your rankings. This could be mentioning a phrase 20 times in your main body of content, or even if you've got a very small, maybe, a short paragraph and you've mentioned a phrase six or seven times, that could be considered keyword stuffing. Or maybe you're just mentioning a phrase multiple times in a title tag, that could be keyword stuffing. It's normally obvious if it feels like you're forcing a phrase too much into an element, then it probably is keyword stuffing and this is relatively easy for search engines to detect. RankBrain has artificial intelligence. It can learn on its own, so it's quite easy to work out when keywords are being repeated too often.

So some of the consequences of keyword stuffing... and this kind of relates a little bit to Panda content. So Panda is kind of... bad content is what Panda tries to find. So what you might find is when your keyword stuff you're probably going to rank lower than you should, and if you've got a weak

Panda content, it might just mean that the content gets ignored or maybe some search engine trust is lost.

## **Pre-click Optimization**

Okay, so we're going to look at on-page optimization and we're going to break this up actually into two areas. So the user enters a keyword into a search engine and you'll get the search engine results that come up, anything that you see in those search engine results like the title tag, the URL, the meta description, we're going to call that pre-click, because it happens before the user clicks. So that's pre-click optimization and one of the goals there is to make the title, the description, the URL enticing, you're going to want them to click. So that's something we're going to look at, that one part, and then the second part is everything else that the user sees when they actually visit your page. So while we look at pre-click optimization there's a really good tool that you can use, which is called the Portent SERP Preview Tool. And the reason that this tool is quite good is it allows you to enter a title tag and meta description and a URL, and it will recreate what that would look like in Google. So you'll know how long it should be, the title, and the meta description, you'll be able to visually see whether it looks engaging, and it's a great tool to use.

And when I entered this in for Amazon even though Amazon does really, really well in SEO, and they do great, their meta description is a bit long, their title tag is a little bit long. So even some guys who do really, really good stuff with SEO, they're not getting everything right and that's something that we're going to use in this section.

Pre-click optimization. So we're looking at title tags and some of the things that you can do to go wrong with title tags, is you can stuff keywords into them, you can make them too long so they get truncated and don't show up in the search results. And sometimes you can just lack targeted keywords and maybe you've just done nothing at all. And, in this example, it looks like what's happened is someone has just tried to put in all the keywords that they want to rank for, and it actually looks really... it looks a bit fake. It looks like keywords have been stuffed. So this is not good approach to take. But when we do it in a natural way then... let's have a look at this title tag we've got twin air size mattresses and blow-up air beds, and we've got the brand at the end, which is called Good Sleep.

In this case, we're actually targeting quite a lot of keyword phrases. Twin air mattress, now that was our main phrase for, if we were a big brand, and even though it's not right at the beginning, having a phrase close to the beginning definitely helps. And it's not even in the exact phrase, which does help a little bit, but the reason we haven't done that, is we want to get a good blend of other keywords as well. So in this title tag, we're targeting twin air mattress, we're targeting twin air beds, we're targeting twin air blow-up mattress there are quite a wide range phrases that we're targeting, even though they're not in the exact order. So do use the Portent Search Preview Tool to check out the lengths and to give you an idea of how the title tag looks. Definitely include your main keyword, specifically your P1 and P2 keywords that we looked at earlier. So your top three or even your top four key phrases and try and write it in a natural descriptive and engaging way, because, ultimately, we do want the user to click through, so it needs to look interesting as well.

The next thing we're going to look are URLs. So this is what you're actually naming the page itself, and things that we don't want to do is we don't want to stuff keywords in that. It kind of looks fake and it can actually count against you. We don't want to make them too long so they get truncated and we don't want them to be meaningless and lack relevancy. And in this example it does lack a lot of relevancy. And this is a lot of content management systems will at first create URLs which have these IDs and numbers in them. And then they will then make them search engine friendly and

prettier. But, in this case, it looks like that second step didn't happen. So what can we do? Well, we can include our main phrase. It doesn't have to be the exact main phrase, but it needs to represent the main phrase quite well, and we want to make it quite short and concise.

Now, in this example, we've got air mattress/twin. It would be perfectly fine to have twin air mattresses, but we've kind of gone for that category or parent-child relationship because it's quite good for site architecture as well. Pre-click optimization, we're now looking at meta descriptions. So the goal with meta descriptions, it's not as important as title tags, in terms of the ranking factor. Title tags are actually very important from a relevancy ranking factor, but meta descriptions don't directly help you rank higher in Google. So, in this case, it looks like even though it's kind of been written in a readable sentence, it looks quite contrived in that we're just trying too hard to work in multiple keywords. And keywords don't directly make you rank higher, but they do have... the meta description does have an indirect way of making you rank higher. If someone clicks on your listing more often and your click-through rate goes up, now that's been proven to have an impact on your keyword rankings.

So your goal here is to make the description relevant, accurately describe the page, but to be engaging and interesting. So if we look at this one, it's neither of those things. So let's have a look at better practice. Well, we do want to have the main keyword in there. One, it helps describe the page and, two, if your main phrase is in there, there's a chance it might get bolded, which helps with click-through rates. But, really, we tend to just focus on the main phrase rather than your secondary and tertiary phrases, and the goal really here is to try and make it stand out from the crowd.

So let's have a look at this example, "Looking for a good night sleep?" I think many people would agree they probably are. It mentions that these air mattresses are quick to blow up, easy to pack away and there's a 10-year guarantee. So we've got benefit, benefit and then we've got a guarantee, which is a unique selling point which was different to other results. So that's a more engaging meta description, which will hopefully generate more clicks for that listing.

## **Post-click Optimization**

We're next moving on to HTML headers. So these are the main headings you see on a page, it also includes secondary headings and sometimes tertiary headings that you see on a page as well. And where people sometimes go wrong is they'll just try and work too many keywords into the heading. And that will sometimes come at the detriment of the message that you want the user to get from the page. So SEO training, SEO courses, London UK, it looks like it's written for a search engine. It doesn't look very user-friendly. So what can we do to improve this? Well, in this case, because it's a product or a service, we've actually just gone for a what-it-says-on-the-tin approach, SEO Training, that's what we've gone for.

Now if you want to, you can be more creative than that and you can include other phrases that might be more engaging. But for product pages, sometimes that's best. iPhone, let's just call it an iPhone. If it's a blog post, you probably do want to write something a little bit more engaging than just a keyword. But that's something to bear in mind. Don't try and force additional keywords in. I'm just trying to make it look relevant to the page itself. So what we're going to do now, is we're actually going to watch a video by Matt Cutts who is the former Head of Spam for Google. He's actually done, I think, probably a couple of hundred videos on SEO. So you can Google his name and find videos about him. But he talks about keyword density and how often you should work keyword into a page and I thought that would be a good video to show you guys.

- [Matt] Today's question comes from the Bay Area of California. The question is "What is the ideal keyword density? 0.7%, 7%, or 77%, or is it some other number?" Oh boy. Okay, keyword density, let's talk about it a little bit. A lot of people think there's one recipe and you can just follow that like baking cookies and if you follow it to the letter, you'll rank number one, and that's just not the way it works. So, if you think that you can just say, "Okay, I'm going to have 14.5% keyword density or 7% or 77% and that will mean I'll rank number one", that's really not the case. That's not the way that search engine rankings work. So the way that modern search engines or at least Google are built is that the first time you mention a word, "Hey, that's pretty interesting. It's about that word", The next time you mention that word, "Oh okay, it's still about that word", and once you start to mention it a whole lot, it really doesn't help that much more, there's diminishing returns. It's just an incremental benefit but it's really not that large. And then what you'll find is if you continue to repeat stuff over and over again then you're in danger of getting into keyword stuffing or jibberish and those kinds of things.

'So the first one or two times you mention a word then that might help with your ranking, absolutely, but just because you can say it seven or eight times that doesn't mean that it will necessarily help your rankings. So the way to think about it is this, think about the keywords that you'd like to have in your copy. Make sure your copy is long enough that you can work those keywords into your copy in a natural way and not an artificial way. And my recommendation is to either read it aloud or read it to someone else or have someone else read it. And sort of say, "Do you spot anything that's artificial or stilted or it doesn't quite read right". And if you can read through the copy and have it read naturally where a person isn't going to be annoyed by it, then you're doing relatively well.

'But if you're like one of these guys where all you're doing is, "I know you're interested in red widgets, because red widgets are one of the best things in the world to have and if you're an expert on red widgets then you'll know that the best source of red widgets is blah, blah, blah", then that's really going too far. And you can really kind of tell whenever you land on a page, if you're an experienced SEO, if someone's just like trying to get the same phrase on the page as many times as possible. Because it just looks fake. And that's the sort of area in that niche where we try to say, "Okay, rather than helping, let's make that hurt a little bit". So I would love it if people could stop obsessing about keyword density. You know, it's going to vary. It's going to vary by area, it's going to vary based on what other sites are ranking, there's not a hard and fast rule.

'And anybody who tells you that there is a hard and fast rule you might be careful, because they might be selling you keyword density software or something along those lines. So I hope that helps, maybe we can dispel that misconception and people realize not to worry that much about it, just make sure you have the words that you want to have on the page, make sure that they read naturally and you should be in pretty good shape. Thanks very much. -[video ends]

Okay, so Matt Cutts, you could kind of see that he wasn't a fan of using the phrase keyword density. He did mention that you should work keywords into the page one, two, three times for your main phrase. But you really want to kind of pull away from stuffing keywords. You don't want to have no keyword at all as it will be hard for search engines to pick up the relevancy. And also, it's important to try and think about what the keyword intent is, are you actually satisfying what the user is looking for. And that's different to just trying to sell your product. And I think, in recent years, there's been a shift away from just trying to make a page relevant by putting a lot of keywords in, to actually making a really good user experience page.

So we're moving on to images. So how do we optimize images and what things can we need to look for that we can get wrong? So when it comes to images if we want to give the image a description we do this through the ALT text and this is really aimed more for accessibility reasons. If you're blind or you're partially blind and you need a screen reader, it will read out the ALT text to describe what



the image is. If you've got a missing ALT text, then you're missing out on adding some relevancy to the page. And if it's misleading and sometimes it's misleading, because we're trying to force keywords in there, then we could lose search engine trust, because it makes everything else less believable. And it's not very good user experience for those that do need a screen reader. And that kind of ties in with over-optimization with the ALT text. If you've got five images on a page, it doesn't make sense to label them all the same, with your main phase on them. It sounds a bit crazy, but it is quite a common thing that people do do.

The other thing to think about is, in this example here, we can see that the file name has got lots of numbers in it and there's no relevancy there at all. That's not a good thing to do. And when you do search your file names you want to try and get them right before you upload them, because that's kind of how you set file names. The last one is to try and make sure that the images are web-friendly. So we don't want them to be a really big size. In this example, 410 KB for a relatively small dimension image is actually pretty high, it should probably be, I don't know, under 50KB.

So how can you optimize your images? Well, give it a relevant file name. In this case, it's a training room, so I've just called it trainingroom.jpeg. The ALT text I've said SEO training rooms, it's very similar to the file name. In fact, I could have used the same ALT text and file name that would be fine, but I think it's quite fair to call that an SEO training room, because I've trained SEO in that particular room. We can also see that the image size is lower, it's actually under 50KB. So it's going to be quick to load on mobile devices and it's going to help with the paid speed.

We're now going to look at the importance of optimized content. Well, if your page isn't optimized or relevant, the first thing a user does is they scan the page, and if they can't see what the relevancy is about, they'll probably bounce. And the other thing as well is if a page isn't optimized, then it's going to be more difficult for search engines to rank that page.

We're now going to move on to recap about RankBrain. So what is RankBrain and what's the consequences with content not being RankBrain-friendly? Now the goal with RankBrain is to say, let's look at key phrases, what do they mean, and let's match them up with the most relevant content we can. Not necessarily the best keyword optimized pages. So if you're not matching that search or intent of what the user wants, then Google isn't probably going to actually rank your page. And that's quite a key point. We've mentioned RankBrain quite a few times, but really do think about providing a really good user experience, wherever you can.

## **On-page Optimization Tools**

The next step that we're going to look at is how do you actually work keywords into a page? And sometimes you hear SEOs call this on-page optimization. But before we do, I thought would be quite good to look at some tools that will actually grab these important on-page elements from the source code, and they'll just visually show them to you as the user. And these are all free tools that you can use. And we're going to look at MozBar as an example. So MozBar is provided by moz.com and it works within Google Chrome or Google Firefox. I believe it has more features in Google Chrome and SEOs generally tend to use SEO Chrome more, because it has better SEO extensions. So marker one shows this Moz icon. So if we click on that it means that we toggle and activate the plugin. And then you'll see a little black drop-down box, and then marker two shows where you need to click to get the on-page analysis. And what that does is the URL that you're currently on it will pull back what the URL is, what the page title is, the meta description, headers and that sort of thing. And that's really useful, because if you want to work keywords into a page, you probably want to know how that page is currently optimized. And at a glance, this is quite a good way of doing that.

# **LESSON 4: IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC SEO PRACTICES**

## Keyword Evaluation

Okay, so we have looked at the core principles earlier, but we're just having a recap now in terms of how important those core areas are for your rankings. So, the technical SEO is relatively quite small. It doesn't mean it's unimportant to get your technical SEO wrong, it means your content might not be able to be crawled or indexed. It's a bit of a showstopper. But what is more important is on-page optimization, so that's maybe nearly three times as important. We're going to say about 30% of the total rankings. And then the last bit is off-page optimization. So, these are external factors that are affecting your website's reputation, largely driven by backlinks.

So, let's think about a landing page that you want to rank and do well on a search engine. Now, we know that the technical SEO is quite small, and we can see the relative size of relevancy. But in order to build up your off-page SEO, then we need to build up the authority of that landing page. Now, in the world of Google we sometimes use the phrase PageRank, and that is building up a page's reputation. So, it could be an internal link or an external link will build up a website's PageRank or web page's PageRank. But in terms of using metrics, to help us understand this, we can actually use the metrics that Moz make available for free.

One of the metrics is called page authority. So when we look at a specific landing page, let's say a knee pain landing page, then we'll need that page not only to be relevant but it will need to be authoritative and reputable, and at a page level we can use page authority, which is a percentage of between 0 and 100 of how reputable that page is. And the way we can improve that page authority is either by increasing internal links to that page within reason, or we can actually generate external links or backlinks which will help with the page authority. Also depending on the actual domain that that landing page is on, that will have an impact as well, and that domain's authority is called domain authority.

Now, primarily this is a backlink analysis tool which we will look at in more detail shortly, but when you enter in a URL, it will tell you the domain authority and it will tell you the page authority. And this is quite important as we'll talk in a bit more detail now. So, we want a page to rank well on Google, but we want to kind of figure out how competitive that key phrase is that we'll be targeting, and whether we actually stand a chance of ranking for that phrase. There are a lot of tools that provide keyword difficulty metrics, we've got SEMrush, we've got Moz, we've got KWFinder, we've got Ahrefs. But we're going to focus firstly, we're going to focus on Moz's metric. And this is part of MozBar and you can actually find it in Moz as well.

The keyword difficulty part is a paid subscription of Moz. So, I've typed in "sprained ankle". I can see the keyword difficulty is 61%. Doesn't sound that high, the higher the more difficult, but it actually is very high. And you'll get a feel for this when you use the tool yourselves. Something over 50% keyword difficulty is pretty high, you need an authoritative site to rank for it. On marker two, we can actually see in the search results what the page authority is for the pages that are ranking, and we can also see what the domain authority is for the actual domain of the landing page. And what you kind of want to do is to say, "Hey, okay, sprained ankle. It's 61% keyword difficulty, and I can see that on average I'm going to probably need as a minimum 34% as my page authority, and it looks like in some cases it can be as much as 63%". So, you'll get a feel for what keywords are perhaps within your reach.

Now, you may ask the question, why is a website with a lower page authority outranking a website with a higher page authority? And the reason for that is, these are just Moz's metrics, so these are their estimations of how reputable a page in the domain is. Google will have their own and it's more



sophisticated. And also when you rank a page it's not just about the authority, as we know, there are other factors like RankBrain, keyword targeting as well.

So, when we are evaluating a keyword, by going too competitive or too generic, what can happen is you can have a real lack of SEO momentum, and that will decrease motivation. And I would probably say that's the number one reason that people give up, is they just lack momentum and they lack motivation. So, by getting just some small wins early on, it can really help getting that motivation and getting that momentum. Also, if you are targeting keywords that are just too competitive, you're probably going to not get as many sales or as many leads, which isn't good. And also, it can set unrealistic expectations. Maybe you're doing work for your boss, and he's following ten keywords that you're targeting but they're just without... they're out of your reach in the short to medium term. So remember, we're thinking about keywords that we can rank for maybe the next three to six months.

In terms of low hanging fruit, I'm still thinking about keyword evaluation. Remember earlier we looked at "twin size blow-up mattress". That looked like an easier keyword to rank for than "twin size air mattress". In Google Search Console, in Search Analytics, there we could see what keywords we were already ranking for, so that's a good place to start in terms of low hanging fruit. And also we've used tools now to show how competitive keywords are, so you might like to check that out.

## **Competitor Research**

Moving on now to competitive research. So, there's going to be a range of reasons why your competitors are doing well. And we've actually got quite a lot of different tools that you can check out. BuiltWith gives you an idea of how a page is constructed from a technology perspective. It will give you an idea of what content management system they're using, maybe what email provider they're using, quite a lot of details like that, but you might want to check out. SimilarWeb is a website that gives you an idea of an estimation of how much traffic a website gets, and also where that traffic comes from before going to a website, and where it then goes to. SEMrush is great for keyword research and competitive research. Buzzsumo is a good content marketing competitive research tool. SEOmonitor is actually really good at working out how you're doing compared to competitors from a market share perspective. And then the bottom three, they're really good backlink analysis tools.

So, let's just have a look at SEMrush. I'm a big fan of SEMrush. I think when it comes to competitive research, you won't find a better tool. And what you can do in this case is we've entered in a URL, I've selected the country that I want to research that URL, and SEMrush will come back with all the keywords that it knows about for that particular landing page. It will include where that landing PageRanks for the country that you've selected, and it will also tell you what the search volume is, and also how difficult that keyword is according to SEMrush. There's lots more to SEMrush than what you're seeing right now. It has a free and a paid version. So, definitely check that out and consider using it for competitive keyword research.

And when we are thinking about competitive research, what can happen when you miss important keywords and that your competitors are targeting? Well, I guess you might lose momentum and your competitors might gain momentum. And also, essentially you'll have content gaps, so there will be gaps in terms of content that you should really be fulfilling if you want to attract as many customers as possible.

We're now going to have a look at SEOmonitor, and I mentioned before what this... this tool actually does a lot of things, and it really neatly integrates into Google Search Console, it does a lot of data

with Google Search Console. But one of the things I quite like from a competitive research perspective is it will give you an idea of how you're doing for a top, for a definitive list of keywords in terms of market share. So, it may well be that your visibility score is 34%, and your top competitor's visibility score might be 74%. So, you'll be able to gauge how you're progressing hopefully and catching up competitors.

In terms of remaining competitive and having content that's shared on social media, this is quite important. So, social media like Facebook and Twitter, it doesn't have a direct impact on ranking. So, if you've got a page that had 1,000 likes on Twitter or on Facebook, or maybe at 2,000 retweets on Twitter, there's no evidence to show that that actually helps your SEO. But the indirect benefit is that more people will see your content and it may well be that some of those people are journalists, some are bloggers, and some are key influencers, and they may decide to link to your site through a backlink and that will actually help directly with your SEO rankings. So, with that in mind, it's quite good if you can research how your competitors are doing in terms of their top performing social content, and that's where this really nice cool tool called Buzzsumo comes into play.

So, in this case I have entered the phrase "RankBrain" and it's actually shown me the top pages that were shared socially for that particular phrase. I've got it selected for the last year, but you can change the date. And that's quite useful, if I'm interested in "RankBrain" and I want to rank for that phrase, then I'll want to see who's being shared socially the most. Now, a lot of these sites that are doing well they probably have quite big social media followers anyway, so that might be one reason for it.

And the other thing that you can bear in mind is, I actually use this tool as a way of staying up to date with SEO. So, if I've had quite a busy week, on a Friday I might type in "SEO" into Buzzsumo, put it for the last week, and I'll see what are the most popular articles that have been written. So, it can be really good for that as well. Rather than put a keyword into Buzzsumo, you can put a domain, and what this is showing me, for moz.com, I can see that in the last year that the most shared content over the last 12 months is "Free and usual hacks to drop dramatically up your LinkedIn game". It had over 17,000 shares on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and some of the other big social media sites. So, from a constant marketing perspective, this is a great tool. But because we know that more social share has an indirect benefit of more backlinks, then this can be quite good for SEO as well.

So, we're now looking at how you actually see where your competitors are getting their backlinks from. Now, bearing in mind backlinks is the number one ranking factor for SEO, this is quite important. So, I have entered in a URL, and what the tool is doing it is actually listing all the websites that have linked to the URL that I've entered. So in this case I think I had entered in moz.com, and I can see their top backlinks. And they're actually ordered by page authority, so I'm getting the most authoritative pages listing first. And by default the target is set to this page, which means the URL that you have actually entered, but you might want to change that to the root domain which will actually give you backlinks for the whole domain. That's a really good tool, and just speaking to some agencies I would maybe say, a better guess, but maybe 20% of backlinks that an agency doing SEO would get would come from using backlink analysis tools.

Now, in some cases they might just replicate a particular backlink, it's something they can recreate, or they may just learn the strategies. Maybe they've observed that Moz are very good in the blogosphere, or maybe for another website they're very good with PR, particularly with newspaper websites. So there are ready sites that you can really use to help with your SEO strategy.

## SEO Tracking

Okay, so we're looking at SEO tracking, and Peter Drucker, who's quite a famous marketeer, he says, "You can't manage what you can't measure". And I would definitely agree with that. And I think there's an old saying that says, a marketer says, "I know 50% of my marketing is working, I just don't know what 50% it is". And in digital marketing, we have the tools to actually measure and report at a much more granular level than we than we did in years gone by. So, we're going to look at keyword rankings, reporting, organic traffic reporting, and website conversion reporting.

So, in terms of keyword tracking, and tracking your keyword, what you'll probably want to do is once you've researched all your landing pages and you know all the keywords that you want to target, it's good to have a definitive list of keywords. Now, for a small site this could be 50 keywords, for a bigger site it could be 200 or more keywords that you want to track on a regular basis. And bearing in mind that most SEO traffic comes from those top five positions, you'll want to know what keywords are in those top five positions, and maybe what keywords are just outside those five positions. And it can give you an idea of learning what tactics are working and what tactics aren't working if you're measuring your keyword rankings.

And above all I think it's really important to help with your motivation, because if you're starting from scratch, maybe your average keyword ranking might be 100th, and it's very likely that you're not going to be getting any traffic, but if periodically every month, or every two months you're jumping from say 100th to 90th to 70th, that's great progress. It's probably not having an impact on your trafficking and conversions, but it's helping you stay motivated, and hopefully that trend will continue and you'll get to the first page of Google or another search engine, and you'll start getting the traffic that you're after.

In terms of keyword tracking tools, there are literally hundreds of them. I'm just highlighting some of the ones that I've used myself. Whatsmyserp.com is actually a free one, and you can use it for a handful of keywords. It will tell you your ranking very quickly, so definitely worth checking out for a cheap and cheerful way of doing it. But I think you probably will want a premium option when you're at the stage of professionally doing SEO for a website. And you might like to check out some of the ones we have here.

Just as an example we're going to look at Pro Rank Tracker. So, it's quite well priced, and it has a lot of features. It allows you to categorize keywords, it reports on search volumes both locally and globally, and it's kind of got all the core features that you'll probably want to use, so you might want to check that one out. In terms of tracking organic traffic, so organic traffic essentially is SEO traffic, and it really will help provide with a measure of return on investment. It will sometimes help pinpoint an uplift or decline, maybe you see a decline in your traffic at the beginning of, let's say, June, and you might tie that in with a search engine algorithm update. And again, it helps you stay motivated if you can see your traffic, and you are making progress.

Now, we are going to cover Google Analytics in more detail in a later module, but we're just going to highlight some of the higher level stuff that are important for SEO. The first thing is we're going to want to see what our SEO traffic is. So, we can do this by just adding a segment. And so if I add a segment and then I select a predefined segment, organic traffic, then what that does is it actually reports the organic traffic, and I can compare that against the total traffic. Really simple, really easy to do, but it's just something that you need to know.

The next one, which is perhaps the most important one, is tracking website conversions. So, this really does have a direct impact on how well the business performs, so maybe in terms of sales or

maybe in terms of leads, so it's very good for return on investment. And if you can prove that your SEO is generating sales, it probably means that you can invest more SEO budget for your company. Now, that might help you with future salaries or it might just mean that you've got more resources to pay for SEO tools or more resources to pay for content.

# **LESSON 5: IMPROVING OFF- PAGE OPTIMIZATION**

## Building Backlinks

Okay, so building backlinks. The old mindset, it kind of used to be, "How can we trick Google?" It might be, "I'll pay a webmaster to link to my site, and I'll get a really good reputation". Or it might be, "I know what, I will get another website to link to me with the keyword that I want to rank for, and that means that Google will think I'm relevant for that keyword". And it kind of... so many people were breaking Google's guidelines going back a few years ago, or even longer, that it got to the point where if you were in a competitive industry, maybe 70% of the first page of Google was kind of doing black hat activity to some level. And that was kind of old mindset, it was, "Let's try and fake it". So let's have a look at the... let's just have a look at the risks and rewards of how things used to work.

So, pre-Penguin, and let's remember that Penguin is a sub-algorithm, and it's to do with analyzing the quality of a backlink, and it was first released in 2012. And prior to that, the risk of being caught for creating fake and unnatural backlinks was very, very low, and the reward was very, very high. You'd get good rankings and your business would do well, so, a lot of people used to go down that black hat route. And then when Penguin got introduced, the first version, it was kind of good at working out fake backlinks, but it wasn't perfect. And as it kind of got old, as it got more sophisticated and it developed, Google developed Penguin further, it got much, much better at detecting when a backlink is artificial, to the point now where it's very high risk if you're actually going to go for the black hat link building approach.

So, let's have a look at the new mindset. The new mindset is more about earning backlinks. So we would earn it from having a great product. We would earn it by having valuable content. It might be that we're going to research our industry, we're going to really know who our customers are, we're going to really know who our influencers in our industry are, and try and connect with them. And it's kind of like when we've got really good content, we definitely want to promote it within our industry, and because we've connected with those key influencers we're going to promote it to them as well. It's getting a little bit smarter with our outreach, and getting smarter with the content that our industry wants to read, not just our customer wants to read, but getting a good balance between the two.

So, let's have a look at some examples of bad backlinks. So, one thing that Google says that you shouldn't do is to pay a webmaster to link to your site. Now, we'll look at an exception to that, but as a general rule that isn't something that you should do and it's considered black hat SEO. The other thing that you shouldn't do is essentially ask a webmaster to link to you in a certain way. So, within a hypertext of a link, those words are what we call anchor text, and if you wanted to rank for "Australia Holidays" and you've asked five bloggers to link to you with that phrase, that isn't the type of thing that Google wants you to do. That's breaking their guidelines. And there are outdated link building techniques, so maybe in 2010 or 2012, people were building links through directories and article submissions, and these were done on a very mass scale. And whilst they were never considered that high quality, they were effective.

But as Penguin's got smarter, these are kind of outdated techniques that you shouldn't be doing. So, when it comes to building backlinks, we want to understand the concept of no-follow links and PageRank. So essentially, let's imagine that for advertising reasons, you want to pay a blogger to link to your site. Now, Google can't stop you doing that, it's an open web. But what would happen is if you paid that blogger some money and they link to your website in a normal way, then the HTML of that link wouldn't include a no-follow attribute. It would be just a regular link. But what Google says is, when it comes to that link, if you are paying some money or they're getting some financial gains, you need to change that link and to add in what's called the no-follow attribute to the link. So, you can pay people to link to your site, but it needs to have that no-follow attribute.

And the other thing to bear in mind is there are links on the internet that have these no-follow attributes. It doesn't mean that they've always been accepting payments. So all Wikipedia pages are no-followed. And if you comment on a blog and you link to your website through the comment, the chances are it's also no-followed. So, no-follow is kind of impartial. It doesn't pass PageRank and reputation, but it doesn't say the website's bad either.

So, how do you work out whether a link is no-followed or not? So, in this slide we're looking at the references on a Wikipedia page. And if you right-click on the link in Google Chrome or another modern browser, there'll be an option to inspect the link, and then the HTML will pop up at the bottom of the browser. And in this case, we can see that there is a no-follow attribute, and Wikipedia has just decided to no-follow all their links, so that's how you would check that out.

## **Content Marketing for SEO**

So, we're thinking about content marketing now, and before we do though is we'll just going to have a look at what, I guess one of the problems that we had in the SEO industry, and what I feel led to building links the wrong way. So, let's imagine you're a travel insurance website, and all the content on your site is transactional content, it's sales content, promoting your products. Now that transactional content is essential on your site – it definitely has a place, but it's not a type of content that's going to naturally attract and build links. It's not a type of content that's going to get shared in the social media. So, what you can do is think about, "Well, actually how can we create content that is maybe more interesting to a wider industry that will get shared on Twitter and Facebook, etc?" And that's kind of where content marketing comes into play.

So, for example, if you find some content and it's interesting, you think your Twitter followers might like it, you'll share that on Twitter. I was quite unfortunate, that about a year ago I had a tennis elbow injury, and I remember going on to a website and just finding the advice that I needed for that, and it fixed my tennis elbow fairly quickly. And that's the type of thing that I would tell someone in my office and share, "This is a really good resource for that". Or maybe you're a physiotherapist... or maybe you're wanting to get into physio, you want to be a physiotherapist, and you might decide to follow that website because they've got such good content around that. So, content marketing can be a great way of creating valuable content, which is either related to your products and services, or quite often it can be in your wider industry as well.

So, what we're going to look at now is Google search quality guidelines. So, the majority of how Google ranks a page, in fact nearly all of how Google works, is all automated through its algorithm, but they do actually have evaluators who periodically will review some search engine results pages and they will feed back to Google what they see and what they find. And Google might tweak its algorithm based on some of their findings. And there is actually a 140-page PDF that you can get online, which is called The Google Search Quality Ratings Guidelines, and it has lots of good content in there about what you should be doing to make your website effective. And one of the concepts that they have on there is actually to do with how... it is to do... it's called EAT content, and it stands for Expertise, Authority, and Trust.

So, if your content can show a high level of Expertise, Authority, and Trustworthiness, then you're going to score quite highly in terms of what these quality raters are looking for. And that's a good mindset to have when you are creating content marketing pieces. Now, content marketing is quite a big subject in itself. One obvious form of content marketing is a blog, and this is where you're writing generally a less salesy piece of content on your site, more informative. And one good way to build up your blog is to actually guest contribute to other blogs, and what that does is it means if another blog has got a bigger audience than yourselves, then hopefully some of that audience will like what you've



written and start following your blog. It helps portray yourself as an expert in your industry if you're getting your name out there through other guest blogs, and you do actually get backlinks from the other blog to your blog. But really it needs to be very related to what you're doing. You don't want to be just building links through guest blogging, through unrelated blogs, that could be considered a little bit spammy.

So, what we'll do now is we'll look at, one, a content marketing strategy that's quite popular, and quite an interesting one to look at, and this is called the skyscraper technique. So, this comes from a guy called Brian Dean, who runs a website called Backlinko. He says what you need to do is to find content with a proven track record of generating backlinks. So, if you add in a website that you think might have generated good backlinks, particularly through content marketing, maybe they've got a good blog or very good videos, that sort of thing. In this case, I've chosen copyblogger.com. If you haven't heard of them, they've got an awesome blog on copywriting and online marketing. It's a very good blog. And what I've done is I've entered in the URL. I've chosen top pages, which you can see on marker two, and then this is showing me the top pages on their site that have backlinks, and it's ordering them by the top, the pages with the most root domains, the most unique domains linking to those pages. So, I can systematically go through those pages and find ones which are relevant to what I do.

And that brings us on to step two, which is to select content that you feel you could recreate and make better than the original. And maybe not necessarily better than your original, that would be, that's the best thing to do, but maybe it's just different or unique to the original. Maybe you've done it in a much more visual way. So, in this case, let's imagine that I have selected the URL "e-book in 30 days", and I feel like I can write a good blog post on how you create an e-book in 30 days. And notice on marker two that this particular URL has attracted 52 different websites or root domains that link to that page. So, I could actually contact those 52 websites and say, "Hey, I've got some great content that I would like you to check out".

And that brings us to point three. This where you reach out to the backlink source and let them know about your new piece of content. And this is actually an email that I received myself, and they were... I thought it was quite well written, it demonstrated that they'd been to my site, they liked an article that I had written, and they said, "I noticed that you linked to this resource, would you consider also linking to my new resource?" And in this case, it was actually very visual and it was quite a nice and interesting resource. So, I actually decided to link to that resource because I thought it was useful for my readers. And that is the skyscraper technique, so if you've got a lot of resources that are good at creating high-quality content, that can be a really good strategy for building backlinks.

We looked up Buzzsumo earlier, and we mainly looked at it for researching by keywords and by domains, but you can also use it to research influencers, which is really important or really useful for content marketing. So, in this case I'm entering in "sports nutrition", and it's bringing back influencers who Buzzsumo thinks are the most authoritative in the sports nutrition space. And that can be really good. If I'm creating some good content and I want to outreach to some of the noticeable players, then I can use this tool.

## **Backlink Profile**

So, what makes a good backlink? Well, a good backlink, essentially, we want to make sure that when we get the backlink, it's from either a relevant page, or the domain is relevant to our own website. We want to feel that the backlink was earned, so they decided to link to us on merit. That's what Google wants. That's white hat SEO. And ideally the backlink should be from an authoritative page, an authoritative domain, so page authority, domain authority.



Keywords in anchor text can help. Relevancy will be part, but we'll see in a few slides time that this can be quite a risky thing to do as well. So we'll want relevancy in anchor text in a natural way. And the other thing with what makes a good backlink is ideally it has the potential to bring good referral traffic. So, imagine that we're not thinking about SEO at all, would that site bring good referral traffic to your website? If the answer is yes, that's a really good sign that you've got a good backlink. And what I would say is, as much as there are a lot of factors that make up a good backlink, it's rare that you'll get it perfect each time. So just bear that in mind.

We're now moving to a backlink profile. So, a backlink profile essentially is how Google and other search engines see a collection of backlinks, so all of your backlinks to your sites. And what you want is you want to have some diversity, and by that, what I mean is you want a range of backlinks. So, if you've got 90% of your backlinks through guest blogging, it looks a bit weird to search engines, because that doesn't normally happen naturally. So, you'll want to maybe get some from PR, maybe some from blogging, maybe some from some local websites. Have a bit of a diversity. The next one really is, your backlinks should look natural, they should be natural. If you have the one or two backlinks that look like they might be paid, there's a fair chance that Google will probably give you the benefit of a doubt, those one or two times, unless they look really bad. But at the same time you want the majority of your links, or in fact almost all of your links, to look natural and earned. The other thing that you'll want to do is to try and get some diversity when it comes to the pages on your site that are being linked to. If they all come to the home page it might give the indication that the rest of your content just isn't very interesting. So, that's something to bear in mind. And as we mentioned before, be careful with anchor text. You shouldn't really be asking other websites to link to you with certain phrases in them. If you do, it might get picked up by search engines that it looks unnatural, and that could trigger a penalty.

So, avoiding a Penguin penalty. So yeah, I guess one of the most common ways that you can get a penalty is when Google considers that you're building unnatural links. And I guess, what does unnatural links mean? It's when you're building links not on your own merit. That's not to say you just create a blog post and you forget about it, if you get a backlink, then great. Sometimes blog posts need promotion, you need to contact influential people, you need to be proactive. But if you're doing it in an unethical way that seems fake and unnatural, that's where Google Penguin might pick you up and give you a penalty. So, this is quite an interesting case study. So, icelolly.com is a UK travel price comparison website, and it kind of looks quite interesting.

So, the middle of January 2012, they had a sudden spike in SEO visibility. So maybe they started using an SEO agency from the first of January, and they started buying lots of backlinks, that could be what happened. And their traffic just increased and increased, and they were doing really, really well until May 2013, which coincided with the release of Penguin 2.0. So, it sounds like what happened here is Penguin 1.0 wasn't sophisticated enough to work out that they were building fake backlinks, but 2.0 was. And we can see it had a massive impact on their SEO visibility. They really nosedived. And if we look at this example, these are keywords where they ranked before Penguin 2.0, and after Penguin 2.0. We can see for cheap holidays they went from position one to position 65. So, they went from as much traffic as they could get pretty much for cheap holidays, to pretty much getting no traffic.

So, why did this happen? Well, they took the old school approach to link building, and at that time even this was considered spammy at that time. I was surprised they managed to get away with what they did with Penguin 1.0, but they basically tried to get as many backlinks as possible with cheap holidays in the anchor text. So, in fact it was actually 43% or just over 43% all their backlinks had this key phrase that they wanted to rank for, and that just looks unnatural. Your highest anchor text backlink keyword should really be your brand, that's the most common thing for most websites. And when it starts to become a transactional keyword then it's quite easy for search engines to detect

something untoward, and maybe your website might get manually reviewed, maybe you'll get an algorithmic penalty, but it's quite easy to spot. And three years later Ice Lolly actually recovered from their penalty, but for three years they pretty much got no Google traffic. It was a severe penalty.

So, when you do have a penalty you can recover in a week, it can take three years. It can take even longer. It depends how bad your black hat SEO activity has been.

## **Paid Links**

So, problems with paid links. Well, any time you buy a link that increases PageRank that's considered black hat SEO. Google Penguin is very good at detecting this. And even selling backlinks, not just buying backlinks, that's considered black hat SEO as well.

## **Exact and Partial Match Anchor Text**

So, excessive keywords in backlink anchor text.

Now, we've kind of talked about this already. It's poor etiquette to ask another website to link to you in a certain way. That's just not something that you should be doing. It's quite easy for search engines to detect. But if we take a step back and we ask ourselves, "What are we trying to do by putting keywords in anchor text?" Well we're trying to tell Google more about what the relevancy of our site is. So, rather than actually target keywords and anchor text, why don't we just target domains and pages that are very relevant to our industry and the phrase and the topic that we want to rank for. That's probably a better thing to do. So think a little bit more topical about your content marketing and your link building.

## **Backlink Analysis Tools and Metrics**

Okay, so now we're going to look at backlink analysis tools, and the key metrics are fairly similar. So, for Moz we have domain authority, page authority. We've got domain rating, URL rating for Ahrefs. Majestic has slightly different ones. It's got a trust flow and a citation flow that will operate slightly differently, and they all measure total links and total unique domains that are linking to your site.

And what you can do is in this example, let's imagine we are inc.com, and we've benchmarked against four competitors. So, we can see what the domain authority is, what the page authority is, and we can notice that the total links and the total route domain links is significantly... well, it's one of the lowest for Inc. Fast Company is slightly very, very similar. But we can see that if we want to compete with Forbes, we've actually got quite a lot of work that we need to do from the reputation perspective. One question might be, well, how come we've got Fast Company that has a... well, in fact it's very similar, Fast Company and inc.com.

But again, remember these are Moz's metrics, these aren't essentially the ones that Google uses themselves.

## **Lost Backlinks**

In terms of lost backlinks, when you lose a backlink essentially you're losing some reputation, you're losing some authority. And Ahref has a really good tool that will tell you when and where you lost a backlink. And that's another reason why advanced SEOs prefer Ahref and Majestic SEO. They've got a bigger database of backlinks.

So, consequences of losing backlinks. Well, you're going to lose page authority or as Ahrefs calls it, URL authority of the page that was being linked to. That's going to have an impact on your overall domain authority and your domain rating, and it just means that key SEO pages are going to have less ranking power. So it's obviously not a good thing to have.

## **Broken Backlinks**

In terms of keeping tabs on broken backlinks, this is actually really interesting. When I looked at this for forbes.com, they had over 2 million broken backlinks which is a massive number. And they obviously weren't using this tool, Ahrefs, and it looks like they weren't being very careful when they were changing URLs on their website. So, if we look at the second marker, notice that there's technology at the beginning of the URL. Now, it looks like what they did is they took out the category from their articles. Maybe they just preferred it that way, but they didn't put the redirects in place, and that's quite significant. It's meant that an awful lot of their backlinks are broken, and it's meant that search engine trusts won't fully passed to the website, may not even pass at all for that backlink.

So, what happens when backlinks are broken? Well, as I've just mentioned, a "404 page not found" It means that probably the reputation isn't being passed to that site or that web page. It's going to affect your domain authority or your domain rating. And because page authority and domain authority are affected, it's going to have a slight effect on your whole, every page on your website if you are losing backlinks.

How to avoid or fix broken backlinks? Well, I guess the first thing is just using tools like Ahref to know when you've got broken backlinks. You can set up alerts or just periodically check. The other thing that you can do is, when you do find that you've got a broken backlink, you can either recreate the page with the same URL, so you get that PageRank and that reputation, or you can just put a redirect in place. So redirect from where the broken backlink is to the next most relevant page that you have in your site.

## **Quantity and Quality of Backlinks**

Now we're thinking about quantity of backlinks, so consequences of lack of backlinks. Now, if you've got a lack of backlinks, it may mean that key pages just struggle to rank for competitive phrases. Your competitors have just got more backed links to specific pages and the domain as a whole. It's also going to have an impact on how often search engines crawl your site. Search engines generally follow external links into your site, so the more backlinks you have the more frequently search engines are going to crawl your site. And also, it's probably going to have an impact on your referral traffic. If you've got less websites linking to you, you're going to get less referral traffic.

Okay, so now we're looking at the consequences of having a lack of quality backlinks. When you rely on low-quality and high-volume backlinks, this tends to be a telltale sign that you're doing things unnaturally and you could be seen as spammy. If you have a lack of quality backlinks, it probably means you're not going to get enough reputation to the pages that need it, and you're not going to rank as well on Google. And also, as Google becomes more sophisticated, it's more about quality. Quality is winning than just volume of backlinks. So, do think hard about how you can get those nice, authoritative, and relevant backlinks in your industry.

## **Absence of Backlinks**

When we have an absence of backlinks, it's obviously not a good thing at all, and sometimes that happens when we focus too much on transactional content or sales pages. So try and think about

how you can create link-worthy content that will do well on social media. Maybe you want to research your competitors, see what they're doing, get some ideas and some inspiration. And just be proactive. If you're talking to a newspaper website and they are featuring you in their actual newspaper, and they mentioned you on their website but they don't link to you, ask them to link to you. Be proactive.

